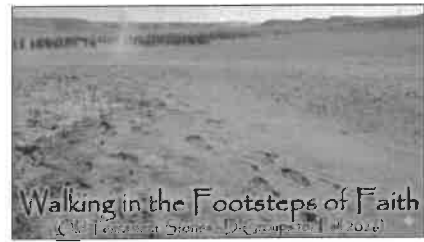


“Walking in the Footsteps of Faith”

OT Stories - Fall 2026 D-Groups

For Wednesday, October 14
DEBORAH (Judges 4-5)



The Big Picture - Where We Are in the OT Timeline

This week we move forward beyond the conquest of the Promised Land under Joshua and into the period of the **Judges**, coming after Joshua has passed on. By this point, God has faithfully fulfilled His promise to bring Israel into the land He had promised to Abraham and his descendants. However, after Joshua died, the generations that followed struggled to remain faithful to the Lord. Judges describes this period with a repeated pattern: **Israel turns away from the Lord → Israel experiences oppression → Israel cries out to the Lord → the Lord hears and raises up a deliverer to rescue His people → the people eventually turn away again.**

Judges 2:16 captures one of the central themes of the book: **“Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders.”** The word, judge, can be somewhat misleading to our ears. These individuals certainly exercised leadership in Israel, but they weren’t courtroom judges like we might imagine today. These were leaders whom God raised up, usually in a military role, to deliver His people from their enemies. And this is an important detail, they were tasked and empowered by the Lord: the real hero of Judges is not any of the judges themselves, it’s the God they serve, hearing and protecting His people. Sure, the human leaders are important, giving us much (positive and negative) to learn from their example and stories, but the repeated cycle emphasizes God’s faithfulness even in the face of Israel’s repeated *unfaithfulness*. Again and again, Israel wanders; again and again, God rescues.

This provides the setting for the story of **Deborah, Barak, Jael, and the defeat of Sisera and King Jabin** in Judges 4–5. At the beginning of Judges 4, Israel has once again “done evil in the eyes of the LORD” (4:1). As a consequence, God allows them to fall under the oppression of Jabin, king of Canaan. His military commander, Sisera, has **900 iron chariots**, and Israel has been “cruelly oppressed” for twenty years. Humanly speaking, Israel appears badly outmatched and in dire straits. But once again, the story is not about how powerful and amazing Israel is. It’s about how powerful and amazing is the God of the Israelites. And as we saw with Joshua and Caleb, faith means learning to see circumstances in *light of who God is* rather than evaluating God in light of our circumstances.

The Close-Up for October 14 - Judges 4-5

READ the TEXT: Some notes on the overall flow of the story with emphasis on the key sections listed above: These two chapters tell the same basic story from two different perspectives. Chapter four gives us the narrative of what happened, while chapter five, usually called the song of Deborah, celebrates what happened and interprets the victory as an act of the Lord. Pay attention to how often chapter five directs attention away from human strength and toward what **God has done**.

4:1-10 ... Israel is suffering under Jabin and Sisera when we are introduced to **Deborah**, a prophetess who is also serving as a judge over Israel. Deborah summons **Barak** and gives him the Lord’s command: gather 10,000 men from Naphtali and Zebulun and go toward Mount Tabor. God promises that He will draw Sisera and his army toward them and **“give him into your hands”** (4:7). Notice where the confidence is supposed to come from. Not from having a larger army or better weapons, but God essentially says: “I will give Sisera into your hands.” Barak responds by telling Deborah that he will go only if she goes with him. There is some debate about exactly how negatively we should understand Barak’s response. Hebrews 11:32 later includes Barak among examples

of faith, so we should be careful not to reduce him simply to a coward, but at the same time, Deborah tells him that because of the path he has chosen, the honor of defeating Sisera will ultimately go to a **woman** instead of to himself. That statement prepares us for one of the great surprises of the story.

4:11-16 ... Sisera hears that Barak has gathered his forces and deploys his army, including those intimidating 900 iron chariots. From Israel's perspective, those chariots must have looked overwhelming, but Deborah tells Barak: **"Go! This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?"** (4:14) *That may be the key statement in the entire narrative.* Barak and his men go down the mountain, but verse 15 makes clear who actually wins the battle: **"At Barak's advance, the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword."** Israel fights. Barak leads. But **the Lord gives the victory.** Judges 5 gives us another interesting detail about the battle. The song describes the heavens pouring rain and the river Kishon sweeping Israel's enemies away (5:4, 20–21). If heavy rain turned the battlefield into mud, Sisera's great technological advantage, those pesky chariots, could suddenly become a liability. The very thing Israel feared may have been rendered useless by the God who rules creation.

