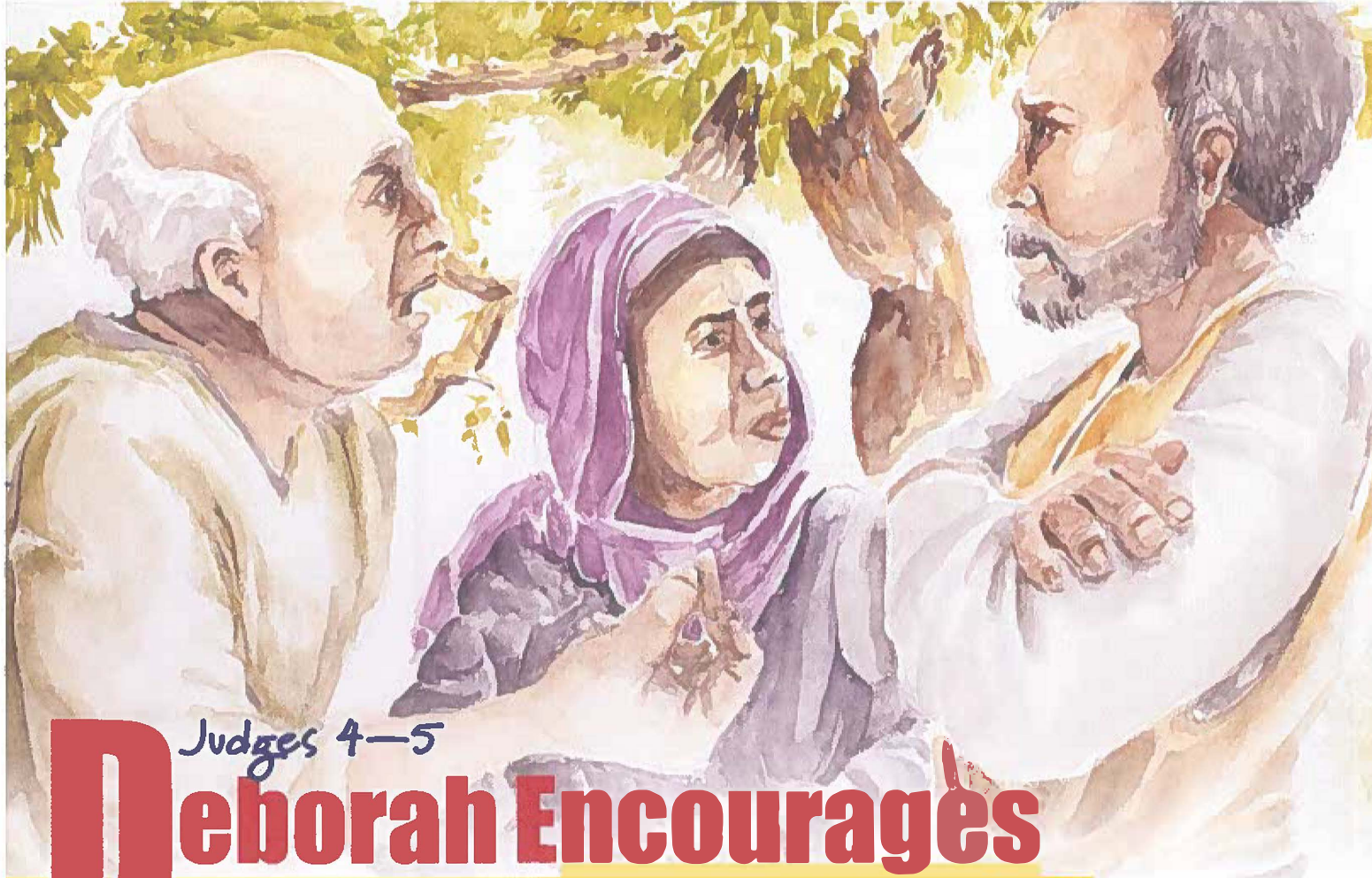




LESSON OVERVIEW

Israel entered the Circle of Apostasy and the Era of the Judges. Sisera, the commander of an army with 900 iron chariots, attacked. Deborah became a judge of Israel and encouraged Barak to battle Sisera. After Sisera was defeated, Deborah ruled in peace for forty years.



