



Deborah
A Prophetess and a Judge
Of Israel

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Overview

DEBORAH WAS ABLE TO SEE THE BIG PICTURE Her story is told in Judges 4 and Judges 5.

Wise leaders are rare. They accomplish great amounts of work without direct involvement because they know how to work through other people.

They are able to see the big picture that often escapes those directly involved, so they make good mediators, advisers, and planners.

Deborah fit this description perfectly. She had all these leadership skills, and she had a remarkable relationship with God.

The insight and confidence God gave this woman placed her in a unique position in the Old Testament.

Deborah is among the outstanding women of history. Her story shows that she was not power hungry. She wanted to serve God.

Whenever praise came her way, she gave God the credit. She didn't deny or resist her position in the culture as a woman and wife, but she never allowed herself to be hindered by it either.

A prophetess and a judge of Israel

Judges 4:4-7

Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophet who had become a judge in Israel.

She would hold court under the Palm of Deborah, which stood between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to settle their disputes.

One day she sent for Barak son of Abinoam, who lived in Kedesh in the land of Naphtali.

She said to him, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, commands you:

Assemble ten thousand warriors from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun at Mount Tabor.

I will lure Sisera, commander of Jabin's army, along with his chariots and warriors, to the Kishon River. There I will give you victory over him."

Deborah orders Barak to raise an army for battle.

Deborah was a prophetess; one instructed in Divine knowledge by the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

She judged Israel as God's mouth to them; correcting abuses, and redressing grievances.

By God's direction, she ordered Barak to raise an army, and engage Jabin's forces.

Barak insisted much upon her presence. Deborah promised to go with him. She would not send him where she would not go herself.

Those who in God's name call others to their duty, should be ready to assist them in it. Barak values the satisfaction of his mind, and the good success of his enterprise, more than mere honour.

Deborah inspires Barak to defeat Sisera

Judges 4:8-16

Barak told her, "I will go, but only if you go with me!"

"Very well," she replied, "I will go with you. But since you have made this choice, you will receive no honor. For the Lord's victory over Sisera will be at the hands of a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh.

At Kedesh, Barak called together the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand warriors marched up with him. Deborah also marched with them.

Now Heber the Kenite, a descendant of Moses' brother-in-law Hobab, had moved away from the other members of his tribe and pitched his tent by the Oak of Zaananim, near Kedesh.

When Sisera was told that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, he called for all nine hundred of his iron chariots and all of his warriors, and they marched from Harosheth-haggoyim to the Kishon River.

Then Deborah said to Barak, "Get ready! Today the Lord will give you victory over Sisera, for the Lord is marching ahead of you." So Barak led his ten thousand warriors down the slopes of Mount Tabor into battle.

When Barak attacked, the Lord threw Sisera and all his charioteers and warriors into a panic. Then Sisera leaped down from his chariot and escaped on foot.

Barak chased the enemy and their chariots all the way to Harosheth-haggoyim, killing all of Sisera's warriors. Not a single one was left alive.

Sisera's confidence was chiefly in his chariots. But if we have ground to hope that God goes before us, we may go on with courage and cheerfulness.

Be not dismayed at the difficulties you meet with in resisting Satan, in serving God, or suffering for him; for is not the Lord gone before you?

Follow him then fully. Barak went down, though upon the plain the iron chariots would have advantage against him: he quitted the mountain in dependence on the Divine power; for in the Lord alone is the salvation of his people, [Jeremiah 3:23](#).

He was not deceived in his confidence. When God goes before us in our spiritual conflicts, we must bestir ourselves; and when, by his grace, he gives us some success against the enemies of our souls, we must improve it by watchfulness and resolution.

Sisera is killed by a woman.

Judges 4:17-21

Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle.

And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him.

Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee, and say, is there any man here? That thou shalt say, no.

Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

Sisera's chariots had been his pride and his confidence.

Thus are those disappointed who rest on the creature; like a broken reed, it not only breaks under them, but pierces them with many sorrows.

It is probable that Jael really intended kindness to Sisera; but by a Divine impulse she was afterwards led to consider him as the determined enemy of the Lord and of his people, and to destroy him.

All our connexions with God's enemies must be broken off, if we would have the Lord for our God, and his people for our people.

He that had thought to have destroyed Israel with his many iron chariots, is himself destroyed with one iron nail.

The weak things of the world confound the mighty. The Israelites would have prevented much mischief, if they had sooner destroyed the Canaanites, as God commanded and enabled them: but better be wise late, and buy wisdom by experience, than never be wise.

The triumphant song of victory

Judges 5:1-31

Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying,

Praise you the Lord for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves.

Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the Lord; I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel.

Lord, when thou went out of Seir, when thou marches out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water.

The mountains melted from before the Lord, even that Sinai from before the Lord God of Israel. In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travelers walked through byways.

The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel. They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?

My heart is toward the governors of Israel that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless you the Lord. Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way.

They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the Lord go down to the gates.

Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the Lord made me have dominion over the mighty.

Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer.

And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart.

Why abodes thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleating of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searching of the heart.

Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches. Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardies their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.

The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength. Then were the horse hoofs broken by the means of the prancing, the prancing of their mighty ones.

Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish.

She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.

At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead. The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots?

Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, [30] Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colors, a prey of divers colors of needlework, of divers colors of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?

So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.

Consider the Praise and Glory Ascribed to God

No time should be lost in returning thanks to the Lord for his mercies; for our praises are most acceptable, pleasant, and profitable, when they flow from a full heart.

By this, love and gratitude would be more excited and more deeply fixed in the hearts of believers; the events would be more known and longer remembered.

Whatever Deborah, Barak, or the army had done, the Lord must have all the praise. The will, the power, and the success were all from Him.

The Distress and Deliverance of Israel Described

Deborah describes the distressed state of Israel under the tyranny of Jabin, that their salvation might appear more gracious.

She shows what brought this misery upon them. It was their idolatry.

They chose new gods, with new names. But under all these images, Satan was worshipped. Deborah was a mother to Israel, by diligently promoting the salvation of their souls.

She calls on those who shared the advantages of this great salvation, to offer up thanks to God for it. Let such as are restored, not only to their liberty as other Israelites, but to their rank, speak God's praises.

This is the Lord's doing. In these acts of his, justice was executed on his enemies.

In times of persecution, God's ordinances, the walls of salvation, whence the waters of life are drawn, are resorted to at the hazard of the lives of those who attend them.

At all times Satan will endeavour to hinder the believer from drawing near to the throne of grace.

Life Application

Notice God's kindness to his trembling people. It is the glory of God to protect those who are most exposed, and to help the weakest.

Let us notice the benefit we have from the public peace, the inhabitants of villages especially, and give God the praise.

Her story shows that God can accomplish great things through people who are willing to be led by him.

Deborah's life challenges us in several ways.

She reminds us of the need to be available both to God and to others.

She encourages us to spend our efforts on what we can do rather than on worrying about what we can't do.

Deborah challenges us to be wise leaders.

She demonstrates what a person can accomplish when God is in control.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Verse Concept: Matthew Henry's Concept Bible Commentary.