

## **22). May 25-31—Judges 2-4; 6-8; 13-16**

*Deborah; Jael; Mother of Gideon; Wives of Gideon; Abimelech's mother and Concubine of Gideon / Jerubbaal; Mother of Samson; Wife of Samson; Younger Sister of Samson's Wife; Prostitute of Gaza; Delilah; Philistine Women*

### 1). Judges 4-5—**Deborah** ~1300-1100 BC

The prophetess Deborah acted as the fourth of twelve judges and religious leaders between Joshua and King Saul. She is the only female judge and introduced herself as "a mother in Israel" (Jdg 5:7). Her husband's name was Lapidoth (or less likely, but possibly, she was a woman of Lapidoth). We assume she was an Ephraimite, as she lived in the hill country of Ephraim between Ramah and Bethel at the time when the twelve tribes were still divided into geographic districts. She lived a day's journey south of Shiloh, where the Tabernacle was set up at this time. She was wise and helped the Israelites settle their disputes. Those needing her services met under the "palm tree of Deborah" (Jdg 4:5)

As with the other eleven judges of Israel, her story included a military victory as well. As a prophetess, she was directed by God to begin a battle against the Canaanites. She summons Barak as her general, and he agrees to follow God's directions to take ten thousand men to Mt. Tabor if she will go with him. Because of this close relationship, in the Middle Ages, Christians speculated that Barak was another name for her husband.

Deborah is the voice of at least three of God's prophecies that are recorded in Judges 4. First, the call to battle and selection of Barak: "I will deliver him into thine hand" (Jdg 4:7). Second, timing: "This is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee?" (Jdg 4:14). It appears that a flood storm swept their chariots away (Jdg 5:21). Third, "the LORD shall sell Sisera [the enemy general] into the hand of a woman" (Jdg 4:9) was fulfilled when the Kenite woman



Jael pretended to offer protection to the general, but once he was asleep, she used a tent peg to kill him.

This is historically consistent with the tradition that Kenites were smiths.

In Judges 5, the "Song of Deborah" elaborates on more details of the battle. Like Miriam, she is known for her prophecies and song. The song may have been written by Deborah—"Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song" (Jdg 5:12)—or written about her after the victory. In either case, it preserved the valiant details and leadership of two women during the period of Judges in Israel.



## 2). Jdg 4:17-22; 5:6, 24-27—**Jael** ~1300-1200 BC

Jael and her husband, Heber, were not Israelites but Kenites from an ancient desert tribe of nomadic metalsmiths. Jael became a heroine in Israel's battle against the Canaanites during Judge Deborah's governance. The Kenites were already in the land of Canaan before Abram and Sarai arrived (Gen 15:19), but most lived in the south. Jael and Heber chose to live between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean. They got along with their neighbors—both the Israelites and Canaanites—in part because everyone needed their craft (Jdg 4:17).

The Prophetess Deborah prophesied that the military general Barak would lead the Israelites in a battle against the Canaanites near Mt. Tabor and that they would be victorious (Jdg 4:6-7). General Barak requested the prophetess come with him—most likely to have the Lord's blessing and direction on the battle. Deborah agreed and prophesied, "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" (Jdg 4:8). This promised woman was not Judge Deborah but the Kenite, Jael. Sisera in this prophecy was the Canaanite General.

As prophesied, even though the Canaanites were better armed with chariots, they fled before Barak and the Israelites. Everyone was killed except the Canaanite General, Sisera, who abandoned his chariot and ran on foot up to Jael's tent. Sisera felt safe with the Kenites and accepted Jael's invitation to come in. When the Canaanite general asked for water to appease his thirst, Jael generously gave him milk (Jdg 4:19). He felt safe and he fell into an exhausted sleep. Jael then chose to act to defend the Israelites. While he slept, Jael hammered a tent nail through his temples and into the ground (Jdg 4:21). He was dead by the time the Israelite general, Barak, caught up with him. Jael greeted Barak and invited him to see "the man you're looking for" (Jdg 4:22, NIV).

Jael's kindness, bravery, and strength were praised in the victory song that is attributed to Deborah: "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent" (Jdg 5:24-27, NIV). This poem is among the oldest in the Bible. Jael was honored as one who used her own volition to help Israel accomplish God's purposes.

