

Deborah, the Dutiful Judge

Lesson Text: Judges 4:4-10, 14, 21-22

Supporting Text: Judges 4-5



Key Text: “Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading^[a] 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.”(Judges 4:4-5 NIV)

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, we will be able to:

1. Summarize Deborah’s role in the defeat of Sisera.
2. Explain how Deborah demonstrated faithfulness in difficult circumstances.
3. State one way to follow Deborah’s example of heeding God’s call to serve

Introduction

Supportive Greatness

Olympic climber Sam Watson broke his own world record by just 0.01 second, showing that even the smallest improvements can require tremendous effort and support. His coach played an important role by providing guidance, encouragement, and confidence. Similarly, in the Bible,

Deborah and Jael both contributed to Israel's victory in different ways. The lesson is that leadership takes many forms, and both visible leaders and those working behind the scenes can have a significant impact.

Lesson Text

Judges 4:4-10,14, 21-22

⁴And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, 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.**

⁶And 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 near 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 Sisera, the captain of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his multitude to the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into thine hand?’”**

⁸And 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 honor, for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.” And Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.**

¹⁰And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh, and he went up with ten thousand men at his heels; and Deborah went up with him.

¹⁴ **And Deborah said unto Barak, “Up! For this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand. Has not the Lord gone out before thee?” So, Barak went down from Mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.**

²¹Then Jael, Heber’s wife, took a nail of the tent and took a 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 show thee the man whom thou seekest.” And**

when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

Lesson Context

This introduction to the book of Judges highlights a major theme: what happens when God's people abandon their covenant relationship with Him.

Key Points

1. Joshua's Death Marks a New Era

After Joshua died, Israel no longer had a strong national leader like Moses or Joshua. God remained their King in a theocracy, but the people increasingly failed to follow Him.

2. Israel Turned to Idolatry

The generation that entered Canaan had pledged loyalty to God, but later generations began worshiping false gods such as Baal and Ashtoreth. Judges 2:10–13 describes how they forgot the Lord and adopted the religious practices of the surrounding nations.

3. The Cycle of Judges

A repeating pattern appears throughout the book:

1. Faithfulness to God → peace and security.
2. Disobedience and idolatry → spiritual decline.
3. Oppression by enemies → suffering and hardship.
4. Repentance → the people cry out to God.
5. Deliverance → God raises up a judge to rescue them.

4. What Was a Judge?

In the Old Testament, a judge was more than a courtroom official. Judges could be:

1. Political leaders
2. Military deliverers
3. Prophets
4. Administrators
5. Individuals who guided the nation according to God's will

5. "Everyone Did as They Saw Fit"

The phrase from Judges 17:6 and 21:25 summarizes the spiritual condition of Israel. Without consistent obedience to God, people followed their own desires rather than God's commands. The book portrays the social, moral, and spiritual consequences of that choice.

The Fourth Judge

When the introduction says today's text is set around **1225 BC** and concerns the **fourth judge**, it is referring to Deborah. Deborah stands out because she was both a judge and a prophet, and she worked with Barak to deliver Israel from the oppression of King Jabin and his commander Sisera (Judges 4–5).

The book of Judges ultimately teaches that lasting peace came not from military strength or human leaders, but from Israel's faithfulness to God. When the people turned away, disorder followed; when they returned to Him, He provided deliverance.

Deborah

After the Israelites again turned away from God following the death of Ehud, God allowed King Jabin to oppress them for 20 years. During this time, Deborah served as both a prophet and judge of Israel. As a prophet, she communicated God's messages, and as a judge, she settled disputes among the people. Deborah held court under the [Palm of Deborah](#) between Ramah and Bethel in the territory of Ephraim. The Israelites came to her for wisdom and justice, making her a respected spiritual and civil leader during a troubled period in Israel's history.

The Task

The four geographic locations help set the scene for Judges 4. Barak came from Kedesh, a city in the territory of Naphtali that served as a city of refuge for those who accidentally caused another person's death (Joshua 20:7; 21:32).

