

Lesson 3: Strength in Numbers

JUDGES PROFILE



Genre: Narrative History

Author: Traditionally, the prophet Samuel

Passage: Judges 4:4-10, 21; 5:31

Where Is It: The seventh book of the Old Testament: Joshua, **Judges**, Ruth

Key Characters: Deborah, Barak, Jael, God, Sisera

Main Plot: God takes sin very seriously, and God's people disobey him to follow other gods. God is still faithful to Israel.



THE WORD

Judges 4:4-10, 21; 5:31



ENGAGE THE WORD

Lesson Overview: Cultural Dimension

Adolescents generally prefer being with others over being alone. At this stage of development, adolescents tend to place their trust in their peer groups. Sometimes God asks us to be alone, and sometimes he reminds us that we can do powerful things in groups. It is important, however, to discern the voice of God and know when we need to seek guidance and when we need to trust him.

Deborah has great confidence in the Lord. Barak, however, does not, and he needs the reassurance from Deborah to follow through with his mission. Ultimately, another woman, Jael, completes the mission. This lesson will help us understand that we need to be confident in God but also that sometimes we can do better with help from others.

Biblical Commentary

In these passages we learn about Deborah, a prophetess and an arbiter. Rather than fighting in battle like the other judges, she settles disputes among people. Deborah loves God, and God speaks to her. In her story, we hear again the cry of Israel to God.

The text tells us that Deborah steps in and retrieves someone named Barak. We don't know much about Barak except that Deborah hears from God that Barak is to save the Israelites by killing Sisera, the commander of King Jabin's Canaanite army. The Canaanites are more established and more powerful than the Israelites. We see this in Judges 4:3: "Because he had nine hundred iron chariots and had cruelly



Wesleyan Snapshot Faith and Works

As Wesleyan-Arminians, we believe that faith is a gift of God that will inevitably result in good works. Good works must be the fruit that is produced from the root of faith. We see no conflict between the letter of James and Paul. John Wesley explained, "St. James's justification by *works* is the fruit of St. Paul's justification by *faith*."

— John Wesley's *Notes on the Bible*, 2:297; comment on James 2:21



THE MAIN IDEA

BY STUDYING DEBORAH, STUDENTS WILL LEARN HOW TO HAVE CONFIDENCE THAT GOD WILL PROVIDE WHAT WE NEED TO FULFILL HIS MISSION BUT THAT SOMETIMES WE FIND THAT CONFIDENCE THROUGH OTHERS.



Bible Background

Prophet/ Prophecy

“Prophecy in the Bible is a speech given under God’s inspiration by someone called and commissioned by God to communicate an urgent message from God to an audience. A prophet is a spokesperson for God. The subject of prophecy may be hope and salvation, or condemnation and judgment.”

—Dr. Alex Varughese,
*Global Wesleyan Dictionary
of Theology*

oppressed the Israelites for 20 years, they cried to the Lord for help.” Much like with Gideon, we see God using Deborah and Barak, two unexpected people, to accomplish his mission.

Barak doesn’t rise to the occasion as we would expect but doubts God and asks for Deborah’s presence during the invasion. Deborah concedes, but because of his doubt, Barak is not given the credit for the destruction of Sisera. Instead, Deborah tells him, “The honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman” (Judges 4:9b).

Barak will not receive the glory for this endeavor because of his lack of trust in God. At this point, the reader can assume the woman is going to be Deborah, but then we are introduced to another woman, Jael. It is Jael who kills Sisera, not Deborah nor Barak. We see here that when God decides to do something great, he generally does not use a person of great status, power, wealth, or political position. God continually uses people from the margins of our communities—people without qualification or socio-economic status—so no one can take the credit except God alone. If we want to see God at work in our world, we should look to the margins.

While Deborah does not kill Sisera, it is important to study her because she is a faithful follower of God and a vehicle for his work. Without her and Jael, God’s work would not have been done.

In Judges 5, we hear Deborah’s song. Sung with Barak, it seems to be an account of what occurs in Judges 4. We hear praise to God, and we hear firsthand how difficult it is for the people of Israel. Deborah’s song ends with a final prayer that demonstrates a strong contrast for enemies and friends of God: “So may all your enemies perish, Lord! But may all who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength.’ Then the land had peace forty years” (5:31). After all the war and discontent, Israel is at peace again—a contrast from the gruesome picture of death from verses before.

REFLECT ON THESE THEMES:

Deborah had great confidence. Do you have confidence in yourself? Do you need others to help you build that confidence? Who are those people?

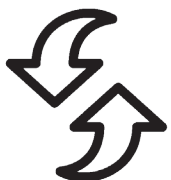
As is often the case, God uses those we would least expect to fulfill his mission. Is God still using

anyone unexpected to do amazing things? What is your role in this mission?

REFLECT ON YOUR STUDENTS:


Do you think it is difficult for students to consider themselves worthy to do great work?

Do you think they could do anything without peer support? Why do our peers give us the confidence we need?



DISCUSSION GUIDE

**LESSON
OUTLINE**



Main Idea: *By studying Deborah, students will learn how to have confidence that God will provide what we need to fulfill his mission but that sometimes we find that confidence through others.*

Resources: *Bibles, copies of handout, writing utensils, blindfolds*

Connect to My Experience:
Welcome and Prayer
Akeelah and the Bee Discussion

Connect to the Word:
Read and Reflect on Judges
Showing Light Activity

Connect to My Life and the World: *Shining Together*

Closing: *Prayer*



CONNECT TO MY EXPERIENCE

Student Goal: Youth will discern where they put their confidence and strength.

