

SEPTEMBER WEEK TWO: DEBORAH

Monday

Judges 4–5

After many years of living in the Promised Land, the Israelites forgot about God. They stopped loving God and didn't follow his commandments. And they did evil in the sight of the Lord. So God allowed an enemy king named Jabin to have power over his people. Jabin would not allow the Israelites to live in peace. Instead, he bullied them and caused them great trouble.

After twenty years of living under the mean King Jabin, the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help. God listened to their prayers and sent them help through a woman named Deborah. As a leader of the Israelites, Deborah was known as a judge. The judges of Israel were leaders who were not kings and were not prophets. Every day Deborah sat near a palm tree in the desert and helped the people of Israel with their problems.

God told Deborah exactly what to do. So Deborah went to a man named Barak and gave him the message she had received from God. She told him that God was commanding him to gather an army of fighting men from Israel and to fight against Sisera, the leader of Jabin's army. Deborah told Barak that God promised him the victory.

"If you will go with me, I will go," Barak told Deborah, "but if you will not go with me, I will not go." Deborah agreed, and together they went to Mt. Tabor with 10,000 men. When Sisera, the leader of Jabin's army, discovered where the Israelites were going, he gathered his army together and went out to battle Barak and the Israelite army. Compared to the Israelites, Jabin's army was a great and powerful army with 900 iron chariots!

Deborah saw Sisera's powerful army with all his chariots, but Deborah trusted God. She said, "Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the Lord go out before you?"

Barak and his men charged down the mountain. The Lord caused Jabin's army to run away in panic – and Barak's army won a great victory. The Israelites rejoiced! No more trouble from King Jabin!

God saved his people from the enemy king, God sent Jesus to save us from our enemies too. Jesus won the battle for us over our greatest enemies – sin, death, and the devil – when he died on the cross for us and rose again.

Close with prayer

SEPTEMBER WEEK TWO: GIDEON

Tuesday

Judges 6:1-8:21

While the Israelites were living in the Promised Land, they again forgot about God and his love for them. They began to worship false gods and idols, instead of the one true God. So the Lord made their enemies, the Midianites, stronger than the Israelites. The Midianites came often into Israel, and stole the crops the Israelites had planted. They stole their sheep, cows, and donkeys. The Israelites were so afraid of their enemies that they hid in caves. Then they remembered God and cried out to him for help.

God answered their prayers. He sent an angel to tell a man named Gideon that God was with his people and that he had chosen Gideon to lead an army to fight the Midianites. At first, Gideon was afraid. But God gave him special miraculous signs (fire shooting up from a rock, a wet fleece on dry ground, and a dry fleece on wet ground – all at Gideon's request), making it clear to Gideon that God could do anything – even use Gideon to fight the Midianites. Then Gideon trusted God.

Although the Midianites had many more soldiers than Gideon, God said to him, "The people with you are too many." When God defeated the Midianites for Israel, he did not want the Israelites to think they had won the battle with their great army. So God told Gideon that everyone who was afraid of fighting should go home. More men went home than stayed to fight!

Then God said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there." So Gideon brought the Israelite army down to the water, so that each of the men could get a drink. Along the edge of the river, God said to Gideon, "Everyone who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, everyone who kneels down to drink." The number of men who lapped their water like a dog was 300. And the Lord said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others home."

In the middle of the night, Gideon gave each of his 300 soldiers a trumpet to hold in one hand and a clay pot with a torch inside to hold in the other hand. Gideon and his army took their position around the enemy's camp. At just the right time, Gideon gave the signal. The men blew the trumpets. They smashed the pots. The torches blazed. The army of Israel cried out, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!"

The Midianite army was so afraid and so surprised that they began to fight against each other instead of fighting against the Israelite army! Many Midianites died, and the rest ran far away as fast as they could.

God did not forget his people Israel, even though they had sinned greatly against him. When they cried out to the Lord for help, God chose Gideon and used him to save Israel from their

enemies. God loves us and saves us too. God sent Jesus for us even though we have sinned against him. Jesus fought the devil for us and took away our sins on the cross, so that we can have peace with God – and one day live with him forever in heaven.