Mount Tabor was about 50 miles north of where Deborah and Barak met and about 11 miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee. Though called a mountain, its elevation of 1,886 feet makes it more like a large hill. It stood near the tribal borders of Naphtali, Zebulun, and Issachar, making it a strategic gathering place.

This region later became known as Galilee, or "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Matthew 4:15, quoting Isaiah 9:1–2). Deborah then delivered God's command to Barak to gather troops from Naphtali and Zebulun. A question arises: Did God mean 10,000 men total or 10,000 from each tribe? Judges 4:14 and the surrounding verses indicate that the force consisted of **10,000 men altogether**, drawn from both tribes.

God Still Speaks

Deborah wasn't just a judge; she was also a prophet. She had a unique advantage when defending against Israel's enemies: she heard God's voice. Therefore, she knew what to do and how to do it.

While God may not call us to battle, we often find ourselves in tense circumstances with high stakes. Sometimes a particular decision feels like life or death. We sometimes find ourselves desperate for God to speak clearly about what we should do and how to do it, especially if we are to lead others and care for their well-being.

It is easy to forget that while God may not speak in a loud, booming voice to give me obvious and specific directions about each step, we can access God's will through the Holy Spirit and the study of Scripture. The more we walk with the Spirit through prayer, the more we discern his will—and perhaps most importantly, our heart desires to follow him. Have you invited the wisdom and guidance of God into the significant decisions of your life? How are we allowing God to work through us as leaders for the sake of serving others well?

The Prophecy

This passage from **Judges 4:8–9** highlights two important themes: **faith** and **God's sovereignty**.

Why did Barak want Deborah to go with him?

The text says: "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go." Some interpreters see this as a lack of faith because Barak hesitated to obey God's command without Deborah's presence. Others note that Deborah was God's prophet and judge, so Barak may have wanted the assurance of God's presence and guidance through her.

Interestingly, Barak is later listed among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11:32, suggesting that although his faith may not have been perfect, he ultimately trusted God enough to go into battle.

What did Deborah mean by "the honor will not be yours"?

Deborah tells Barak: "The LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman." Barak expected to lead the army and perhaps personally defeat Sisera, the enemy commander. Because of the way events unfolded, that honor went to another woman, Jael, who later killed Sisera (Judges 4:21). **This was not merely Deborah's prediction—it was God's declaration of what would happen.** **The meaning of "deliver" or "sell"** The Hebrew word translated "deliver" can also mean "sell," "give over," or "hand over."

The idea is not God literally sold Sisera as property, but God **gave him over to a fate he could not escape**. Note, the same word is used elsewhere in Judges when God gives Israel into the hands of oppressors because of their disobedience.

The key point is: Sisera's future was not determined by his military strength, his army, or his plans. God already determined the outcome.

Deborah's statement emphasizes God is the true commander of the battle. Barak, Sisera, Deborah, and Jael all play roles, but the victory belongs to the Lord. A deeper lesson. This passage expresses God often works through unexpected people. **In a culture where military glory usually belonged to male warriors, God chose two women—Deborah and Jael—to play central roles in Israel's deliverance.** The story reminds readers that God's purposes are accomplished according to His will, not according to human expectations or status. The phrase "Sisera's destiny is not in his hands" captures the central message well: **God's sovereignty overrules human power and human plans.**

Jael's Action

After God routed Sisera's army through Barak and the Israelites (Judges 4:15), Sisera fled on foot to the tent of Heber the Kenite. There, Heber's wife, Jael, welcomed him, offered him shelter, and gained his trust.

Exhausted from battle and his long escape, Sisera fell asleep. While he slept, Jael took a tent peg and hammer and drove the peg through his temple into the ground, killing him (Judges 4:21). Her action fulfilled the prophecy of Deborah that Sisera would be delivered into the hands of a woman (Judges 4:9).

Shortly afterward, Barak arrived while pursuing Sisera. Jael met him and said, "Come, I will show you the man you're looking for." When Barak entered the tent, he found Sisera dead with the tent peg through his temple (Judges 4:22).

