

Re-Cycling Judges, “Deborah: A Mother of Israel”  
Text: Judges 4:1-16, 23-24  
7-22-18



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**Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context...** (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

*“What are some of the questions you found yourself asking about God--- about life--- when you began your faith-journey? How has the nature of your questions changed? How has this process helped you develop a more authentic faith?”*

*“How do you find yourself responding when your reality doesn’t seem to align with your expectations? Do you find yourself more prone to alter your expectations or challenge God?”*

*“What do we do with texts like this? What do we do with the really disturbing and violent parts?”*

*“What kind of story is your life telling? What is it saying about you? What is it saying about God?”*

*“Which chapter/episode of your story do you find difficult to read? How might you be able to re-direct the story-line in order to experience a bit of wholeness?” (e.g. forgiveness, to let go of an offense, to re-arrange your schedule, etc.)*

*“Where in your life is the circumstance causing you to challenge God? Where is it causing you to challenge your expectations? Where might repentance be necessary?”*

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**Teaching Notes...**

**I have found that the deeper your faith, the tougher your questions, the more complex the answers. Our posture is not necessarily one of “unbelief”, but a sincere desire for authentic faith.**

Our journey of faith typically starts out with a more rudimentary, “*fill-in-the-blank*”, expression (Hebrews 6, “...*basic teachings about Christ*”). We don’t know much. We don’t even know what we’re supposed to know. So, the journey usually begins with some form of ‘God-data dump’. At this point, it has very little to do with how we arrived at such conclusions except that it was part of our “*Come to Jesus*” packet.

Eventually, our faith will run head-on into circumstances which defy our rather lineal approach. In such circumstances, we either challenge God **or** challenge our expectations. If, in our presumption (lit. ‘*to overstep bounds*’), we challenge God, we will quickly abandon him for something more manageable. If we challenge our expectations, we might actually discover the “**true God**” in the process.

*“I arose as a mother to Israel”* (Judges 5:7).

There’s so much we do not know about Deborah. We do know that she lived in a very tumultuous time in Israel’s history and that God has proven to always respond to the sights and sounds of human misery (Exodus 3:7).

*His choice for his people during this particularly troubling season of their lives? Not a warrior. Not a strategist. A “mother”. It’s what mothers do, right--- respond to cries?*

God, once again, subverts convention and the status-quo and chooses a woman, in a male-dominated culture, to rescue his people. “Mothering” is that influential presence which is not limited to genealogy. In my own life, I’m not sure I could even count the number of times that someone said to me, “*Your mom was like a mother to me*”.

Israel has proven to be the consummate “wayward child” (in actuality, the story of the prodigal son is about Israel wandering from God, only to be welcomed back as they came to their senses). [Isaiah 1:2 “*I raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me*”.]

Deborah was a “**prophetess**”. She communicated both warnings and judgement (warnings eventually become judgment, when un-heeded). Prophecy challenges our present course of action, in light of all that is possible, should we repent and embrace the ways of God. It is never simply the announcement of inevitable and irreversible outcomes, but the corrective attempts of God to alter a people’s history.

Deborah’s role was fundamental to Barak’s success. His name makes it into Hebrews 11 and hers does not. We find Deborah, like a good mother, stepping back as her child steps forward.

Judges is “MA” (Mature Audience). What do we do with Jael? “*Sisera cruelly oppressed (terrorized) the Israelites for (20) years*” (4:3). The details of the killing display an anger

that is usually consistent with one who has been victimized and finally 'gets their chance'.

She invites Sisera into her home, warms up some milk for him and drives a tent stake through his temple. *Does anyone remember this scene being portrayed for you on a flannel-graph (predecessor of the tablet) board?* [In one of the clearest, "Captain Obvious" statements in the narrative... "*and so he died*".]

**I think we have to discern between the value of simply telling the story (conveying the facts) and telling the 'Story' (finding the story beyond the story). Either the events recorded in the narrative are 'true' or they are 'truth'.**

The Greek word for 'truth' (aletheia, John 14:6) involves both an 'objective' view (accuracy) and a 'subjective' view. The former concerns itself with factual accuracy. "*Did this really happen? Are the facts of the story true?*" The latter is concerned with the truth as 'personal excellence'; in keeping with God's desires/purposes.

### **Discover God in the Story.**

The broader narrative (what else is going on) is the faithfulness of God and his lovingly-stubborn commitment to his good purposes for his creation. Those good purposes are being worked out amidst a world that is both beautiful and broken; amongst a people who are both chosen and defiant.

So, we must be able to say that the Story does, at times, offer us "what happened" (reality; facts), not what should have happened. Many of the activities recorded in the biblical narrative are the direct result of human volition, but not necessarily God's will, in that it receives his endorsement. In fact, it seems that, historically, God has had to make provision for our weakness and inability to 'get it'. In this way, God actually becomes subject to us (in that the way that we offer/reflect him is a result of not only how he has revealed himself, but how we understand him).

In accomplishing his divine purpose, he has chosen to enlist the cooperation of human will. It was never "ideal" but moving toward the "ideal" (e.g. polygamy: several men in the OT that God used were polygamists [Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon]. Jesus presents monogamy as the plan which conforms most closely to God's ideal for marriage. "*Haven't you read ...from the beginning 'God made them male and female. This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.'*" Matthew 19)

**God is depicted as being able to allow for human freedom and response, without forfeiting his restorative purposes. We call it 'sovereignty'. Sovereignty speaks not only about God's right to rule, but how he carries out his will.**

→ **Sovereignty means that despite some pretty conflicting evidence, the world is not a chaotic mass, spiraling out of control, but moving toward a purposed-end: ‘shalom’** (peace; wholeness; nothing broken; everything functioning properly).

*“God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end”* (Eccl.3:11).

→ **Human freedom is actually a central quality of divine sovereignty.**

We must be willing to admit that there are evidences in the Story which indicate that humanity has made decisions which have taken creation in a different direction than he had planned.

*“I did find this: God created people to be virtuous (right; straight; fitting; proper), but they have each turned to follow their own downward path.”* Ecclesiastes 7:29

→ **The question of God’s goodness may be best addressed in sovereignty and sovereignty is essentially about “trust” not “explanations”.**

### **Discover God in your story.**

God incorporates us into his Story so that he might tell his story through us. If God is the *“author and finisher of our faith”* (Hebrews 12:2 *“the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.”*), it seems to suggest his active and intimate involvement.

It means that you will need to pause and reflect upon your own story--- your experiences, your failures, your sins, your blessing--- and take responsibility for the ways in which it has not only impeded your growth, but how it has affected others. You are responsible for who you are becoming and as you are able to ‘figure this out’, you not only re-direct your own story, but you alter the course of history!

### **Sovereignty kicks the door wide open for God to behave in unpredictable ways. He has every resource at his disposal to ensure your wholeness, except your “yes”.**

Sovereignty is the conviction that there will never be a circumstance in my life, whether self-inflicted or unexplainable, which God cannot “reclaim” (restore) and use to accomplish something of greater value.

As bizarre as your life appears, at times, it’s never fictional! You never have to worry about “deleting” those old, embarrassing stories of your brokenness or attempt to re-arrange them in a way that sheds you in a more favorable light. We call it grace and grace is never simply about your ‘redeeming’ qualities, but your ‘redeemable’ qualities.