

Deborah, a Mother in Israel

Introduction:

After Joshua passed away, Israel did evil in God's sight. Because Israel had no king, the people did whatever they thought was right—there were no real standards of right or wrong. It was a sort of "If it feels good do it." mindset. The people served foreign gods and broke their covenant (agreement) with God. The Lord allowed various foreigners to harass them. Each time Israel cried out to God for a deliverer, God would raise up a leader (known as a judge) to help His people. The judges were military and governmental leaders.

It was during one of the times when Israel was doing evil in God's sight that Jabin, king of Canaan, began to oppress Israel. He had a military commander named Sisera and 900 iron chariots. He harshly mistreated Israel for a period of twenty years.

Story:

Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth, was a judge in Israel. She sat under a palm tree known as the "palm tree of Deborah" between the cities of Ramah and Bethel and made her judgments. Deborah was also known as a prophetess.

One day Deborah sent for a man named Barak, the commander of the Israelite army. She said, **"It has become clear that GOD, the God of Israel, commands you: Go to Mount Tabor and prepare for battle. Take ten companies of soldiers from Naphtali and Zebulun. I'll take care of getting Sisera, the leader of Jabin's army, to the Kishon River with all his chariots and troops. And I'll make sure you win the battle."**(Judges 4:6, 7)

Barak said he would only go if Deborah would go with him. To this Deborah replied: **"Of course I'll go with you. But understand that with an attitude like that, there'll be no glory in it for you. GOD will use a woman's hand to take care of Sisera."** (Judges 4:9)

Barak went to Mount Tabor with Deborah and ten companies of soldiers (about 10,000 men). Heber the Kenite reported Barak's movements to Sisera. Sisera took his 900 iron chariots, all his soldiers, and went to the Kishon River.

Deborah told Barak to charge because God was giving him the victory over Sisera. Barak went down Mount Tabor with his 10,000 men.

The Lord confused Sisera and his army. He sent torrents of rain. Their chariots were getting stuck in the Kishon River because it was at flood stage. Sisera left his chariot and ran away on foot. Meanwhile, Barak and his troops chased after the chariots and the army all the way to Harosheth Hagoyim. All of Sisera's troops were killed; no man was left alive.

Sisera was running for his life. He headed to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. Jael stepped out of her tent and welcomed Sisera to come inside. He went in, and she covered him with a blanket. He asked for some water to drink. She gave him milk instead and then re-covered him with the blanket. Sisera asked her to stand guard at the entrance to the tent, and if anyone asked if a man was inside she was to reply, "NO."

Once he was fast asleep, Jael took a tent peg and hammer and drove the tent peg through Sisera's temple. This fulfilled Deborah's prophecy about Sisera dying at the hands of a woman. Barak was looking for Sisera. Jael showed him the dead body of Sisera inside her tent.

The Israelites grew stronger and stronger until they had destroyed King Jabin of Canaan.

On that day Deborah and Barak sang a song of victory known as "The Song of Deborah" (You can read it in Judges 5.). Then the land of Israel had peace for 40 years.

Summary:

God raised up Deborah to be a leader in Israel. Most of the judges were men. The song of Deborah tells us that the villagers were all hiding in their walled cities until Deborah arose as a "Mother in Israel", meaning she became a leader of the people. We don't even know if she had any natural children of her own. Apparently, her care for and love of all the people of Israel made her seem like a mother to them. Her leadership inspired confidence in the people so much that Barak wanted her to go into battle with him.

Deborah had a prophetic gift. She shared God's words and insights with Barak and the others. This is how she knew that God was giving them the victory, and it was time for battle. This is also how she knew that Sisera would be killed by a woman.

She must have been a courageous woman to be willing to go with Barak and the 10,000 soldiers into battle. She may have been sort of like bait to lure Sisera into the battle. We see that Deborah's courage was based on deep faith in God and His promises. She took God at His word.

Deborah must have been a wise woman because we learned from this story that she sat under a palm tree and made important legal decisions or judgments for the people of Israel.

She also must have been a multi-talented woman because she wrote the Song of Deborah which is one of the oldest poems in the Bible. It shows her knowledge of the history of Israel because it recalls how God brought the Israelites through the wilderness and into Canaan. It is really a beautiful poem.

What can you learn about leadership skills from this story about Deborah? Did she have any skills you admire and would like to use in your own life?

Discussion Questions:

1. When the Bible says the people did evil in God's sight what does it mean? (Look at the introduction above.)
2. Does God seem to approve of the attitude, "If it feels good, do it."?
3. What were the consequences of the people breaking covenant with God?
4. Why did God raise up judges for Israel?
5. How many years did King Jabin harshly mistreat Israel?
6. Who was Deborah?
7. Who was Barak?
8. Why do you think Barak wouldn't go into battle without Deborah?
9. What did the Lord do to help Israel defeat Sisera's armies? What happened to them?
10. How did Jael trick Sisera? How did this fulfill Deborah's prophecy?
11. How long did Israel have peace after this victory?