



08

SESSION EIGHT

The Wisdom of Deborah

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will study the account of Deborah, a woman filled with wisdom, whom God raised up to judge the people of Israel. This was a woman who used her gifts in service to God, exhibited great faith in God's ability to save, and then gave glory for His mighty works. In Deborah, we see a picture of a faith-filled life that utilizes wisdom and courage in obedience to God.

SCRIPTURE

Judges 4:1-7,12-16; 5:1-11

THE POINT

God equips His people with gifts to be used for His glory and for their good.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

On the board or a large sheet of paper, write the following question: Do you trust God? Instruct students who answer “yes” to stand. State that the question is not as easy to answer as it may seem.

Read the following scenarios. Direct students to remain standing until you read a scenario in which their trust in God might be shaken.

- You just got your license yesterday and hit another car in the parking lot. No one saw it happen.
- You don't know the answers on an important test, but you can see the answers of the smart kid who sits beside you.
- Your teacher says the Bible is a work of fiction and challenges any Christian in the room to stand up.
- Everything seems fine between you and your boyfriend or girlfriend, but you've been sensing God telling you to break up.

• **What is the relationship between how much you trust God and how faithful you are to God?**

Point out that it's easy to say we trust God, but when life is hard it can be difficult to put our trust into practice. In the wake of current events such as riots, war, violence, and break-ups, life sometimes doesn't seem to make sense. It's hard to be faithful when everything around you screams “faith-less.”

No matter how faithless you have been, God promises to remain faithful to you. When you follow up your sin with mistrust or fear of His rejection and abandonment, you continue in faithlessness. When you trust His promises to restore you and to walk with you, you show yourself faithful again.

Option 2

We all face opposition, whether it's at school, in sports, or in some other competition. Share the following information: Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova played in tennis matches 80 times over 16 years, with Navratilova holding a 43-37 edge. “The beauty of our rivalry was not only we met so many times but the contrast. We were night and day, so different in every way and brought our own set of fans to the mix. It was drama. She was aggressive, I was the counter-puncher. She was muscular. I wasn't. She was from a communist country and I was an American, land of freedom. Just the way we looked. She was emotional. I was cool.” —Chris Evert

- **How was each player uniquely equipped to face the other?**
- **Who's the toughest opponent you've ever faced?**
- **In what ways do Christians, in particular, face opposition? How has God equipped us to remain faithful and stand against the attacks of the enemy?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God equips His people with gifts to be used for His glory and for their good.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Deborah:** prophetess and judge over Israel; used by God to rescue His people
- **Barak:** military leader; summoned by the prophetess Deborah to lead the Israelite army to victory over Canaan

PLOT

When important moments in history take place, they are almost always captured in some form or another. Either we report on them (journalism), recount the events as a story (history), or capture their significance in poetry or song. In the biblical story of Deborah, the author used two forms—narrative and poetry—in order to tell us the story of God once again rescuing His people. Deborah is a woman filled with wisdom, and she is used by God to rescue His people.

TIMELINE

DEBORAH

God gives personal gifts to be used for His glory and the good of others.

GIDEON

God gives strength to accomplish His will.

SAMSON

God uses broken leaders to accomplish His good purposes.

GOD RAISES UP LEADERS TO DELIVER HIS PEOPLE

Let's jump into a story that shows the beautiful way the people of God come together and use their gifts. A prophet, a warrior, and hundreds of others would all play a part in this rescue, and through their actions, God gets the glory.

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died. And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years. Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, "Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, 'Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun. And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand'?" (Judg. 4:1-7)

Again, the Israelites found themselves in the same Judges cycle. Unbelief is the root of the Israelites' idolatry. They did not believe that God could satisfy them, so they kept chasing after other gods by doing what was "evil in the sight of the LORD" (v. 1).

In response, the Lord allowed them to be seized by a general named Sisera. This was a man whose army assembled 900 chariots, ready to terrify any enemy that would rise up. He killed Israelite men and committed a number of other atrocities against the nation of Israel. But finally, after twenty years, the people cried out to God.

Against the backdrop of the Israelites' unbelief stood a few individuals who were willing to serve God and use their gifts for His glory. This passage introduces us to Deborah and Barak, servants of the Lord who operated out of a deep understanding of who God is.