Welcome your students and open in prayer.

AKEELAH AND THE BEE DISCUSSION

SAY: This week, I'd like to show you a clip from a movie called *Akeelah and the Bee*. In this film, a young girl overcomes obstacles to compete in the United States' National Spelling Bee. You can access the movie clip here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DCVmU5gMDQ>.

SAY: In this clip, you can see that Akeelah is afraid to compete in the spelling bee. Dr. Larabee tries to encourage her confidence by asking her to think about where her strength comes from.

ASK: What do you put your confidence in?

What gives you strength?

Confidence
 Confidence is the feeling or belief that one can rely on someone or something; firm trust.

Exodus 15:2
 The Lord is my strength and my defense;
 he has become my salvation.
 He is my God, and I will praise him,
 my father's God, and I will exalt him.

CREATIVE OPTION: A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

Pair students up in groups of two or three. Blindfold one of the team members while the other team member leads them around the house or youth room. Set up a few obstacles. After they go around the course once, tell them they now have to do it without their guide.

ASK: Was it easier with the help of someone? Were you more confident when you had someone there to guide you?

SAY: God guides us all the time, but we don't always hear it. We feel like we need someone else, too. We are going to look at this week with Deborah and Barak and Jael.



CONNECT TO THE WORD

Student Goal: Youth will learn to put their confidence in God through the story of Deborah.

READ Judges 4:4-10. After the passage is read, discuss the following.

SAY: Deborah was a prophet and leader. One day, God told her to tell someone named Barak that he was going to save the Israelites by killing Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army. But Barak didn't want to go alone. He said he would only go if Deborah went with him. He didn't fully trust God.

ASK: Is there anything you feel like you couldn't or wouldn't want to do alone?

Why wouldn't you do it by yourself?

Who would you take with you to help you?

Why would you take that person?

SAY: Deborah and Barak set out to kill Sisera, but when it comes down to it, neither of them completes the task. Instead, a woman named Jael does it, and it's gruesome.

READ Judges: 5:21.

ASK: What's the difference between Jael and Barak?

What about Deborah and Jael?

SAY: Judges 5 is a song by Deborah. At the end of the passage, we read, "So may all your enemies perish, Lord! But may all who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength" (Judges 5:31).

SHOWING LIGHT ACTIVITY

If the weather and your setting allow, go outside for this activity. Ask the students to pay attention to the feeling of the sun on their faces and their bodies.

ASK: Did you know all organisms rely heavily on the sun to live?

SAY: The sun provides energy needed to maintain life on earth. Here's a little science lesson. This energy is not always obtained directly. The process of energy dispersion begins with plants in a reaction called *photosynthesis*. The most important component of photosynthesis is light itself. Sunlight consists of all parts of the visible spectrum, which contains all possible colors. Because only certain parts of this spectrum are absorbed by plant cells (usually blue and red), the

reflected light gives them their color, which is generally greenish. In photosynthesis, light is converted into energy.

SAY: God's people are like the sun at its strongest. Just as the sun gives life, at our strongest, we give life too—spiritual life. When we shine like the sun, we give off God's light, giving people around us an energy, a sense of life that makes them want to be different.

ASK: What are some ways we can show light in our communities?

CREATIVE OPTION: WORK AND WITNESS

This lesson offers a great lead-in for a work and witness project in your local community. Before you meet, plan a few options that introduce an opportunity to show the world the light of Jesus. How can you work in your neighborhood for Jesus? Have sign-ups ready, and allow your youth to take ownership of the project. This is a great way to teach through action.

CREATIVE OPTION: COMING TO YOU LIVE

Create a news show. Have the students report on the killing of Sisera.

Further Explanation

The purpose of this project is to encourage our youth to participate with their hands. We can learn, pray, and listen to teachings all day, but if we do not work with our hands, then our learning is useless. Faith without works is dead. Take this project seriously and think of creative ways to engage your community or church in a work project. Work is a great teacher of wisdom.



CONNECT TO MY LIFE AND THE WORLD

Student Goal: Youth will begin to understand the significance of a work project for the mission of God.

SAY: Deborah was confident in God, but we learn in this story that God's mission wasn't carried out by one person. They ended up relying on one another to get the task done. Even if they didn't know that Jael was part of the plan, in the end, they needed her.

If only one person shines like the sun, it won't be very bright. But if we all do it, think about what it would look like. Feel the warmth on your face. See the light shining in your eyes.

Look up the local Habitat for Humanity branch or come up with a work project around the church that will accept your whole group. Or work together on a project to restore a home. One person alone could not do it, but as a group, great things can happen!

Distribute this week's student handout. If you have time, ask the students to spend some time reflecting on the lesson. Give them five to ten minutes to fill in their answers before you close. If you don't have time, ask them to take the handout home with them and spend some time in reflection this week.

CREATIVE OPTION: BE A LIGHT

Deborah was a confident woman. How can we find our confidence in God when it is hard to hear him and see him? How can we let him fill us with the inner strength we need so we can trust that he will guide us?

Play “You Make Me Brave” by Amanda Cook and Bethel Music. You can find it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Hi-VMxT6fc>.

Turn down the lights. Have the students reflect on God’s ability to provide confidence to each of us so we can accomplish great things and be the sun at its strongest to those around us.



CLOSING

In closing, pray that God would help your students shine brightly together for God so that those around them would come to believe as well.