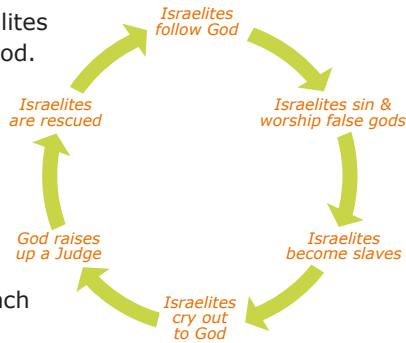




Deborah and Barak

After Joshua died, the Israelites forgot about the one true God. They did not remember that they were His chosen people. Yet, in His mercy, God did not forget them. As the cycle of sin begins, we see that God is faithful to send deliverers to save them from their enemies each time they turn back to Him.





Day #1: Pattern

Find some things to make a pattern with. Some ideas might be a handful of coins, or pieces of candy, or colored beads. The key to a pattern is having several of each *kind* of item (same size, same color, etc.), so the pattern can repeat. Now, make a pattern with your items by laying them on a table. For instance, if you have 2 pennies, 2 nickels, and 2 dimes, your pattern might be 1 penny, 1 nickel, 1 dime, 1 penny, 1 nickel, 1 dime. The book of Judges describes a pattern of *behavior* that the Israelites did over and over again.

In the book of Joshua, we saw that the Israelites followed God, and God fought for His people. This was because of the "If - then" promise God made to His people. Do you remember what the "If - then" promise was? (He said **If** they followed Him, **then** He would bless and protect them. Deuteronomy 30:16) Because the Lord fought for them, they won battles and conquered nations Joshua 10:42. Without God, Israel was not a mighty nation.


When the Israelites stopped following God and began to worship idols - which could NOT help them - they were defeated and taken prisoner. Each time that the Israelites became slaves, they called out to God for help. In His mercy, and because of His promise, God sent help to His people. Each time they called to Him, He sent a deliverer to fight for them and lead them. These deliverers are also called Judges. Sadly, each time the Israelites were rescued by a Judge, they would soon forget about God and begin worshipping false gods again! The Israelite's pattern of behavior can be called a "cycle" because when they got to the end of the pattern, it started all over again.

 Look at the diagram on this page to see the cycle of behavior the Israelites followed. Discuss any behavior cycles you might see today. Pray and ask God to point out any ungodly patterns in your life.

 *God, see what is in my heart. Know what is there. Put me to the test. Know what I'm thinking.* - Psalm 139:23


Day #2: Idols

Take some Playdoh or modeling clay and make a small figure. It can be a person or animal, or an imaginary creature. If you don't have playdoh or clay, draw a figure on paper. Now look at the figure you made. It would be ridiculous for you to worship that figure. You made it with your own hands. You know that it cannot do anything for you. What if you handed it to your friend? It would be just as silly for him to worship the figure. Although he did not make it, it was made with human hands. Yet, the Israelites chose to do just that.

 *They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served **created things** rather than **the Creator** - Who is forever praised.* - Romans 1:25

Only God is worthy of our praise! There is NO comparison between God Almighty and something we can make. God formed the earth and He tells the ocean how far it is allowed to flow on the seashore (Psalm 102:25, Job 38:11). He tells the rain where to fall and He placed the stars in the sky (Job 38:25, 38:32). And God, alone, is the Giver of life (Genesis 2:7)!

*The Lord is great. He is really worthy of praise. People should have respect for Him as the greatest God of all. All of the gods of the nations are like their statues. **They can't do anything.** But the Lord made the heavens. Glory and majesty are all around Him. Strength and joy can be seen in the place where He lives.* - 1 Chronicles 16:25-27

 We may not choose to bow down to a man-made statue, but there are other ways of having an idol in our lives. Is there anything in your life that you value more than time with God and time in His Word? Do you rush to that thing everyday instead of taking time to listen to God, talk to Him, and read the Bible? Ask yourself if that thing really compares to the Maker of heaven and earth. Read through any part of Job 38 - 41 to gain proper perspective on the awesomeness of God.

Pray for God to reveal any idols in your life. Ask **God** to give you *the desire* to seek Him more than anything else (John 6:44).