This event confirmed Deborah's prophecy and demonstrated that Israel's victory came through God's plan, using an unexpected person to accomplish His purpose. Barak achieved victory, but the honor of Sisera's downfall belonged to Jael.

Conclusion

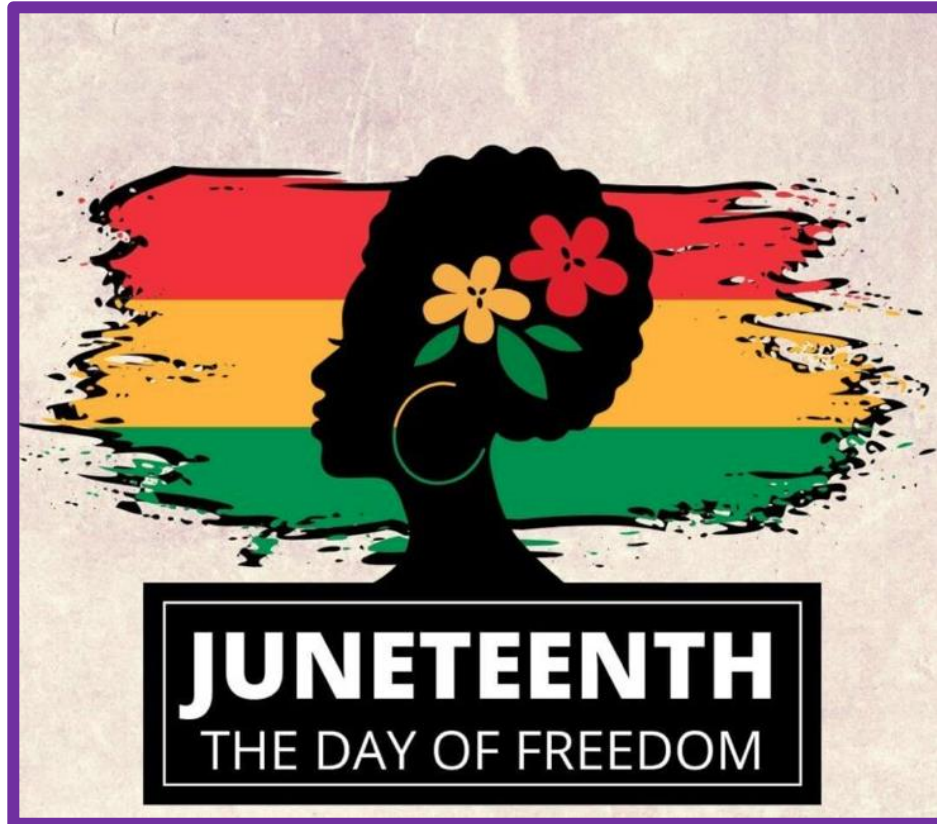
When a prophet's words is validated by truth and accuracy, they confirm the prophet's calling and legitimacy. God proves Deborah's predictions and faithfulness throughout the narrative. Judge Deborah is an emboldened witness of God's fidelity and integrity.

As prophetess, Deborah called Barak to her palm tree to relay God's commands. She boldly informed him he was to go into battle and that God would bring about victory. Her initiative set Barak into action. Deborah remained steadfast despite Barak's doubts and courageously followed him into the war, taking her place in military leadership for the sake of her people. She reminded Barak along the way that God planned their success, serving him through exhortation. In the role of both prophet and strategist, Deborah discerned the correct timing and movement of the army.

After their victory, Deborah led God's people in praise: "When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves—praise the LORD!" (Judges 5:2). She proved herself a loyal and dutiful deliverer for Israel, continually giving all glory and honor to God.

Take Aways

Closing Prayer



Daily Bible Readings

Monday: *The Oppression & The Prophetess*; Judges 4:1–5, Psalm 83:1–4, 9, Proverbs 31:26.