- **Why did God want Gideon to have a very small army?**
- **Who really won the battle against the Midianites?**
- **Who should we trust to win our battles?**

Close with prayer

SEPTEMBER WEEK TWO: SAMSON

Wednesday

Judges 13–16

Before Samson was born, an angel told his mother that he would begin to save Israel from the Philistines. The angel told her that Samson could never cut his hair. As long as Samson obeyed and trusted God, he would be very strong.

The rulers of the Philistines were afraid of Samson. They knew that he loved a Philistine woman named Delilah, so they offered her a large amount of silver if she would help them capture Samson.

Delilah begged Samson to reveal the secret to his strength. Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bow strings that have not been dried, then I will become weak." When Samson was asleep, Delilah tied him up with seven fresh bowstrings. Then she told him that the Philistines were attacking! But Samson jumped up and snapped the bowstrings.

Delilah kept trying. Again she asked Samson how he could be bound. He said, "If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I will become weak." When Samson was asleep, Delilah wrapped him with new ropes and told him that the Philistines were attacking. But Samson had lied, and he snapped off the new ropes like little threads.

Delilah didn't stop. She said to Samson, "Until now you have told me lies. Tell me how you can be bound." This time he said that if she tied his hair into a loom and fastened it with a pin, he would become weak. Delilah tried this too. But Samson didn't mean it again, and he easily got free.

Day after day Delilah asked Samson what gave him his great strength. Finally, he told her the truth. "If my head is shaved," he said, "then my strength will leave me, and I will become weak and be like any other man."

This time, Delilah knew that Samson was telling the truth. She called the Philistine leaders. While Samson slept, Delilah cut his hair. Then she called out to him that the Philistines were attacking! When he awoke, he tried to get free again, not knowing that the Lord had left him. The Philistines tied him up, blinded him, and took him to prison. But while he was in prison, Samson repented and learned humility. In repentant humility, Samson relied on the Lord again, and his hair began to grow again, too.

Many days later, the Philistines gathered at their temple to offer a sacrifice to Dagon, their false god. They said, "Our god has given us our enemy Samson, God's strong man, into our hands." Then they sent for Samson to come and entertain them.

As Samson stood between two pillars of their temple, he prayed, "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me one more time." With that prayer, Samson pushed the pillars with all his strength, and the temple fell, killing thousands of Philistines. God strengthened Samson one last time to win a mighty victory over the Philistines.

God made Samson into a champion for the Israelites. But Samson also did things that did not follow God's commands. God gave us the greatest champion ever in Jesus Christ. Jesus is

stronger than all our enemies, and he always obeyed God the Father. When Jesus died on the cross, he defeated sin, death, and the devil! Because of Jesus, our sins are forgiven.

Close with prayer

SEPTEMBER WEEK TWO: RUTH

Thursday

Ruth 1–4

A long time ago, a woman named Naomi, along with her husband and her two sons, lived in the land of Israel, in the town of Bethlehem. When a great famine came to Israel, they went to live in the land of Moab. While they were there, Naomi's husband died.

Naomi's two sons grew up and married women from Moab – one was named Ruth and the other Orpah. These two women were Naomi's daughters-in-law. Then, after 10 years, Naomi's two sons also died. Now Naomi was all alone.

Since Naomi had no one in Moab to help her or care for her, she decided to move back to Bethlehem. One daughter-in-law, the one named Orpah, stayed in Moab with her relatives. But the other daughter-in-law, Ruth, loved Naomi very much. Ruth told Naomi, "Where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people, and your God my God."

Ruth and Naomi walked for many days back to Bethlehem together. Life in Bethlehem was hard for Naomi – she was poor and had no way to earn an income. To get enough food for them to eat, Ruth followed the workers in the field, picking up the pieces of grain they dropped when they cut grain.

One day, Ruth went to work in the field of a man named Boaz. Boaz was a close relative of Naomi's husband, and he was very kind to Ruth. He told his workers to leave behind some of the grain in the field on purpose, so that Ruth could pick it up and take it home to Naomi.