4:17-24 ... Sisera flees the battle on foot and arrives at the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, believing he has found a safe place. Instead, after he falls asleep, Jael kills Sisera by driving a tent peg through his head (the book of Judges certainly doesn't hold back on some of the fun details!). This is a shocking and violent conclusion to the battle, but it also fulfills Deborah's earlier statement that the honor associated with Sisera's defeat would go to a woman. The great military commander is ultimately defeated in one of the most unexpected ways imaginable. This fits a larger biblical pattern: *God regularly accomplishes His purposes through people and methods that human beings might overlook.* Victory does not belong to those who appear strongest, it belongs to the Lord and to those who follow Him. The chapter closes: **"On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites."** (4:23) Notice again who receives the credit.

5:1-31 ... Judges 5 retells the story through the song of Deborah and Barak, which helps us to understand how Israel was supposed to remember this victory. It begins: **"Praise the Lord!"** (5:2). This is important. God is the victor, Deborah and Barak and Jael simply played their parts. Those individuals matter, but the song directs the praise beyond them. **Praise the Lord.** God's people are meant to look backward at His faithfulness so that they will trust Him moving forward. The song also contrasts those who willingly stepped forward with those who remained on the sidelines. Some tribes joined the battle. Others didn't and 5:23 even pronounces a curse on Meroz because its people **"did not come to help the Lord."** This raises an important question for us as God's people: When God is at work, will we courageously participate in what He is doing, or will we remain comfortably on the sidelines? Deborah, Barak, and Jael are very different people with very different roles, but each becomes part of what God is doing to rescue His people.

Two Key Reminders throughout This Semester

1. **God is ultimately the HERO of these stories; remember, as part of Scripture, God is *revealing* Himself to us. So, what do we learn about Him through this story? What can we learn from the human characters about putting our faith/trust in Him?**
2. **We read these stories through a Christ-lens. So, how do we read this story differently in light of Jesus and being His followers?** Consider that the pattern of Judges creates a longing that the judges themselves can never satisfy. Remember the pattern of Judges, the people sin, the people experience oppression and cry out, the Lord hears and intervenes. The Israelites need more than another temporary judge. They need a *final Deliverer*, they need Jesus. Like the judges, Jesus comes to rescue God's people, but His rescue goes infinitely deeper. He does not merely a deliverer from a human oppressor. He delivers us from the ultimate enemies of **sin and death**. And unlike the temporary peace Israel experiences at the end of Judges 5, the victory in Jesus is eternal.

Some Additional Questions for Reflection

1. **What part of the story in Judges 4–5 stood out to you most? Why?**
2. At the beginning of the story, Israel has been oppressed for twenty years and Sisera possesses 900 iron chariots. **How might the situation have looked from a purely human perspective?**
3. Compare that with Deborah's statement in 4:14: **"Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?"** How does knowing God has "gone ahead" change the way we approach frightening or uncertain situations?
4. **What does this story teach us about God's faithfulness when His people have been unfaithful to Him?**
5. Judges 4:15 says that **the Lord routed Sisera's army**. Why is it important that Scripture gives God the credit even though Barak and 10,000 soldiers actually fought the battle?
6. Where are you most tempted to focus on the equivalent of the **"900 iron chariots"**—the visible obstacles—rather than the character and faithfulness of God?
7. Deborah seems confident in what God has promised. **What do you think produces that kind of confidence in a believer?**
8. Barak is sometimes criticized for saying he would go only if Deborah accompanied him, yet Hebrews 11:32 includes him among people remembered for faith. **What does that tell us about the relationship between faith and fear? Can genuine faith still include hesitation?**
9. The story involves several very different people—Deborah, Barak, the soldiers, and Jael. **What does that teach us about the different ways God can use people in accomplishing His purposes?**
10. God defeats Sisera in a way no one would likely have predicted. **Why do you think Scripture so often shows God working through unexpected people, circumstances, or methods?**
11. Judges 5 repeatedly praises those who **"willingly offered themselves."** What is the difference between merely believing that God is at work and actually making ourselves available to participate in His work?
12. Some tribes joined the battle while others stayed home. **What are some reasons we may choose to stay safely on the sidelines rather than step into something God is calling us to do?**
13. Deborah and Barak respond to victory by singing and remembering what God has done. **Why is remembering God's past faithfulness important for present faith?**
14. What are some practical ways we can intentionally remember and celebrate what God has done rather than quickly moving on to the next problem?
15. Throughout Judges, human deliverers provide only temporary rescue. **How does that repeated pattern create a longing for someone greater?**
16. In what ways does Jesus fulfill the need that the judges could never ultimately fulfill?
17. The promise given to Barak was very specific: God promised victory over Sisera. **What promises has God actually given Christians today that we can confidently build our lives around?**
18. How do we distinguish **biblical faith** from simply assuming God will make everything work out the way we want?
19. Where in your life right now might God be calling you to trust His character even though you cannot yet see how the situation will turn out?