Barak was Deborah's general, and he led the army of God's people. At first glance it might seem like Deborah was filled with faith and Barak with fear, but this was probably not the case. Barak, a mighty general, said he would fight Sisera's army if Deborah, the woman, would go with him. Deborah was representative of the

voice of God in this passage. Barak wanted to know that the word of God would be with him, just as Moses did in Exodus 33 when he begged God to be with the people of Israel.

So Barak demonstrated faith, and he obeyed by preparing an army of 10,000 men. Barak used the gifts God gave him to walk in faithfulness. He knew his role. He knew his part in the story was small and not for his own glory, but for the glory of God.

As we continue the story, we see how God's chosen leaders used their gifts in the face of incredible odds. Take a look at how the scene is described:

When Sisera was told that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the men who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon. And Deborah said to Barak, “Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him. And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot. And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left. (Judg. 4:12-16)

The day of war had arrived. The army of God was assembled on the top of Mount Tabor, and they could see the 900 chariots coming. You may think that the battle didn't seem too hard because the Israelites had 10,000 men while Sisera had only 900 chariots. But this was before the days of air war and atomic bombs. No one had ever seen an army of 900 chariots. Barak and his men would not be able to overpower Sisera and his chariots filled with men equipped for battle. They knew they were outmanned when it came to weapons (Judges 5:8). The odds were stacked against them—except for the all important fact that God was on their side.

The hinge of this story hangs on verse 14. “Does not the LORD go out before you?” This was the place of confidence and hope for the people of God: the Lord had gone before them. Deborah and Barak and the people of God had faith in the Lord's words. He said they would be victorious. Because He is a faithful God, their faith in His victory was secure.

Faith is what leads us to be courageous when facing impossible odds. Faith is demonstrated by our belief and obedience, our trusting in God and desire to obey Him in faith. Our faith is not rooted in our gifting, or found in our skills, or propped up by our ambitions. Our faith is in the word of God and in His unshakable character. As the people of God, we build our lives on the promises of God. No other foundation is stable.

- **How do you typically respond when you are facing what seem to be impossible odds?** (*p. 54, PSG*)

- How does knowing that God is with you help you remain faithful to Him? (p. 54, PSG)

GOD'S PEOPLE RESPOND TO HIS DELIVERANCE IN WORSHIP

Chapter 4 recounts the story of God's rescue. Now, in chapter 5, the author transcribes a beautiful piece of poetry—the song of God's rescue:

Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day: “That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the LORD! “Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the LORD I will sing; I will make melody to the LORD, the God of Israel. “LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. The mountains quaked before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel. “In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways. The villagers ceased in Israel; they ceased to be until I arose; I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel. When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates. Was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel? My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless the LORD. “Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys, you who sit on rich carpets and you who walk by the way. To the sound of musicians at the watering places, there they repeat the righteous triumphs of the LORD, the righteous triumphs of his villagers in Israel. “Then down to the gates marched the people of the LORD. (Judg. 5:1-11)

Sometimes songs are the best way to communicate a story. Songs teach. When Americans attend a sporting event, they stand together and sing a story: “O say, can you see by the dawns early light?” They sing Francis Scott Key’s account of the War of 1812. It’s war history, and “The Star Spangled Banner” reminds Americans of who they are and their story as a nation. Similar to a national anthem, the song of Deborah and Barak was a victory song.

The focus of this song is not on the characters in the story, but on God as the rescuer. The leaders’ egos and the people’s accolades fade away in light of the glory of the one true God (4:14). It was the Lord who called Deborah to sit as a judge over His people. It was the Lord who gave Barak skills and leadership to assemble and train an army. It was the Lord who gave Sisera into the hands of a housewife (Jael, the woman who struck down the mighty general with a tent peg). It was the Lord who went out before them.

Why did the people sing? To praise the Lord and to remember His faithfulness. Deborah and Barak knew that people would be prone to forget the mighty works of God. That’s why she gave them a song of remembrance.

TIMELINE

RUTH AND BOAZ

A glimpse of God's love in the midst of dark times.

SAMUEL HEARS

Samuel hears from God.

Beginning Summer 2016

DEMAND FOR A KING

The people desire to be like the surrounding nations.

