

Deborah's Courage

Sunday Plan

SCRIPTURE

Judges 4–5

MEMORY VERSE

Judges 4:14

OPTIONAL VIDEO

Deborah

<https://southside.cc/551-856>

God uses whoever trusts him, not whoever looks the part.

For the Teacher

Read this before you teach. Today the kids meet Deborah — a prophet and judge in Israel during a time when nobody expected a woman to lead anything. Israel had been forgetting God for years; an enemy king named Jabin had been crushing them for twenty years; the people finally cried out. God's answer was a woman with a palm tree for an office, and a general named Barak who would only fight if she came with him. The chapter is the story of God winning a battle through people who didn't look the part.

KEY TRUTH

God uses whoever trusts him, not whoever looks the part.

Three unlikely people, one God. Deborah is a woman in a culture that didn't expect women to lead armies. Barak is a general too afraid to go without her. Jael is a non-Israelite tent-dwelling woman who ends the war with a tent peg. By every cultural measure, none of them should have been the heroes. That's the point. God isn't picking from the people who look strongest. He's picking from the people who trust him. Don't soften that — it's the spine of the lesson.

The memory verse is the hinge. Judges 4:14: *"Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?"* That last line — *the LORD goes out before you* — is the same promise the kids heard three weeks ago in Joshua 1:9 (*God goes with you, so be brave*). Same God, same promise, different generation. The kids should feel the echo.

About Jael and the tent peg. Yes, this happens — Sisera flees the battle, hides in Jael's tent, and Jael drives a tent peg through his head while he sleeps (Judges 4:21). It's in the Bible and we don't pretend it isn't. But we don't dwell on the gore in a classroom of seven-year-olds. Tell them plainly: *Jael, a woman nobody expected, killed the enemy general in her tent.* That's enough. The point is who God used, not the method. If a kid asks how, answer matter-of-factly and move on — *with a tent peg, while he was sleeping. The Bible doesn't make it pretty.*

Where this connects. Three weeks ago the kids learned *God goes with you, so be brave* (Q3L1 — Joshua Leads). Today they hear what that looks like a generation later, when nobody expects a woman to lead. If a kid was here for Joshua, they should hear Deborah saying the same thing Joshua heard from God: *the LORD goes before you.*

What we're skipping and why. Chapter 5 is the Song of Deborah — a long victory poem the kids don't need to read in full. We'll sample it briefly at the end. Chapter 4 also includes a longer account of the battle (verses 12–13, 15–16); we'll summarize the battle in the teacher's words rather than reading every verse. Stay in 4:1–9 and 4:14 for the read-aloud.

Repeat the bottom line all morning. Say it at least six times. Have the kids say it back. Write it on the board. End with it.

MATERIALS

- Bibles for every student
- Whiteboard or large paper, markers
- Pencils, crayons or colored pencils
- Index cards
- Activity sheets (printed in advance from this week's activities — pick what you'll use)

1. Gather

Welcome the kids and have them sit together. Tell them today's story is set hundreds of years after Joshua — and the heroes are not who anyone expected.

ASK

Who's the most surprising person you've ever seen do something brave? Maybe somebody small, or quiet, or somebody nobody thought could do it?

Let two or three kids answer. Don't push. Then tell them: today's story is about three people God used to save Israel — and not one of them looked like a hero. Write the bottom line on the board:

SAY

God uses whoever trusts him, not whoever looks the part.

2. The Story

Setting the Stage

Before opening the Bible, tell the kids where they are in the larger story. Use your own words:

SAY

After Joshua died, God's people kept forgetting him. Over and over they'd turn away, an enemy would come and crush them, they'd cry out to God, and God would send a judge — a leader — to rescue them. That's the whole book of Judges.

Today they've been getting crushed for twenty years by a king named Jabin and his army general, Sisera. Sisera has nine hundred iron chariots — the tanks of the ancient world. Israel has nothing like that. The people finally cry out to God. And the leader God raises up is not what anybody expected.

Reading the Text

Have everyone open to Judges 4:1. Pick a confident reader.

Judges 4:1–5

After the reading, work through these questions together:

DISCUSSION

1. Look at verse 3. How long had the enemy been crushing Israel?

→ *Twenty years. A long time. Most of the kids in your class have never lived that long.*

2. Verses 4 and 5 introduce the leader. Who was she? What two jobs did she have?

→ *Deborah. She was a prophet — somebody who heard from God — and a judge — somebody who led the people and settled disputes. Two big jobs at once.*

3. Where did she do her work?

→ *Under a palm tree. She didn't have a palace. She had a tree. That's her office.*

Deborah Calls Barak

Tell the kids that Deborah sent for a man named Barak. Barak was a general — he led soldiers. But what happens next is surprising.

