

Judges *There was no King in Israel*

2. An unusual partnership: Deborah, Barak and Jael *Judges 4.1-23*

Aim: To think about how stereotypes and fears/anxieties can hold us back from risk-taking faithfulness to God.

To start with:

- Think of a film you like that depicts a victory. Who are your favourite characters and why?
- In our society how do you think we picture 'heroes'?

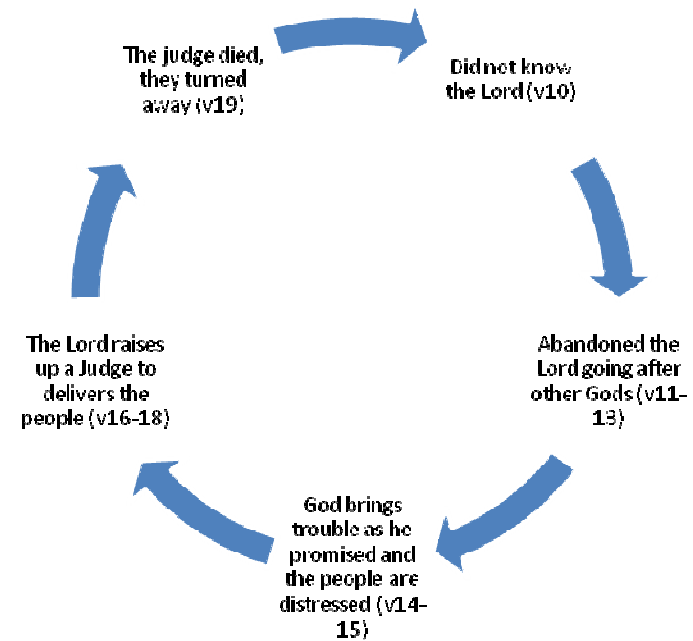
Setting the scene:

If you think your cell is already familiar with the 'cycle of Judges' then dive straight into the study. If you think it'd be helpful for your cell to have a quick recap do the setting the scene section (below). It should take no more than 5-10 minutes.

To make sense of what happens in Judges 4.1-23 it's important to know how it fits into the cycle of Judges.

Draw on a piece of paper the 'cycle of Judges' to remind people what they learnt last week!

For example:



Already there have been several cycles before we get to chapter 4.

Engaging with the text:

Read Judges 4.1-16.

The cycle has started again and God's people have done evil in the sight of the Lord and are being oppressed by Jabin, King of Canaan.

1. What do you think it must have be like to live in an occupied land as an oppressed people?

Take a piece of paper and make three columns - one for Deborah, one of Barak and one for Jael.

2. What kind of impression does this passage give you of Deborah and Barak? (*Fill in the columns for Deborah and Barak with as many words as come to mind that describe your impression of them.*)

Barak leans on Deborah for support when it seems that God's desire was for him to take the risk for himself in leading the army.

3. How far do you sympathise with Barak? How easy do you find it to rely on God rather than lean on other people? Why do you think that is and what effects do you think it has?

Read Judges 4.17-23 and 5.24-27.

4. What impression do these passages give you of Jael? (*Fill in the column for Jael with as many words as come to mind.*)
5. In contrast to Barak, Jael did act on her own.
 - a. Do you find her actions more shocking than Barak's (look again at what he did in Judges 4.16)? Why or why not?
 - b. Does the fact that Jael lives in an occupied land, her husband is away and a soldier is in her tent make a difference to your response to her actions?

Paul says to the whole early church, both men and women:

- 'Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.' (1 Corinthians 16.13)
 - 'Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might ... for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.' (Ephesians 6.10-12)
6. How do Jael's actions on her own of risk-taking faithfulness to God challenge:
 - a. Stereotypes of appropriate 'ladylike' behaviour?
 - b. Our own Barak-like anxiety and fearfulness that wants to lean on others for security?

Reflect and pray:

- Are there areas in which you know you need to bear responsibility and take risks for God?
- Are there unbiblical stereotypes or fears and anxieties that hold you back?
- Pray that the truth of God's word would renew your mind and strengthen your heart and will to love and serve the Lord with risk-taking faithfulness.