Day #3: Deborah & Barak

After the Israelites acted out their sin cycle several times, God raised up a woman named Deborah to help His people. The Israelites had been taken over by Jabin, king of Hazor. The leader of King Jabin's army was a man named Sisera. Sisera had a fierce army and was very cruel to the Israelites.

Day #3 continued:

Deborah was a leader among the Israelites. She solved their disagreements (Judges 4:5). The Bible calls her a prophetess, or woman prophet (Judges 4:4). All the Israelites would have known she was a messenger from God. One day she called for an Israelite man named Barak. Deborah told Barak that the Lord had a command for him.



*"He says, 'Go! Take 10,000 men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun with you. Then lead the way to Mount Tabor. **I will** draw Sisera into a trap. He is the commander of Jabin's army. **I will** bring him, his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River. There **I will** hand him over to you.'" - Judges 4:6b-7*

This would have been a scary challenge. But what two words are repeated in the command above? (I will.) God promised that **He** would trap and defeat Sisera. Barak refused to obey God's instructions unless Deborah went with him (Judges 4:8). Deborah agreed to go, but because Barak put conditions on God's command, Deborah told him that the victory would go to a woman instead of to him (Judges 4:9). Would this woman be Deborah? We will see tomorrow!



Certainly, it was understandable that Barak would be nervous about going to war with a fierce enemy. But Barak truly had nothing to fear because God **promised** that **He** would do the fighting.

Even if an army attacks me, my heart will not be afraid. Even if war breaks out against me, I will still trust in God. - Psalm 27:3

Ask God for the faith to trust in His promises (Psalm 62:8).

Day #4: The Battle

Deborah and Barak led the men of Israel into battle. God caused Sisera's chariots to scatter. Barak's army killed all the men of Sisera's army. But Sisera escaped on foot. He ran to the tent of one of King Jabin's friends. Only the friend's wife, Jael, was in the tent. She told Sisera to hide inside. He asked for water, but cleverly, she gave him warm milk to drink which made him sleepy. Exhausted from battle, Sisera fell asleep. Jael took this opportunity to kill Sisera, the enemy of God's people, while he slept. Soon Barak showed up at the tent. Jael took him inside and showed him that Sisera had been killed.

After the victory, Deborah sang a song to praise God for what He had done. He kept His promise and defeated the enemy. In her song, Deborah also praised Jael's heroic act.



"May Jael be the most blessed woman of all. May the wife of the Kenite Heber be blessed. May she be the most blessed woman of all those who live in tents." - Judges 5:24

Day #4 continued:

So, it came to pass that a woman, Jael, was given credit for rescuing the Israelites from the cruel commander, Sisera. This happened, just as Deborah told Barak it would.

The Bible says the Israelites grew stronger and stronger until they destroyed King Jabin who had been ruling over them.



God kept His promise and Deborah praised Him. Do not forget to praise God! You can praise Him in prayer; you can read Bible verses about Him out loud to Him; you can tell others about His goodness.

I will make known the name of the Lord. Praise God! How great He is! - Deuteronomy 32:3

My mouth is filled with praise for You. All day long I will talk about your glory. - Psalm 71:8

Day #5: Mustard Seed Faith

The Bible tells us of many different people in many different situations. At times, the people seem to have done everything just right. At other times, things are not so perfect.

Barak was willing to follow God's orders, if... if Deborah would go with him. This is similar to Moses' reaction to God at the burning bush. Moses would go to confront Pharaoh, if... if his brother, Aaron, could do the talking (Exodus 3:10-14).

In both cases, God had promised a wonderful outcome. God promised that He would do the work. But both men were very hesitant to obey. Each man lacked enough faith to do things 100% God's way. Yet, despite their lack of faith, both Moses and Barak were unquestionably used by God. Surely each man did have some faith. The Bible says we can do great things with faith as small as a mustard seed (Matthew 17:20).

Few people in the Bible had perfect faith. And those who did, usually did not have it every time. (Compare Genesis 12:4 with 12:12.)



Be encouraged by the words spoken by a desperate father in Mark 9:24, "I do believe! Help me overcome my unbelief!" These are very valid words to pray. Faith is not something we can muster up. Faith is a gift from God.



God's grace has been given to me... Keep in mind the amount of faith God has given you. - Romans 12:3

When you find yourself with questions or worries, ask God to strengthen your faith. Ask God to make you like Abraham, "He was absolutely sure that God had the power to do what he had promised." Romans 4:21.