In the same way, we have been given songs throughout the Bible (Ex. 15, the Psalms, Rev. 5) that are meant to remind us of what God has done. In the singing of these songs, we are remembering and retelling what God has done on our behalf. In our singing we encourage and build up one another (Col. 3:16).

CHRIST CONNECTION

The story and the song of Deborah is our story; it's our song. We were captive to sin and we had no hope. Satan and his 900 chariots were stacked against us; we could not fight on our own. Yet the Lord stood in our place, fighting on our behalf, claiming victory over the enemy in an unlikely way—through a cross.

There is another story of God crushing the head of his enemy. In Genesis 3, part of the covenant God made with Eve is that her seed would crush the head of the serpent. Or to put it more clearly—Jesus would crush the head of Satan.

Today, we are the people of God because through Christ, God has crushed the head of the serpent. It's through this great rescue that we have been forgiven once and for all. We are like the Israelites, continually running after things we think will give us life. What does the world offer? The same lies the serpent offered in the garden: *You can be greater than God; you can be the hero.* But here we see there is only one hero. The hero of this story is God alone. The hero of the story of our rescue is Christ alone.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of a Christian

The Spirit's work in the life of a Christian begins with salvation, bringing a person to faith in Christ, and is continued through the process of sanctification, helping that person become more like Christ throughout the course of his or her life. The Spirit empowers and indwells believers, intercedes on their behalf, and equips them with special gifts for service in God's kingdom. He is also our Comforter and Teacher, helping us to interpret and understand Scripture.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some ways we can discover the gifts God has given us? What happens when we choose not to use our gifts in service to God?** *One of the best ways to discover our gifts is by serving in different capacities within the church. By doing so, we are able to sift through our strengths and desires, as well as receive feedback from those around us. In addition, a good spiritual gift inventory can also be helpful.*
- **What happens when we have more faith in our gifts than in God's power?** *Faith in our gifts will ultimately disappoint. Our gifts should point us to God, helping us realize more and more that we are dependent upon Him in all things.*
- **What is the significance of Deborah telling Barak that "the Lord has gone before you"? How was this meant to encourage and challenge Barak?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Why is it important to give God glory when He works through us? What happens when we take credit for what God has done?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

According to the story, Barak's army knew they were outmanned when it came to weapons (Judg. 5:8). Yet they stood there and trusted that God was going to do something. I wonder if, while they stood there, they retold one another the story of Exodus: "Remember what God did when he parted the Red Sea and our fathers walked on dry ground? Remember when our families came into the promised land with Joshua and the rivers were parted?" Knowing God's character and power gave many of them courage as they faced the tremendous odds against them.

- **How has God's past work in your life or in the life of someone you know given you courage and comfort during a difficult time?** *Answers to this will vary.*
- **How can you encourage someone you know with a story like this from the Bible?** *Answers to this question will vary, but you may want to give an example of how you might do this yourself, referencing another story of God doing a mighty work on behalf of His people.*



HEART

We saw in this story the song of Deborah and Barak. It is interesting that other religions aren't known for singing and writing hymns and praise songs. Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism are not marked by song the way Christianity is. As Christians, we can't seem to help but sing. Our faith sings. And here, after God gave His people the victory, Deborah and Barak broke into song, which is exactly what takes place in our own hearts when we reflect on the love of God in His victory over sin in our lives.

- **What are some Christian songs that cause you to reflect on God's love for us in Jesus, leading you to worship?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How does this story help us think about the times we worship through song?** *Answers will vary, but include the fact that the essence of worship isn't about light shows and talented musicians, but about reflecting on what God has done and allowing that to move us, from the inside out, to praise Him.*



HANDS

In this story we have two very different people—a female judge and a frightened general—coming together to use their gifts. On a small scale this teaches us how the church today moves forward in unity, as one body with many parts. Some, like Deborah, lead with wisdom and counsel. Others volunteer to serve in the church. All of us have a role to play in the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5). When we walk in faith by using our gifts, we realize we are not the center of the story. We no longer pretend that we are worthy of glory, which frees us to truly serve God and others.

- **How do you currently use your giftedness to serve those within your church?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some areas where you can begin to start serving and using your gifts for God's kingdom?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject