



**CHRISTIAN
ENDEAVOUR**

for Christ and the Church



Judges Period

People with problems

Deborah - A woman in a man's world

Judges 4

Teaching aim

To understand that God can use everyone in His service, even if they have problems of their own.

Setting the Scene

The people in this series lived in the time between the death of Joshua and the choosing of Saul as the first king of Israel. It is called the Period of the Judges. The Israelites had just settled in the Promised Land, the land of Canaan, but it was not an easy time. There were Canaanites who wanted their land back and nations on the borders who hoped to gain some of it. Without a strong leader like Joshua, the Israelites had no real unity or single government. When there were threats of danger or questions about what laws meant, they had to find leaders to guide them, and they called them 'judges'. Not all the people in this series were 'judges', but they were all rather special.

Deborah's Difficulty

Read Judges 4.1-5. Deborah was special. Of the 12 Judges named in the Book of Judges, she is the only one who was a woman. In those days, women were almost second-class citizens with few rights. For the men to accept her decisions in their disputes (v5), she must have been a very special lady. Do you know what it is like to be the odd one out? You want to play rugby but everyone else wants to play football, or your skin is dark and the others are white (or vice versa), or your friends want to do something they think is cool or funny but you know it is wrong. Deborah must have felt like that – she was a woman in a man's world.

But there was another difficulty. For 20 years, Jabin, the king of Canaan, had been giving the Israelites a hard time because he was more powerful than the Israelites (v3) (NB: iron chariots were their equivalent of tanks in a modern army). It happened because the Israelites had begun to forget about God (v1). They had stopped doing what was right and had started to worship other gods. This happened many times in the period of the Judges (see Jud.3:12, 10.6, 13.1). Only when 'they cried to the Lord for help' (v3), that is they remembered God, did He act to save them.

As a woman in a man's world, Deborah might manage to advise the Israelites about laws but how could she help them against a foreign enemy?

Deborah's Decision

Read Judges 4.6-8. Just as the Israelites brought their problems to her, Deborah took her problem to God. God told her He would give His people a victory but, as nobody would follow a woman into battle, Deborah had to find a man to lead them. So she sent for Barak and told him what God had said (vv 6-7). Barak was not very happy about doing what Deborah had told him (v8). Did he not trust her, or did he not trust God?

Deborah's Duty

Read Judges 4.9-24. Although Barak was not sure about it, Deborah knew it was her duty to see that God's instructions were carried out. So she promised to go with Barak to get an army together and take them to the place where God had said the battle would be fought (v7). Deborah trusted God to keep His word and was not afraid to go with Barak. As a result, there was a great victory (vv15-16). But notice –

- a Because he did not wholly trust the word of God, Barak did not receive any honour for the victory, even though he commanded the Israelite army (v9).
- b It was the Lord God who won the victory (v15) – some experts suggest that God sent a rainstorm driving into the faces of the Canaanite soldiers so they couldn't see to fight properly. It also flooded the valley of River Kishon making the ground so soggy that the heavy iron chariots of the Canaanites were useless.
- c It was a woman, Jael, who completed the victory by killing Sisera, the Canaanite commander, with a tent peg and a hammer – a rather messy business.

Summing Up

Deborah trusted God and made sure that what God wanted was done. Although she had the difficulty of being a woman in a man's world, God was able to work through her to solve the even greater problem of the oppression of His people. He can use us even when we feel we are the odd one out.

Resources

Memory verse

'She held court under the Palm of Deborah ... and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided' (Jud 4:5)

Activities

- Under 8s Activity Sheet "Judges Period - 1".
- Over 8s Activity Sheet "Judges Period - 2".

Readings

For the historical sequence of this series see - Scripture Union's Bible Time Line.

The Lion Handbook of the Bible – gives a list of all Judges except Samuel with a map of where they lived (p.220) and dates of some (p.219).

Prayer points

Pray for :

- all leaders of nations who have to make difficult decisions and solve difficult problems.
- all people who feel that they are on their own when standing up for what is right.

Deborah

Draw a story board using the verses given in Judges 4.
Include "speech bubbles" in your drawings.

<p>1</p> <p>v5b The Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided</p>	<p>2</p> <p>v6 She sent for Barak</p>
<p>3</p> <p>v9 Deborah went with Barak v10 10,000 men followed him.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>v15 The Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and army</p>
<p>5</p> <p>v17 Sisera fled on foot to the tent of Jael.</p>	<p>6</p> <p>v21 Jael picked up a tent peg and hammer ... and Sisera died.</p>

Deborah

Find the following words in the wordsearch.

JABIN
CANAAN
HAZOR
SISERA

HAROSHETH
HAGGOYIM
IRON CHARIOT
DEBORAH

LAPPIDOTH
PALM
BARAK
MILK

KISHON RIVER
HEBER
JAEI
MOUNT TABOR

TENT PEG
HAMMER

H	A	G	G	O	Y	I	M	D	R	T
A	H	A	M	M	E	R	O	E	E	W
R	R	E	B	E	H	O	U	B	V	H
O	L	E	A	J	P	N	N	O	I	T
S	I	S	E	R	A	C	T	R	R	O
H	A	Z	O	R	L	H	T	A	N	D
E	E	N	T	Y	M	A	A	H	O	I
T	K	A	R	A	B	R	B	K	H	P
H	N	I	B	A	J	I	O	L	S	P
N	A	A	N	A	C	O	R	I	I	A
G	E	P	T	N	E	T	E	M	K	L

From the letters left over, fill in the number of years that Jabin oppressed the Israelites.

The single letter remaining is the initial letter of the area where Deborah lived. Can you name the area?