Judges 4–5 **Deborah Encourages**

Introduce It!

Time Line

1240–1200
B.C.

Key Events & People

The Battle at Mount
Tabor; Barak,
Deborah, Sisera

Time Line Materials needed. (See p. 4.)

Begin the lesson in prayer. Thank God for his continual forgiveness, like how he continually forgave Israel. Give the children a few moments to confess to God silently anything they need forgiveness for, reminding them that God always forgives our sins when we ask.

Just one generation after Joshua, the people did not know God or what God had done for their people. As punishment for no longer following God, the Israelites were handed over to their enemies. God no longer protected them from harm.

Then, out of the Israelites' distress, God raised up the judges. These judges were not like judges we see today. They were not like those on TV settling arguments and sending people to jail. These judges were the spiritual leaders for the people.

Read Judges 2:18–19.

Memory Verse

*Make your ways
known to me, Lord;
teach me your paths.*

Psalms 25:4



The Israelites were stuck in the circle of apostasy for a few hundred years. *Apostasy* means that you abandon your faith. The Israelites' circle of apostasy went something like this:

1. The Israelites would stop following God and do evil in his sight.
2. God would punish them and let their enemies defeat them.
3. The people would repent and cry out for help.
4. Each time, God would raise up a judge to lead the people back to him.

Today we're going to discover the story of Deborah, the only female judge. Place time line marker at 1240 B.C. Deborah was judge over the Israelite people from about 1240 to 1200 B.C.

Circle of Apostasy Sequencing

The Israelites **REJECTED** God.
Make an X with your arms.

The Israelites **REPENTED**.
Spin around.

God **RESCUED** the Israelites.
Hold your hands in the air.

The Israelites **RETURNED** to God.
Jump backward.

Tell It!

Choose a way to tell the story while reading the account from the Bible or telling it in your own words. Ideas for creative storytelling include acting it out, using props, or incorporating pictures.

Twenty Years of Trouble

The Israelite people were in a time of terrible trouble. Once again, they had stopped following the one true God and begun worshiping idols, or false gods. And so for twenty years, they were under attack from a man named Sisera.

Read Judges 4:1-3.

Sisera's army had 900 iron chariots! The people were terrified! How could they possibly beat a man with 900 iron chariots? God heard the cries of his people. And he had a plan.

The Palm of Deborah

Deborah was Israel's judge. She would sit at a certain palm tree, listening to and settling the arguments people had with each other. Deborah trusted God and asked for his guidance to be a good judge. Deborah was also a prophet of God. A prophet is someone who God uses as a messenger. God had a message for Deborah to give his people about Sisera. What do you think God's message was? Children respond.

A man named Barak (BEAR-uhk) was called to see Deborah. She said, "God has a job for you. You are to get 10,000 men to form an army and go to Mount Tabor. There, God will bring Sisera and his army. God will help you defeat Sisera!" How do you think Barak reacted to this plan? *Children respond.*

Barak was TERRIFIED! But he also wanted to obey God. He just needed some help from Deborah. Barak said, "Deborah, if you will go with me, I'll go. But if you don't go, I won't go either." Barak needed Deborah's encouragement to give him the courage for this important job. What do you think Deborah said? *Children respond.*

Barak may have been scared, but Deborah wasn't. "I will go with you," she said. So Barak sent messengers out to the Israelites, asking men to join his army, and Barak and Deborah headed to Mount Tabor.

The Battle at Mount Tabor

One day, Deborah told Barak that the time for the battle had come.

Read Judges 4:14.

Barak was encouraged by Deborah's words and the knowledge that God would help him win the battle. So Barak and his 10,000 warriors came down the mountain. Closer and closer, they could see Sisera's chariots approaching across the dry and dusty valley. How do you think Barak and his men felt watching those chariots coming closer? *Children respond.* It must have been a terrifying sight! But they remembered Deborah's encouragement that God was with them.