Tuesday: *The Hesitant Commander*; Judges 4:6–10, Psalm 20:6–8, Proverbs 3:5–6

Wednesday: *The Battle of Mount Tabor*; Judges 4:11–16, Psalm 44:3–6, Proverbs 21:31

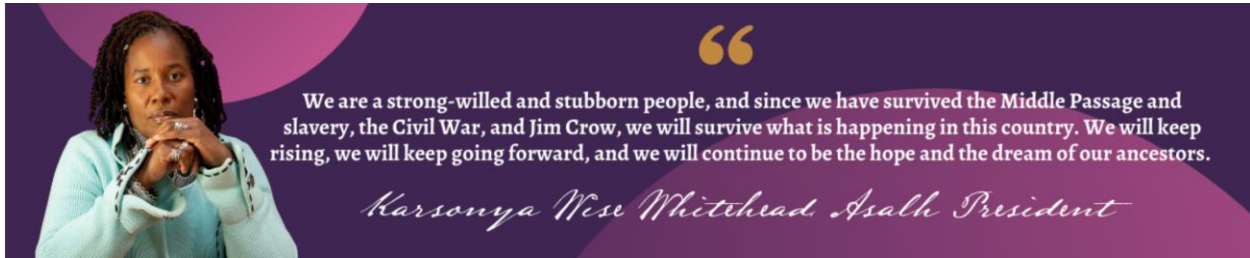
Thursday: *The Tent Peg & The Downfall*; Judges 4:17–24, Psalm 71:1–4, Proverbs 11:2

Friday: *The Song of National Awakening*; Judges 5:1–11, Psalm 68:7–9, Proverbs 29:2

Saturday: *The Faithful vs. The Fearful*; Judges 5:12–23, Psalm 118:6–9, Proverbs 18:9

Sunday: *Ultimate Victory & Forty Years of Rest*; Judges 5:24–31, Psalm 92:1–4, 11, Proverbs 4:18

BLACK HISTORY



Juneteenth! Friday, Jun 19, 2026

Juneteenth, short for “June Nineteenth,” marks the day when federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, in 1865 to take control of the state and ensure that all enslaved people be freed. The troops’ arrival came a full two and a half years after [the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation](#).

Juneteenth honors the end to slavery in the United States and is considered the longest-running African American holiday. A federal holiday since 2021, Juneteenth occurs on Friday, June 19, in 2026.

Although Confederate General Robert E. Lee had surrendered at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, in April 1865, slavery had remained relatively intact in Texas. That is until U.S. General Gordon Granger stood on Texas soil and read General Orders No. 3: “The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free.” In Texas, slavery had continued as the state experienced no large-scale fighting or significant presence of Union troops. Many enslavers from outside the Lone Star State had moved there, as they viewed it as a haven for slavery.

After the war ended in the spring of 1865, General Granger’s arrival in Galveston that June signaled freedom for Texas’s 250,000 enslaved people. Celebrations broke out among newly freed Black people, but emancipation didn’t happen overnight for everyone. In some cases, enslavers withheld the information until after harvest season. That December, slavery in America was formally abolished with the adoption of the [13th Amendment](#). In 1866, freedmen in Texas organized the first of what became the annual celebration of “Jubilee Day” on June 19. In the ensuing decades, Juneteenth commemorations featured music, barbecues, prayer services and other activities. As Black people migrated from Texas to other parts of the country, the Juneteenth tradition spread.

Association for the Study of African American Life and History

The mission of the ASALH® is to promote, research, preserve, interpret and disseminate information about Black life, history and culture to the global community. Established on September 9, 1915, by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, we are the Founders of Black History Month and carry forth the work of our founder, the Father of Black History. We continue his legacy of speaking a fundamental truth to the world—that Africans and peoples of African descent are makers of history and co-workers in what W. E. B. Du Bois called, “The Kingdom of Culture.” ASALH is in short, the nexus between the Ivory Tower and the global public.



The Negro Historical Association with Carter Woodson (with bow tie) seated next to Mary Church Terrell (in white) in front row, center, of this portrait (1925).

Source: Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives, Howard University, Washington DC

We are in the final stages of organizing the Northern Virginia Branch. If you have any questions, please contact: *Deac Joe Boutte, Bro Harvey Woodson, or Rev Gillis M. Taylor.*

Come and Join The ASALH NOVA Branch!!