When Boaz saw how Ruth cared so much for Naomi, and how Ruth trusted in God, Boaz wanted to marry Ruth. But in those days, there was a law that said Boaz could only marry Ruth if he bought and owned the land she lived on. Boaz bought the land and married Ruth, so that he could love and care for Ruth and for Naomi as well – and so Boaz became their "redeemer" (redeem means to "buy back").

God blessed Ruth and Boaz with a baby boy. They named him Obed. Little Obed made his grandmother, Naomi, very happy! Obed grew up to become the father of Jesse, and Jesse became the father of King David. Many years later, from King David's family, a baby named Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.

God had not forgotten about Naomi or Ruth. He blessed Naomi and Ruth by sending them Boaz as their "redeemer." God blesses us, too, by sending his Son, Jesus. By paying the penalty for our sins on the cross, Jesus has bought us back from sin and death, and has become our Redeemer.

- **Why was Ruth willing to go with Naomi to live in Bethlehem, far from her own home in Moab?**

- How was Ruth able to get food in the fields in Bethlehem, even though she didn't have a job of her own?
- How was Boaz the redeemer of Ruth and Naomi?
- How is Jesus our Redeemer?

Close with prayer

SEPTEMBER WEEK TWO: ESTHER

Friday

Esther 1–10

King Ahasuerus, the king of Persia, reigned over a vast empire, stretching all the way from Ethiopia to India. After Queen Vashti offended him, King Ahasuerus decided that he wanted a new queen. So the king held an enormous beauty pageant for every girl and young woman in his kingdom in order to find and choose his new queen. The beauty contest lasted more than a year!

One of the young women – a beautiful woman named Esther – was an Israelite, one of God's own people. King Ahasuerus chose Esther over all the other young women, and she became the queen.

Esther had a cousin named Mordecai. He had raised Esther and was like a father to her. One day, Esther saw Mordecai crying loudly near the palace gate. Esther sent a messenger to him to find out what was wrong.

Mordecai sent a message back, telling Esther that a man named Haman – a man who hated the Israelites – had tricked the king into making a new law. The new law said that on a certain day all the Israelites would be killed. Mordecai told Esther she had to go to the king and beg him to save her people. Esther explained to Mordecai that she didn't have a good relationship with the king and didn't know him very well, and that no one was allowed to go to the king without an invitation. If someone went to the king and had not been invited and they were unwanted, that person would be killed. And the king had not invited Queen Esther to come see him for a month!

Mordecai nonetheless urged Esther to go see the king. Who knows, Mordecai said, maybe this was the whole reason Esther had become queen – to save the Israelites (and the family line of the promised Savior) from death! Esther told Mordecai to ask the Israelites everywhere to pray and fast for three nights for her, and then she would go to the king. "And if I perish, I perish," she said.

Three days later, when Esther went to the king, he was glad to see her, because he liked her, even though he had not invited her. He told her he would do anything she wanted, because she was his queen. But Esther simply invited the king to a feast she had prepared, and she asked him to bring Haman too.

The king and Haman honored her request and came to Esther's feast. After they had eaten, the king asked Esther again what she wanted him to do for her. Once more Esther asked the king to come to a feast, on the very next day, and to bring Haman too. At the feast the next day the king asked Esther one last time what she wanted from him. Finally, Esther told him – she wanted the king to save her life from Haman, who wanted to kill her and her people too!

King Ahasuerus was furious at Haman, who was put to death for his evil plan by which he had also tricked the king. And the king made a new law that saved the Israelites from their enemies who wanted to kill them.

God used Esther to save his people. Mordecai and Queen Esther praised and thanked God, and all the Israelites shouted and rejoiced! Even today, the Israelites still sing and dance and celebrate every year, in remembrance of how God chose Esther to help them and how God saved them from their enemies. God saved his people from being destroyed, more than 400 years before Jesus our Savior was born from Israelite descendants. How thankful we are to God for Esther to do that and for sending Jesus to save us and take away our sins!

- **How did Esther trust God, stop Haman's evil plan, save her people, and save us?**

Close with prayer