## 3). Jdg 8:19—**Mother of Gideon** ~1300-1100 BC

Gideon declared that the men killed at Tabor were “my brethren, even the sons of my mother,” emphasizing the maternal bond rather than his paternal, as the relationship that demanded vengeance. This elevated maternal kinship justified execution to avenge the wrongful death.

#### 4). Jdg 8:30—**Wives of Gideon** ~1300-1100 BC

Gideon fathered 70 sons through “many wives,” demonstrating that Israel’s judge practiced polygamy on a massive scale despite God’s design for marriage established at creation. The text’s emphasis on the number of sons—without mentioning daughters—revealed the cultural priority placed on male heirs for warfare. Gideon likely had numerous daughters through his “many wives” indicating they were accumulated as symbols of wealth and power following patterns from ancient Near Eastern rulers, not God’s covenant.

#### 5). Jdg 8:31; 9:1, 3, 18—**Concubine of Gideon became Abimelech’s mother** ~1300-1100 BC

Gideon’s concubine was part of his harem that bore his seventy sons (Jdg 8:30). Her husband was the fifth Judge in Israel. He broke down Baal’s altar; thus earning the title: Jerubbaal, or “let Baal contend” (Jdg 6:32, NIV). She was known as a “maidservant” (Jdg 9:18) from Shechem (an established commercial center on the north and south trade route through the land of Israel, in the hill country of Ephraim). This story depicts the people of Shechem in a derogatory light, as do other biblical stories (e.g. Dinah’s kidnapping, the capital of the northern tribe of Israel, and the Samaritan woman at the well).

Three of the four accounts of Gideon’s unnamed concubine mention her son Abimelech’s coup (Jdg 9:1, 3, 18). As a concubine’s son, Abimelech would not be heir of the chief judge through birthright, so he sought it through murder. We are not told if Abimelech’s mother influenced his plot to become the heir, but it is probable, as her hometown helped in the coup.

Her son, Abimelech, garnered support from the Shechemites under the banner of kinsmanship. With their help, he murdered all 70 of his half-brothers—except one, Jotham. If his mother were still alive, she most likely would have joined Abimelech as the Queen Mother when he took over. The narrator recorded Abimelech’s mother’s position as a “slave” woman in an attempt to further degrade his overthrow (Jdg 9:18, NIV). Both her city and her son were destroyed within three years of his revolution, but the book of Judges does not record what happened to her.

#### 6). Jdg 13:2-25; 14:2-9, 16; 16:17—**Mother of Samson** ~1100 BC

In the midst of the fallible examples of Israel’s 12 Judges, we have an upstanding heroine in the wife of Manoah and mother of Samson. She, like many of her noble predecessors, was both a spiritual example and barren (see \*Sarah, \*Rebekah, \*Rachel, and \*Hannah). Also like Sarah, an angel promised her a son. Like Rebekah, she meekly asked for and received divine instruction. Like Rachel, her prayers were answered. Like Hannah, she was required to take the Nazarite vow during her pregnancy and direct

her son in that lifestyle for his life (Jdg 13:2-5). Samson did not follow his mother's example, and so her memory is tainted by his wrongdoings.

In Numbers 6, God outlined the special vow of consecration referred to as a Nazarite vow: "If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of dedication to the LORD . . . They must be holy until the period of their dedication to the LORD is over" (Num 6:2, 5, NIV). The vow includes not eating or drinking anything from the vine (wine, grapes, raisins, or even the skins and seeds), nor any other fermented drink, and "no razor may be used on their head" (Num 6:3-5, NIV).

Once the angel left, she told her husband Manoah about her visitation: "A man of God came unto me. He looked like an angel of God, very awesome. I didn't ask him where he came from, and he didn't tell me his name. But he said to me, 'You will become pregnant and have a son'" (Jdg 13:6-7, NIV). Her husband responded that he wanted to learn more about how to raise the promised child. But looking at the whole text, he also wanted a second witness for himself.

Manoah asked in prayer, and the angel returned again to his wife (Jdg 13:8-9). The example of divine sensitivity to women is found repeatedly in scripture (e.g., Hagar in Gen 16:8, 21:17; Rebekah in Gen 25:22-23). When Manoah's wife saw the angel, she remembered her husband's concerns and asked

the angel waited while she ran to find him. This speaks of their relationship and her efforts to include him as a full spiritual partner.

