

LESSON 1  
June 7, 2026

## Unit I: Faithful Witnesses Testify to God's Promises

# Women in Leadership

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 20:20-28  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Judges 4:1-24  
PRINT PASSAGES: Judges 4:4-10, 14, 21-22

### KEY VERSE

And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. (Judges 4:4-5, KJV)

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Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided. (Judges 4:4-5, NIV)

### Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Describe Deborah's leadership as a faithful witness.
- Rejoice in Deborah's excellent example of faithful leadership during harsh circumstances.
- Follow Deborah's example of heeding God's call to leadership in service to others.

### \*Key Terms

Arose (verse 9, KJV)—Hebrew: *qum* (koom): to have risen, stood up.

Commands (verse 6)—Hebrew: *tsavah* (tsaw-vaw'): gives charge (to); orders; "commanded" (KJV).

Deliver (verse 7)—Hebrew: *nathan* (naw-than'): to give, put, set; "give" (NIV).

Dwelt (verse 5, KJV)—Hebrew: *yashab* (yawshab'): to sit, remain, dwell.

Go (verse 8)—Hebrew: *halak* (haw-lak'): to come, walk.

Journey (verse 9)—Hebrew: *derek* (deh'-rek): way; road; distance; manner; "course" (NIV).

Judged (verse 4, KJV)—Hebrew: *shaphat* (shawfat'): to govern; "held court" (verse 5, NIV).

\*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



### The Biblical Context

The book of Judges serves as a literary bridge, connecting the era between Joshua's conquest of Canaan and the establishment of the monarchy under Israel's first kings, Saul and David. Culturally, after Joshua's death, the Israelites' twelve tribes became fragmented groups, often prioritizing tribal loyalty over national identity. Additionally, cultural compromise with Canaan's inhabitants led to idolatry and moral decline as they repeatedly adopted their gods and immoral customs. Theologically, Judges highlights Israel's spiritual failure to uphold their covenant responsibilities with God through disobedience and idolatry, the need for godly leadership, and God's divine justice and mercy in response to their temporary repentance, as evidenced by God's identification and commissioning of judges as their deliverers. The book's overarching biblical context spans the twelve judges—military deliverers and judicial leaders—whom God used during the dark era of Israel's pre-monarchical history.

## Introduction

This lesson's unifying principle states, "Our bad choices can land us in a hole from which we find it impossible to climb. Where can we find rescue when our troubles are too big to handle on our own?" Honestly, most of us will admit we have made bad decisions that led us into situations that felt impossible to overcome. What often makes these circumstances even more difficult is the painful truth that they resulted from our own deliberate choices—there was no one to blame but ourselves. Israel's history before becoming a unified nation in Canaan provides a tragic example of this very human tendency. After the death of Joshua and the elders who outlived him, the book of Judges records repeated cycles of rebellion against God's laws. This sobering refrain best sums up this period: "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (see Judges 17:6; 21:25). Alongside this spiritual decline was their failure to fully obey God's command to drive out the Canaanite inhabitants. Instead, they compromised and were enticed to worship foreign gods.

Despite having God's promises and provisions, Israel deliberately "dug holes" of adversity and oppression for themselves—holes created by spiritual compromise, moral decline, and national disobedience. Yet, when their self-inflicted conditions became unbearable, they cried out to the Lord. In His grace and

mercy, God responded by raising up judges, temporary leaders, and warriors to rescue them from their enemies and restore peace. Among these deliverers was Deborah, the Bible's only recorded female judge. During another cycle of rebellion and oppression, she bravely answered God's call to lead, encourage, and speak truth to the nation. Her leadership serves as a powerful reminder that even when God's people fall repeatedly, He can still provide those who will guide them back to Him if they are willing to listen and obey.

### ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

## Deborah, the People's Savior (*Judges 4:4-10*)

## KJV

- 4 And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.  
5 And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.  
6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?  
7 And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.  
8 And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.  
9 And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.  
10 And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

## NIV

- 4 Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time.  
5 She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided.  
6 She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor.'  
7 I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands."  
8 Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go."  
9 "Certainly I will go with you," said Deborah. "But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh.  
10 There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.

Judges chapter 4 opens with the death of Ehud—the leader God used to deliver Israel from Moabite oppression—and highlights the return of Israel's familiar cycle of sin and rebellion against God. Therefore, the Lord allowed Jabin, king of Canaan, to oppress Israel for twenty years through his powerful military commander, Sisera (Judges 4:1-3). In response to their desperate cries for deliverance, God raised up an unlikely leader: Deborah. Her appointment was unique for two reasons—she was a woman, and she was Israel's first prophet since Moses, one of only three women

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in Scripture specifically recognized as prophets (verse 4). Deborah initially served as a judge, a role that entailed both judicial and military responsibilities during this spiritually and morally unstable period in Israel's history. She held court under a well-known landmark called the "Palm of Deborah," where the people of Israel came to her to resolve disputes and seek legal counsel (verse 5). God frequently used prophets to communicate His will to His people, and in this case, He spoke through Deborah. So, when she summoned Barak and instructed him to gather ten thousand warriors from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them to Mount Tabor, she did so with divine authority, speaking as God's appointed messenger (verse 6).

