

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 1-7

Monday	1 Timothy 3:1-7 (A Leader Who Sets an Example)
Tuesday	Acts 9:36-42 (A Leader Who Cares)
Wednesday	Acts 18:24-28 (Leaders Who Build Other Leaders)
Thursday	Nehemiah 2:1-8 (A Leader Who Listens)
Friday	Nehemiah 4:1-6 (A Leader Who Intercedes)
Saturday	John 13:3-17 (Jesus, the Pattern for Leaders)
Sunday	Judges 4:4-10, 14, 21-22 (A Leader Who Inspires)

Deborah, a Leader in a National Emergency

Lesson Scripture: Judges 4:1-24

Focus Scripture: Judges 4:4-10, 14, 21-22

Key Verses: At that time Deborah, a prophet, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. Judges 4:4-5

JUDGES 4:4-10, 14, 21-22 (NRSV UE)

Judges 4:4-10

4 At that time Deborah, a prophet, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel.

5 She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came up to her for judgment.

6 She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you, 'Position yourself at Mount Tabor, taking ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun.

7 I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand.'"

8 Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go."

9 And she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh.

10 Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh, and ten thousand warriors went up behind him, and Deborah went up with him.

14

14 Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day on which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Has not the Lord gone out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Ta-

JUDGES 4:4-10, 14, 21-22 (KJV)

Judges 4:4-10

4 And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

5 And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

7 And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.

8 And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.

9 And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

10 And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

14

14 And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount

bor with ten thousand warriors following him.

21-22

21 But Jael wife of Heber took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, until it went down into the ground—he was lying fast asleep from weariness—and he died.

22 Then, as Barak came in pursuit of Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, “Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.” So he went into her tent, and there was Sisera lying dead, with the tent peg in his temple.

Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.

21-22

21 Then Jael Heber’s wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

22 And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

Key Terms

- **Witness** – A person who can give a firsthand account relating to a person or event from what they saw, heard, or felt.
- **Syncretism** – Mixing elements of Christianity with aspects of traditional African spiritualism.
- **Angola** – A nation of 40 million people on the west coast of Africa.

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Questions about the existence of God, his character, ability to love, care for, and protect his people have engaged religion from ancient times. As in the courts of law, throughout the ages, God chose to call character witnesses to testify to his character and his ability to provide and protect his people. What we will see in these lessons

In this series, the key-word is *witness*. Keep before you who is a witness, the purpose a witness serves, and how this concept of witnessing can in-

form our spiritual growth and daily Christian walk. Like the witnesses in scripture, we, too, can give effective Christian witness. As you study these lessons, please act as the jury in

the case of God vs. Israel. Assess how well the players in these historical dramas of God's interactions with his people validated what scripture claims about God.

Telling the Bible Story

Keeping with the theme of witnesses, note that different witnesses are called to testify to varying points of law or evidence. In this first lesson about Deborah's role as a judge and warrior, mark how the text makes clear what God was doing and why God wanted a witness at this time. Judges 3:1-2 spells it out clearly. God wanted to teach Israel discipline and the art of warfare. But Deborah is a woman! She was not supposed to be a warrior. Still, isn't that just like God: to step outside ordinary patterns to do the extraordinary?

But the story of Deborah as a judge and war general also highlights an uncomfortable truth about God. Yes, God is a protector. He shows up when his people are in trouble or under threat from enemies.

But he is also a God of justice, who does not tolerate rebellion and unfaithfulness. So, God judges his people and allows them to be captured or defeated when they turn their backs on him. Judges 3:7-12, therefore, shows a cyclical pattern of sin, punishment, crying out, and rescue by God's judges.

It is tempting to focus too heavily on Deb-

Deborah's exploits as a war general and ignore her daily duties as a prophetess. But to do this is to miss a key point of the narrative. To appreciate her unusual achievement in war, we must understand her closeness to the ultimate general, Yahweh, who strategized the victory attributed to her. Deborah's closeness to God jumps out at us in

Judges 4:4-5, which highlights her usual activities as a judge of Israel. She needed the wisdom of God to guide the people in the events of daily living. In this respect, she was a female version of the revered prophet and judge, Moses.