Suddenly, there was a loud crash and lightning split the sky. It was a thunderstorm! Soon, water was everywhere. And the dry valley turned into mud—thick, sticky, gloopy mud. What do you think happened next? *Children respond.*

Sisera's chariots got stuck in the mud! When they saw Barak's army, they ran away! All Barak's army had to do was chase them far, far away. Soon, there was no one left to chase.

Deborah and Barak wrote a song about how God won this amazing battle. All the people sang praises and rejoiced that God had freed them from terror under Sisera. And they lived in peace and happiness for forty years. Deborah gave Barak the encouragement he'd needed to obey God and win the battle.

Pray It!

Dear God, thank that you always send the encouragement we need to do your will. Thank you for always having good plans for us. We love you! In Jesus' name, amen.



Apply It!

Choose any of these activities for your lesson. Use more than one if time allows. For any of these activities, discuss the **Talk about It!** questions on page 81 as time allows.

Show It!

Paper Chains

Overview

Children observe how something that is weak can be stronger when multiplied.

Our memory verse tells us that God wants us to encourage others, help the weak, and be patient with everyone. Watch to see something that's weak to begin with but becomes stronger with just a little help.

Materials

toilet tissue or crepe-paper streamers

Directions

1. Choose a volunteer to hold their wrists together in front of them.
2. Wrap one strand of toilet paper around the volunteer's wrists. Challenge the volunteer to break free, which they will easily do.
3. Choose another volunteer, and this time, wrap the toilet paper around their wrists a few more times.
4. Continue for a few more rounds, each time adding more toilet paper, until it's very difficult or impossible for the volunteer to break free.

Conversation

One or two lengths of toilet paper can be pretty weak and easily broken. But the more toilet paper we add, the stronger it becomes. Sometimes, it can be easy to get discouraged when we're on our own. It can be hard to remember to trust God and accept his help. But when others join with us and encourage us, we become stronger! We can help others be stronger by encouraging them.



Act It Out!

Wheelbarrow Chariots

Overview

Children act out the Bible story battle by pairing up to be a chariot and driver and then getting stuck in the mud.

Preparation

Mark the start line with masking tape. Make sure there is enough room behind the start line for all pairs of children. Ensure children have enough room to race in the playing area.

Directions

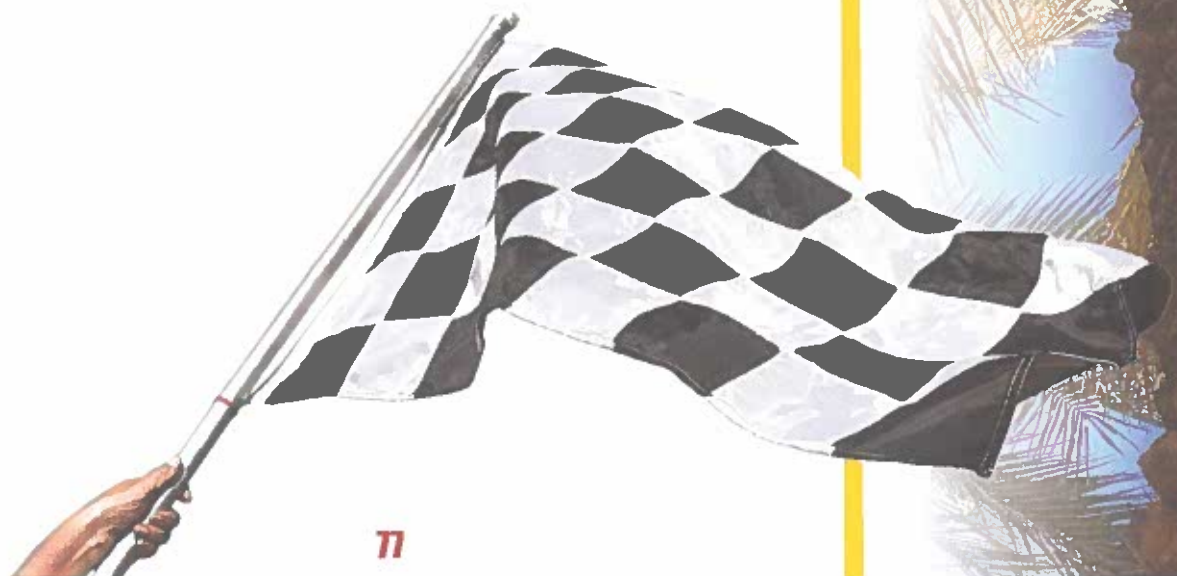
1. Children gather on one side of the playing area, form pairs, and get into wheelbarrow-race formation: One child stands in back and grasps the ankles of the other child who holds themselves up with their hands (in a push-up position).
2. On your signal, children then begin to race across the playing area.
3. When you say, "Thunder, lightning, and rain; oh my!" the children in front pretend to get stuck. Their partners then race back to the starting line. Once there, players recite the memory verse together.
4. Repeat, with children switching places.