Judges 4:6–9

DISCUSSION

1. What did God tell Barak to do, through Deborah?

→ *Take ten thousand men, go to Mount Tabor, and God would hand Sisera and his nine hundred chariots over to him.*

2. Look at verse 8. What did Barak say?

→ *"If you go with me, I will go. But if you don't go with me, I won't go." The general won't fight without the woman next to him.*

3. In verse 9, Deborah says she'll go — but she also says something surprising. Read it again. What does she warn Barak?

→ *Because Barak hesitated, the glory for winning won't go to him. God will hand Sisera over to a woman.*

The Battle and the Tent

Tell the kids you'll summarize what happens next, then they'll read the most important verse of the chapter.

SAY

Deborah and Barak went to Mount Tabor with ten thousand soldiers. Sisera came against them with his nine hundred iron chariots. And right when the battle started, Deborah stood up and said this:

Have everyone find Judges 4:14.

Judges 4:14

ASK

What does Deborah say to Barak right before the battle?

Write the key line on the board:

"The LORD has gone out before you."

Then tell them, in your own words, what happened next. God did exactly what Deborah said. He routed the army. The chariots couldn't move. The whole army was destroyed. Only one man escaped — Sisera, the general himself. He ran on foot until he came to a tent in the woods. The woman who lived there, Jael, welcomed him in. She gave him milk. He fell asleep. And while he slept, Jael — a woman nobody expected — ended the war.

NOTE

If a kid asks *how*, answer plainly: *with a tent peg, while he was sleeping. The Bible doesn't make it pretty, because war isn't.* Then move on. Don't dwell.

Three Unlikely People

Walk to the board. Write three names:

Deborah. Barak. Jael.

DISCUSSION

1. Deborah was a woman in a time when nobody expected a woman to lead an army. Did God use her?

→ *Yes. She was the one who heard from God and gave the orders.*

2. Barak was a general — but he was scared and wouldn't go without Deborah. Did God still use

DISCUSSION

him?

→ *Yes. He led the army. God still won the battle through him — just not in the way that gave him the glory.*

3. Jael wasn't even an Israelite. She was a Kenite, living in a tent in the woods. Did God use her?

→ *Yes. She ended the war.*

4. So who *did* God use to save Israel?

→ *Three people who didn't look the part. A woman who heard from God. A general who was scared. A foreign woman in a tent. None of them were the obvious choice. All of them trusted what God said.*

TRANSITION

This is the heart of the lesson. God isn't looking for the strongest, the most qualified, or the most expected person. He's looking for somebody who will trust him.

3. The Point

Say the bottom line again, with the kids:

SAY

God uses whoever trusts him, not whoever looks the part.

The Memory Verse

Have everyone turn back to Judges 4:14. Have a student read it aloud:

SCRIPTURE

Judges 4:14

And Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?"

Read it together two ways: all together normally, then the second half alone — "Does not the LORD go out before you?" — like Deborah is asking it.

SAY

The LORD goes out before you. That's the same promise God made to Joshua — I will be with you wherever you go. Same God. Same promise. Hundreds of years later. The God who went before Joshua went before Deborah. The God who went before Deborah goes before you.

The Index Cards

Hand out index cards. Tell each student to write or draw one thing they know they should do this week, but they feel like they're the wrong person to do it — too small, too quiet, too young, too scared, not popular enough, not smart enough. Tell them no one else will read it. They'll keep it or take it home.

NOTE

While they write, walk around quietly. If a kid says "I can't think of anything," ask them: "Is there somebody at school who needs a friend? Is there a truth you've been afraid to tell?" Help them name it.

When they're done, have everyone hold their card. Pray over the cards:

PRAY

God, you used Deborah, you used Barak, you used Jael — three people nobody expected. Thank you for going before us. Help us remember when we feel like we're not the right person, that you don't pick the way we pick. Use us when we trust you. Amen.

4. The Work

Pick one or more activities from this week's menu. Print enough copies for each kid in advance. The kids don't have to do all of them — pick what fits the group's energy and what time you have left.

The menu for this week:

- **Under the Palm Tree** — coloring page of Deborah holding court under her palm tree.
- **Three Who Trusted** — word search with the names, places, and key words from Judges 4–5.
- **When I'm the Wrong Person** — drawing prompt connecting the lesson to the kid's own life.
- **Remember Deborah** — fill-in-the-blanks recall using the kids' Bibles (Judges 4).

The full production specs for each activity are in this week's activities file.

NOTE

While the kids work, sit with them. Ask one or two what they're working on. Reinforce the bottom line one more time before class ends. If you finish early, have a few kids share what they made. If you run long, send the activity sheets home.

What Comes Next Week

Israel forgets God again, and this time the enemy is the Midianites. God picks the smallest man from the smallest family in the weakest tribe — Gideon — and tells him to go save Israel. Then God shrinks his army from thirty-two thousand soldiers to three hundred. The kids will see what it looks like when God deliberately picks the weakest tool to make sure everyone knows the win came from him.