When she found him, she described the angel as "The man hath appeared," which confused him, even though it was consistent with other angelic visitations in scripture (Jdg 13:10). As requested, the angel answered Manoah's questions by defending his wife: "Your wife must do all that I have told her" (Jdg 13:13, NIV). This example of honoring a woman's witness and worthiness to receive the administration of angels is notable.

The account contrasts Manoah's wife's substantial faith and spiritual sensitivity with Manoah's dearth. For example, Manoah did not realize the man was an angel and asked if he would stay for a meal. But the angel tutored him by suggesting he offer an offering to the Lord. Then Manoah asked for the man's name, and the angel corrected him again: "Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?" (Jdg 13:18). After offering the sacrifice, Manoah and his wife watched as "the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame" (Jdg 13:20).

This was the evidence Manoah sought, and he realized he had seen an angel. But it frightened him, and he feared for his life. With her enlightened understanding, his wife assured him, "If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things" (Jdg 13:23). Again Manoah's wife's spiritual maturity was a guiding influence in her husband's life.

The divine promises were answered, and she bore her special son, who was a Nazarite from his "mother's womb" (Jdg 16:17). His mother again takes the leadership role by naming him Samson (Jdg 13:24). Under her tutelage and control over his diet, we learn her son "grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times" (Jdg 13:24-25). A similar phrase is used by NT authors to describe John the Baptist's and Jesus's early development (Lk 1:80; 2:40, 52). Like Elizabeth and John, Samson's mother raised him as a Nazarite and in the learning of the Lord.

We do not read of Samson's commitment to the LORD nor evidence of following the Spirit in his later life. But we do see a level of commitment to his mother and father. He consulted his parents on the choice of his wife. Both parents disagreed because she was not of the covenant. Significantly, Samson ignored their counsel and pressed his father—not his mother—until arrangements were made (Jdg 14:3). Samson knew where his mother stood on obeying God and did not try to wield her opinion.

Samson also honored his mother and father a few years later when his first wife complained that he wouldn't tell her the answer to his riddle. Samson justified himself: "'I haven't even explained it to my father or mother,' he replied, 'so why should I explain it to you?'" (Jdg 14:16, NIV). He held his parents in a higher place of esteem than his wife.

Samson's life was punctuated with examples of seeking to satisfy his personal appetites. He rejected his mother's teachings, his Nazarite vow, and God's laws. His lustful actions repeatedly showed that he did not honor his mother enough to fulfill his divine calling as a Judge in Israel.

#### 7). Jdg 14:1-15:6—**Wife of Samson** ~1100 BC

Samson's Philistine wife was manipulated by both sides, betrayed Samson under threat, and ultimately died violently as collateral damage in the conflict between Samson and the Philistines. She was a Philistine woman from Timnah who caught his eye. Despite his parents' objections that she was not an Israelite, he insisted, "Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well" (Jdg 14:3). During their wedding feast, Samson posed a riddle to 30 Philistine companions. When his wife pressured him for the answer, weeping and accusing him of not loving her, he initially resisted, valuing his parents' trust above her

demands. However, after seven days of relentless manipulation, Samson revealed the answer, and his wife immediately betrayed him by telling the Philistine men.

Samson abandoned her in anger, and her father gave her to Samson's best man, assuming the marriage was dissolved. When Samson later returned to reconcile, he discovered this betrayal and burned the Philistines' fields in revenge. The Philistines responded by burning Samson's wife and her father to death. Samson's wife became a tragic victim caught between her husband's recklessness and her people's violence. While she betrayed Samson's trust under pressure from her countrymen who threatened her family, her death by fire demonstrated the brutal consequences women faced when caught between warring men. Her story illustrates the dangers of marriages that violated covenant boundaries and the devastating results when lust rather than God's guidance determined the choice of wife.

#### 8). Jdg 15:2—**Younger Sister of Samson's Wife** ~1100 BC

Samson's father-in-law offered his first wife's younger sister as an interchangeable replacement based on looks, "is not her younger sister fairer?" The exchange demonstrates how daughters were treated as tradeable commodities without any reference to agency, feelings, or consent. This callous proposal devalued marriage.