Conversation

In our reenactment, it was funny when the chariots got stuck. But I'm sure Sisera and his men didn't think it was funny at all! God always has the most amazing ways of taking care of us.

But what if Barak hadn't been encouraged by Deborah to trust God? What if he just thought the job was too scary or too hard? Children respond. God knows we need encouragement. That's why he gives us friends and family to be with us and help us be strong.

Materials
masking tape



Play It!

Balloon Teamwork

Overview

Children work together in pairs to run a race carrying a balloon they can't hold with their hands.

Preparation

1. Inflate balloons and tie to secure. Place balloons in plastic bag.
2. Use masking tape to make a start line at one end of the playing area and a finish line at the other end.

Directions

1. Children form pairs and stand behind the start line. Give each pair a balloon.
2. Pairs take a few minutes to experiment with different ways to carry the balloon between them without using their hands. For example, pairs can carry the balloon between their heads, shoulders, elbows, hips, etc.
3. After pairs come up with their plan, they line up and race other pairs to the finish line. If you have enough pairs, you can put pairs in teams.
4. If a balloon is dropped, the pair must stop and position the balloon again. They can carry it the same way as before or try a new method for carrying the balloon.
5. The first pair or team to finish answers one of the **Talk about It!** questions on page 81.

Conversation

Could you have carried that balloon by yourself without using your hands? Maybe. It would have been even more difficult than it was with a friend. Friends can help us do difficult tasks by lending a hand . . . or a head, shoulder, elbow, or hip if hands aren't allowed. Raise your hand if your partner said anything to encourage you during the race. What were some of the encouraging things that were said? Children respond.

Materials

balloons, one for every two children
large plastic bag
masking tape



Talk about It!

Basic Questions

1. What was Deborah like? What are some words that describe her?
Judge. Prophet. Wise. Believer of God. Encourager to others.
2. Why do you think Barak needed Deborah's help? *He was afraid. He didn't know if he could do what God wanted him to do.*
3. When God sent a storm, what happened? *Sisera's chariots all got stuck in the mud. Sisera's army ran away. The Israelites won the battle.*
4. When might it be hard for a kid to do what God wants?
How could a friend help them to obey?
5. What something you know God wants you to do? *Be honest. Share with others. Stand up for others who need help.*
6. Who has helped you by encouraging you?
7. How could you encourage someone who has something difficult to do? *Pray for them. Say encouraging words to them. Lend a helping hand. Go with them.*

Go Further

1. Deborah and Barak wrote a song to praise God for the amazing way he won the battle with Sisera. Singing this song was a great encouragement to all the people. Write a song about a way God has provided help and encouragement to you. Or write a song that could encourage someone going through a hard time.
2. Besides our memory verse, what are some other verses from the Bible about encouraging others? (See Romans 1:12, Romans 12:8, Ephesians 4:29, Hebrews 3:13, Hebrews 10:25, and 1 Thessalonians 5:11.)
3. Knowing how often God talks about encouraging others, how important do you think it is?

Wrap It Up!

After the battle with Sisera, Deborah ruled as a judge over the people of Israel for another 40 peaceful years. However, the Israelites were not finished with the Cycle of Apostasy. Refer to the time line. Next time, we'll hear about one of the youngest judges, Gideon.

