

Women in the Bible: Deborah

Setting the Story: Post Exodus and wandering in the desert, Joshua brings the Israelites into the promised land of Canaan. In this new time, Judges were used as the leaders instead of Kings. The book of Judges tells the accounts of the different Judges during this 200-year period. Deborah comes to us in a time where Israel has been oppressed by the Canaanites for roughly 20 years.

Scripture: Judges chapter 4 and 5

- Grab your Bible and read through the scripture
- Note: Judges 5 is a poetic dramatic retelling of the events in chapter 4. If it feels like you're reading the same things twice just with different emphasis, you are! Take note of the ways the story is originally told vs. how it is "sung" or dramatically retold.
- What parts of the story jump out to you?

Background Information:

Deborah

- One of 15 judges leading Israel, first and only female judge
- Speaks 114 words in chapter 4, sings her song with Barak in chapter 5
- "Her faith in God became the strength of Israel [and she became] the keeper of a new spiritual vision that would light all of Israel"¹

Jael

- Speaks 23 words
- Tribe of Heber: traveling metalsmiths working/sympathizing with Canaanites
- Broke ancient hospitality code but received no punishment because laws weren't established at the time

Things to Consider:

- Neither of these women fall under the "meek and demur" description that is often imposed upon women, especially women in the Bible
- There are many in the world (including Christian denominations) who think women should not hold positions of power, yet here is a woman with an incredible amount of power recognized and utilized by God. These stories are in the Bible, they just seem to be, forgotten!
- Women start and end this fight: Deborah leading people into battle, Jael killing off the leader and only survivor

Reflection Questions:

- There are three important songs sung by women in the Bible: Deborah (Judges 5), Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10), and Mary (Luke 1:46-55). How do these songs compare?
- The book of Judges shows God at work in the lives of the people, where do you see God at work in the world around you?
- Deborah is one of the most powerful women in Israel and in the whole Bible, who are the powerful and influential women in your life and in society today?
- What are your thoughts on calling Deborah "a mother of Israel"?

¹ All of the Women of the Bible by Edith Deen, page 70

If you are interested in reading or discovering more about the story of Deborah, check out some of these resources. I own all of these books and love them. I also included art to look at for those of you interested in looking at the ways art and interpretation influence each other. Feel free to send me any resources that you find!

Further Reading:

- Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture
- Bible Women: All Their Words and Why They Matter by Lindsay Hardin Freeman
- All of the Women of the Bible by Edith Deen
- Women's Bible Commentary by Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley
- Life: Women of the Bible special edition magazine printed in 2019
- Article: <http://www.womeninthebible.net/women-bible-old-new-testaments/deborah-and-jael/>

Art to Consider:

I love looking at the way art can influence our perspective on stories. Check out some of these artistic representations of Hagar and her story. How do they change or impact how you view the story?

The Prophetess Deborah ordering Barak to take arms against Sisera by Francesco Solimena (The Met)

In Tune (Judges 4-5) by Lauren Wright Pittman (A Sanctified Art)

Jael and Sisera by Artemisia Gentileschi (<http://www.womeninthebible.net/women-bible-old-new-testaments/deborah-and-jael/>)

Deborah Praises Jael by Gustave Dore (<https://www.artbible.info/art/large/213.html>)

Deborah's Army: The Book of Judges video by BimBam

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myeSLGXHt4k>)

- Child's video for the telling of the story, but take note of the ways Deborah and Jael are portrayed (and the sass they both give!)

The Song of Deborah by Laurence Olivier (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbOmruieYk>)

- Has some really good artwork within the retelling of the story