#### 9). Jdg 16:1—**Prostitute of Gaza** ~1100 BC

After Samson abandoned his first wife, she was killed by the Philistines. He visited a prostitute in Gaza for sexual gratification, continuing his pattern of exploiting women and rejecting his sacred calling as a judge or military force in Israel. Repeatedly his behavior did not uphold God's Nazarite Vow.

In a culture offering women few economic alternatives, particularly in foreign-occupied territories, this unnamed woman survived through prostitution. Historically this was not usually the

woman or girl's choice. Her story illustrates how prostitutes occupied precarious positions, caught between survival necessity and exploitation by both clients and authorities.

When Philistine leaders learned of Samson's presence, they ambushed the city gate, turning this woman's home into a trap. The narrative reveals nothing of her perspective. We do not know if she willingly served Samson, feared him as an enemy warrior, or participated in the ambush plot. This woman disappears from scripture, representing countless women whose circumstances forced them into prostitution and whose voices remain unrecorded.

#### 10). Jdg 16—**Delilah** ~1100 BC

Delilah enters the Old Testament at the time of the twelfth and final Israelite judge and war hero, Samson. She was his last scandalous lover and plotted his downfall. She exemplifies a wicked, manipulating woman without morals or integrity, and an enemy to Israel. She may have been a Philistine, as she is more loyal to the bribing Philistines than to Samson, but we are not told anything about her parentage. The text claims that Samson loved her, but it never says she loved him.

Of the four recorded females who ensnared Samson's heart, the text recorded only Delilah's name. In Hebrew there is a wordplay with her name. Delilah is similar to "night / layla," and Samson's name relates to the "sun / shemesh." Her deceptions take place at night, and she works in darkness. From her deceit, Samson is left in complete darkness when his eyes are "put out" (Jdg 16:21).

Four times Delilah begs Samson to confide the secret to his profound strength. He lies the first three times by claiming he would become weak if he were tied up with seven fresh bowstrings, with new ropes, or if his hair were woven into seven braids on a loom. Odd as it seems, Samson does not suspect her duplicity even though she attempts each of the three false ideas to destroy his strength. Delilah's pestering enticements escalated so that "his soul was vexed unto death." Samson finally confessed that his power was a divine gift associated with his Nazarite vow and that if his hair was cut, "then my strength will go from me" (Jdg 16:16-17). It was actually his mother's Nazarite vow first, as she obeyed the angel who directed her to dedicate her son "to God from the womb" (Jdg 13:5).

Delilah arranged for someone to cut Samson's hair while he slept on her lap, and his extraordinary strength left him. The Philistines finally imprisoned him and gave Delilah her bribe money of eleven hundred shekels of silver (Jdg 16:18-21). This was an enormous sum in the ancient world—worth twelve years of labor, when a laborer earned a shekel every four days. We are not told if Delilah was among the three thousand Philistine men and women who gathered sometime later to watch the blinded and weakened Samson, reduced to a circus-like spectacle. If she were there, she would have been killed when the Lord answered Samson's prayer to briefly return his strength. God empowered him to jolt the pillars that supported the building's structure. All the Philistine spectators and Samson were crushed to death in the collapse (Jdg 16:30).

Something in the story seems to be missing or exaggerated. Realistically, it was not Samson's hair that empowered him, but the endowment of divine power that stemmed from living a Nazarite vow as God dictated (Num 6:1-21; D&C 121:41). Perhaps he did not drink wine or cut his hair, but a Nazarite vow includes separating oneself for God's service, which he did not do. Samson violated his vow when he became ritually impure with a harlot, lied, came in contact with blood from killing the lion, and ate honey from an unclean carcass (Lev 11:27). Delilah's and Samson's lives were undoubtedly more nuanced.

#### 11). Jdg 16:27—**Philistine Women** ~1100 BC

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Philistine women actively participated in mocking Samson and shared equally in the judgment when the temple collapsed, killing all 3,000 spectators. The women were not innocent bystanders but active participants in the mockery of God's appointed judge, celebrating his downfall alongside the men. When Samson prayed for strength one final time and pushed down the temple's pillars, all 3,000 spectators—men and women alike—perished in the collapse of Dagon's Temple.