



“This is the Story...”

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Week 13: The Land Has Rest

Judges 2:16-23, 4:4-24

Intro Video: <https://youtu.be/Ft6sZPjIA4I>

Review the big story: God created the cosmos and humans and called it all good. We were created to live in harmony, but sometimes we miss the mark. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and all of humanity missed the mark, and they had to live with the consequences, but God stuck with them and continued to love them. Then God called a family, beginning with Abraham and Sarah, to be in a covenant relationship with God. God’s work continued with three more generations from this family. Like the humans before them, they often missed the mark, but God was faithful. When the people became slaves in Egypt, God raised up Moses to be their leader. God performed many signs and wonders, and delivered them from slavery. In the wilderness, they learned to be a people of God, trusting in God’s provision, living out God’s commandments, and wrestling with the law in shalom community. As they prepared to go into the promised land, they were given the *shema*, words of love to keep with their whole beings. God gives the people a new leader, Joshua, and through miraculous works brings the people through the Jordan River and into the promised land.

- **Key verses:** Judges 2:16-19; Judges 4:5; Judges 4:9

Tell the story: Now the people are in a new place, and they have to learn again how to be a people of God. They keep forgetting those words from the Shema, and that gets them in trouble. So God raises up judges to deliver them. Each time God raises up a judge, the people do better...until the judge dies. Then they miss the mark again, and again God has to raise up a judge. Deborah was one of those judges. When one of the tribal leaders didn’t want to go do what he was supposed to do, Deborah called him out on it, then went with him. But he wasn’t the one that had glory at the end of the day. The glory went to Jael, a woman who used her wits to help her people.

- Read Judges 2:16-23; 4:4-24

Prime the pump:

- **Things to notice:**
 - Remember back in Exodus 1-4, when women played subversive roles in continuing the story of the people of God? They’re back at it in this story. Read Judges 4:4-24 and notice the times that the story deviates from what you would expect.
 - This is a rather gruesome story. But it also has an element of humor to it. Picture the whole thing as a clown skit, and catch the absurdities.
 - Consider also reading chapter 5, which is the story song that Deborah and Barak sang. We aren’t the first ones to use a song to tell a story!
- **Background information:**
 - The Hebrew word *shofet* translated as “judge” can mean a judicial authority or a leader/chieftan. Leader/chieftan is actually a more accurate term for many of the judges in the book of Judges. But Deborah seems to have functioned as both.
 - The book of Judges tells us the stories of what scholars call the “judges cycle.” The first part of this week’s passage very clearly explains what that cycle was. This whole book is full of gruesome stories about the people’s disobedience. If you want to dig into the messiness of the people of God, start reading through Judges.

- With the way 4:6 is interpreted in most Bibles, it would seem that Deborah is instructing Barak. But according to Robert Alter, it is more accurate to translate it, “Has not the LORD God of Israel charged you...” meaning that he knew already what he was supposed to do but wasn’t doing it. How does that change this reading?
- **Conversation starters:**
 - This is an uncomfortable story. Does God want this violent thing to happen? Is what Jael did good? Be okay with not having on the answers. Acknowledge all the different things you feel as you read this story. Do you want to cheer for these women? Are you grossed out? Do you squirm? Wrestle with it.
 - This whole judges cycle is yet one more story of God sticking with humanity. If this resonates with you, maybe you want to track the ways God has stuck with humans throughout this story.

Microsong: “The Land Has Rest” (Listen: <https://youtu.be/WORm73GuA6s>)

God’s family turns away from God. Nine hundred iron chariots control the land until the people groan to God again.

God sends a judge named Deborah who leads the people into battle. When the bloodsheds over then the land has rest.

For forty years, forty years.

Sing the big song: (Listen: <https://youtu.be/Mli9N-ITjTg>)

This is the story of how it all began. God made matter, and chaos shattered.

Eve and Adam, they tried to hide. The world got violent and God replied with a mark and flood and a rainbow sign, God’s love written on skin and sky,

And then God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, ahhhhhh

A mother and her favorite son wrestle for the blessing, another son becomes a slave, the land is saved from famine.

God’s family grows. Egypt oppresses. They groan to God and God sends Moses.

Ten strange signs say “Please release them!” By the sea God saves them. Ahhhhhhh

The people complain and God rains bread. Daily food and ten new rules.

Five sisters come and ask for land. God says, “Yes, amend the law!”

Moses says, “In your new life across the Jordan, love God with your whole heart and with all your being, and your strength, now listen: God is One, only God! God is One, only God!”

Cross over Jordan, stories and stones. Circuits and shouts and the walls come down.

God sends judges like Deborah and the land has rest.

God loves every one of us, it’s true, and God loves the universe.

Go do your household project!