Through Deborah, God tells Barak that He will force Sisera, Jabin's military commander, along with his chariots and many troops, to come against him, assuring Barak of a sure victory (verse 7). Ironically, despite this divine promise, Barak sets a condition for accepting the mission: he will go, but only if Deborah goes with him (verse 8). His reliance on Deborah's presence instead of God's promise shows wavering faith—and as a result, Barak loses the honor of victory. Instead, the Lord states that the honor for the victory will go to a woman (verse 9). Barak, with Deborah, returns to Kedesh and successfully gathers a powerful army, likely inspired and encouraged by Deborah's influential presence (verse 10). Two key spiritual truths come from this story: first, God sovereignly chooses whoever He wills to fulfill His plans, regardless of gender, culture, or social standing. Second, those whom God calls must always remember that their strength comes from Him, not from themselves or others.

## 🔍 WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How can believers today discern when God is calling them to step out in faith to minister to or lead His people?

## Jael, the People's Deliverer (*Judges 4:14, 21-22*)

### KJV

**14 And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.**

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**21 Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.**

**22 And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.**

### NIV

**14 Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?" So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him.**

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**21 But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.**

**22 Just then Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. "Come," she said, "I will show you the man you're looking for." So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple—dead.**

As requested, Deborah accompanied Barak and the ten thousand men from the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali to Mount Tabor—God's divinely appointed battlefield. With Deborah's command and her assurance of victory, Barak engaged Sisera in battle and decisively routed his army, along with nine hundred iron chariots (verse 14). However, the triumph was not yet complete. Sisera, the only survivor of the battle, fled on foot toward the encampment of Heber the Kenite, who was at peace with Jabin, king of Hazor, hoping to find refuge from Barak and the advancing Israelite forces (see verses 11, 17).

Heber's wife, Jael, welcomed Sisera with the customary gestures of Near Eastern hospitality—offering shelter, concealing him under a rug, providing him with milk to drink, and standing guard at the entrance of the tent to mislead potential pursuers. However, Bible scholars presume that Jael did not share her husband's political allegiance with Jabin. While Sisera slept, she took a tent peg and drove it through his temple, killing him (verse 21). When Barak arrived in pursuit, Jael drew his attention to the lifeless body of the enemy commander (verse 22), fulfilling Deborah's prophetic declaration that the final honor of victory would belong to a woman. Though Jael's actions defied cultural expectations of hospitality, they aligned with God's sovereign plan for Israel's deliverance. In a moment of extraordinary courage and unconventional obedience, Jael became the unexpected instrument through which God achieved His people's victory over Canaanite oppression.

## **WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

**How do the actions of Deborah, Barak, and Jael reflect differing types of faith and obedience?**

## **A Closing Thought**

At some point, people make poor choices that land them in situations that seem impossible to overcome. Christians are not exempt—as clearly illustrated by Israel's failure to eliminate the Canaanites as God had commanded. As a result, they gradually gave in to the lure of the Canaanites' idolatrous and immoral culture. Yet, when they cried out to God in sincere repentance for deliverance from the consequences of their sinful rebellion, He responded with compassion. God appointed and equipped a series of judges—both judicial and military leaders—to facilitate their rescue and spiritual restoration. Among God's chosen instruments was the prophetess Deborah, the

only female judge mentioned in Scripture. Her appointment powerfully affirms that God's criteria for service and leadership among His people transcend cultural norms and societal expectations.

## Your Life

Making wrong choices is a universal reality, even among believers. Yet this lesson not only reminds us of who we can turn to when our decisions land us in difficult circumstances but also challenges us to expect God to deliver us in ways that may defy our expectations. When His people cry out in sincere repentance, God responds, but His choice of deliverers is not bound by gender. The story of Deborah and Jael affirms that God values faithfulness, obedience, courage, and wisdom over cultural norms or societal limitations. He raises up whomever He wills, male or female, to accomplish His purposes and bring restoration to His people.

## Your World!

One thing is sure: when God's people repent and call on Him, He will deliver them, even when their bad decisions are the cause. As seen in His use of Deborah and Jael as Israel's savior and deliverer, respectively, He may choose those we least expect as His instruments to provide leadership and deliverance in unexpected and unconventional ways. Consequently, we must remain aware that courageous faith is not gender-bound and be open to acknowledging, accepting, and respecting those He sovereignly chooses.

## Closing Prayer

Sovereign God, thank You for reminding us that You will provide faithful leadership during adverse circumstances of Your choosing, like Deborah. Help us follow her example of answering Your call to leadership and service with courageous faith, unquestioningly. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Conclusion

### (Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week's lesson provides an extraordinary example of the effectiveness of confident prayer in believers' lives (1 Samuel 1:9-20, 25).

Home Daily Bible Readings		
MONDAY, June 8	"Leading a Life of Righteousness"	(Ezekiel 18:5-9)
TUESDAY, June 9	"Trusting in a God Who Sees"	(Genesis 16:1, 4-16)
WEDNESDAY, June 10	"Do Not Forsake Your Mother's Teaching"	(Proverbs 6:20-22)
THURSDAY, June 11	"Praising God for Home and Family"	(Psalm 113)
FRIDAY, June 12	"A Mother Who Comforts Her Child"	(Isaiah 66:9-13)
SATURDAY, June 13	"Rejoicing in God's Deliverance"	(Luke 1:46-56)
SUNDAY, June 14	"Seeking God's Blessing"	(1 Samuel 1:9-20, 25)