The killing of Sisera raises some complex

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issues about the ways of God: how God often steps outside tradition and religious order to accomplish desired outcomes. Follow closely the events leading to Sisera's murder. See verse 4:14, Deborah's role as an encourager. At verse 4:15, note that it is God himself who set up the victory for Israel. The panic God initiated signaled to Sisera that defeat was imminent, causing him to flee on foot. Then in comes Jael. What she did in attacking Sisera was culturally and religiously offensive. A host should not violate a guest's rights or comfort. Yet this seemed acceptable to God for Israel to achieve the victory God had initiated. So, a perplexing question arises. When is a person permitted to break with customs and religious norms to achieve a desired outcome with God?

Also note the need for cooperation and coordination among people in achieving godly outcomes. Yes, this narrative focuses on Deborah. However, Barak and Jael played crucial roles. The role of Jael is particularly fascinating. She was not

an Israelite. She was not a warrior. And she did not use a military weapon to kill Sisera. These facts teach us to be open to God's unusual ways of working.

Sankofa

When we think of Deborah, we see a woman of great wisdom and faith who God used for national liberation. The same can be said for Nzinga Mbande (1583-

1663) from the nation known today as Angola. Nzinga was born into royalty. This allowed her to be trained in skills that were normally reserved for men: diplomacy, languages, and statecraft. These skills proved useful when she represented the king (her brother) in negotiations about liberation from the Portu-

guese colonizers. And upon her brother's death, Queen Nzinga stepped into leadership of the nation. She led a strong, enduring campaign of resistance against Portuguese domination, was a tough opponent against the Atlantic slave trade, and skillfully used diplomacy and military tactics to push for the liberation and sov-

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ereignty of her people.

Case Study


The religious life of Nzinga Mbande provides an interesting case study which challenges us to examine some of the key assumptions we make about who Jehovah God blesses and uses. In our discussion about Deborah, we regard her as an Israelite – a member of God’s chosen people. But that description pushes the envelope outside the historical range of truth. At Deborah’s time, there was no kingdom of Judah, nor a Jewish ethnic-religious identity.

Nzinga Mbande’s life struck a similar profile. As a Mbundu queen, in her early life, Nzinga followed the traditional religion of her ancestors, embracing reverence for ancestral spirits, traditional community rituals, and native deities.

Around age 40, Nzinga became a Roman Catholic and took a Christian name (Ana de Sousa). After that, Nzinga seems to practice an oscillating form of pragmatic

syncretism. She was Christian or traditionalist as the situation demanded.

In noting the amazing success of women like Nzinga Mbande, how can we maintain that our God only blesses and works with people who check all our religious boxes? Too often we aim to fit God and people into neat boxes. Consider the degree to which your church community practices this.



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Life Application

Above, we noted that the people God used to bring deliverance to nations did not fit neatly in traditional or religious boxes. How about putting to the test your acceptance of this position?

Consider recent state or national elections, your preferred candidate(s), and why they were your preference. Then, consider the election results, especially where an opposing candidate won. Think about if God had a hand in the outcome, and if he did, why would he have allowed the opposing candidate to win? Do the same for the selection of church officials. If you do this honestly,

you will see the mental boxes that you expect people to check for God’s favor.

Deborah and Nzinga, as women, acted outside their cultural roles. Jael used an unusual weapon to kill Sisera. This tells us that God’s solutions do not have to include the usual elements and people. Be open to the uncommon moves of God when planning church or personal projects.

Questions

1. In your opinion, why did Israel go through cycles of rebellion and deliverance?

2. Are such cycles inevitable even today in the lives of believers, and why?

3. Can you identify any religious boxes in your mind that frame how you assess people?

Closing Devotions

Closing Hymn: “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” (*AMECH #52*)

Closing Prayer: Dear God, help me open my heart to all that you are doing around me, irrespective of who you are doing it through. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 8-14

Monday	Ezekiel 18:5-9 (Leading a Life of Righteousness)
Tuesday	Genesis 16:1, 4-16 (Trusting in a God Who Sees)
Wednesday	Proverbs 6:20-22 (Do Not Forsake Your Mother’s Teaching)
Thursday	Psalms 113 (Praising God for Home and Family)
Friday	Isaiah 66:9-13 (A Mother Who Comforts Her Child)
Saturday	Luke 1:46-56 (Rejoicing in God’s Deliverance)
Sunday	1 Samuel 1:9-20, 25 (Seeking God’s Blessing)