



DEBORAH

LEADER'S GUIDE
LESSON 5



THE WOMAN WHO INSPIRED A NATION

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DEBORAH - THE WOMAN WHO INSPIRED A NATION [Judges 4-5]

Introduction: Out of the pages of Israel's history arises a woman named Deborah. She was a woman of very unique abilities and superior leadership skills. Not only did God raise her up to be a prophetess but God also appointed her to be a judge to lead her nation out of Canaanite oppression. Her godly wisdom, courageous spirit and magnetic personality inspired her nation to take action against their oppressors, leading them to victory. Deborah also encouraged her people to repent and return to their faith in the God of Israel. Let's look at this remarkable lady through the lens of Scripture.

Deborah's Background

1. Deborah's name means bee. According to science, bees range among the highest in intelligence. Her leadership and wisdom were like honey to her countrymen but to her enemies she had a fatal sting. Deborah stands out as one of the wisest of all the O.T. women. Deborah was a woman who was an inspiration to her countrymen in the faithful and untiring service she gave to Israel through her unwavering faith in God. She was fearless and was highly respected in Israel by both men and women alike. She was one of those women who even men stepped aside to follow her leading.
2. There is no genealogy given regarding Deborah in Scripture. Her home was between Ramah and Beth-el which was in the hill country of Ephraim. Deborah is described as the "wife of Lapidoth" [Judges 4:4]. The Hebrew word ishshah is used for woman or wife. The word "Lapidoth" means torches or lightening flashes. The three views concerning Lapidoth are as follows: (1) the name of her husband; (2) refers to her prophetic office and can be translated a woman of splendor, torches or lights; and (3) denotes some unknown place and can be translated a woman from a particular area or town. If she was married, Scripture is silent in giving any details about her husband or if she had any children. The only thing it says is that Deborah became a "mother of Israel" — a maternal figure to her nation [Judges 5:7].
3. Deborah was a woman of many remarkable gifts. She was well known throughout the country. She was a leader who was wise, godly, fearless, public-minded, compassionate, determined and had a magnetic personality to inspire others. As a prophetess, she told the Israelites about God and His power. As a judge, she ruled with God's truth and wisdom. She was a warrior who fought for Israel's freedom, and

her presence gave confidence to Barak and his army to go to battle even though the odds were against them.

4. Deborah lived in the time of the judges where “there was no king in Israel [Judges 21:25]. The time of the Judges covered a period of around 450 years. It is approximately 1/3 of the total history of Israel set forth in the Old Testament. Jewish history spans from around 1446 B.C. to 400 B.C. Historically, this period links the conquest of Canaan with that of the Kings. Theologically, this time serves as a reminder that obedience to God brings blessing and disobedience brings punishment and death. The judges’ period is summed up very well in Proverbs 14:34, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”
5. The book of Judges describes the political, social and religious decline during this period of Jewish history and shows their effect upon the Jewish people. The book of Judges clearly sets forth a pattern to their religious experience with God. The five stages to this pattern are rest, rebellion, retribution, repentance and restoration. This vicious cycle is repeated many times in the book of Judges.
6. God’s ultimate plan for Israel was the theocratic form of government where God Himself would be the supreme ruler over his people. Because Israel disobeyed the commandments of God and followed after false gods like Baal and Ashtaroth, God raised up enemies to oppress them [Judges 2:12-19]. In God’s infinite wisdom, He chose to raise up judges to deliver them from their oppression when they looked to Him. There are three important aspects to notice about the “judge form” of rule: (1) The judges were appointed by God — not elected or appointed by men. (2) It was not a continuous form of government. There were large gaps in the earlier part of Judges between deliverers, and the judges were raised up only when needed. (3) The judges were not obligated to anyone except God —no advisors, no courts, no heads of state, etc. The reason for this form of government was that if the disciplinary measures brought about the desired goal of obedience in the people, the “judge form” of rule could be brought to an immediate close and theocracy in its finest form could be ushered in. *See insert A
7. There are 14 judges in all. Twelve in the book of Judges and two in the book of 1 Samuel. These judges are classified as either major or minor judges. There are two main criteria for this distinction: (1) whether the judge effected a military deliverance and (2) whether or not the judge’s record is extensive in Scripture. The eight major judges are Othneil, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Eli and Samuel. The six minor judges are Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon. The most extensive record of a minor judge is three verses long. *See insert B

8. The period of the judges was a time of great affliction and oppression for the Jewish people; however, they brought it upon themselves because of their spiritual disobedience to God. Their faith was only as good as the last judge before the “children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord” [Judges 4:1]. Even after six oppressions by their enemies, Israel still did not turn to God. The last verse in the book of Judges sums up the sad state of God’s chosen people for it says, “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” [Judges 21:25].

Deborah — The Prophetess & Judge

9. When Ehud the judge was dead, the people turned away from God. This time God used the Canaanites to greatly oppress the people of Israel for twenty years [Judges 4:3]. The Canaanites paralyzed Israelite trade and disrupted their normal life style. The Jews couldn’t walk the main roads nor farm their lands without fearing for their lives. They lost their freedom, their property pillaged, their women were molested and their children taken as slaves. Although Jabin was the king of the Canaanites, it was Sisera, the captain of Jabin’s army, who was the real menace to Israel. Military superiority was evident in the fact that the Canaanites had 900 chariots of iron while the Israelites had none. Any resistance against the Canaanites seemed almost impossible until Deborah arrived on the scene. When the children of Israel cried out to God, it was then that God raised up Deborah. At this time, the men of Israel were failing to lead in the matters of faith and leadership; therefore, God raised up a woman to do His will.

10. Deborah served the Lord in a dual capacity for she was both a judge and a prophetess. She was the only woman appointed by God to serve as a judge. This was a high honor for Deborah for this position was usually held by spirit-filled men. However, she was also a prophetess of which only a handful of women were given the prophetic gift which is the ability to discern the mind and purpose of God. Just like a prophet, a prophetess had to be 100% correct in what they said. Beside Deborah, other prophetesses were Miriam [Exodus 15:20], Huldah [2 Kings 22:14], the prophetesses [Nehemiah 6:14; Isaiah 8:3] and Anna who was present at Jesus’ circumcision [Luke 2:36].

11. Deborah used her prophetic gift in strict accordance with Mosaic law to settle disputes among the people and to give spiritual direction to all those who came to her. Deborah was completely devoted to the service of God, and she was God’s mouthpiece to His people during this time. The meeting place for all in Israel who sought judgment at her hands was between Ramah and Beth-el under a palm tree

[Judges 4:5-6]. It was from here she dispensed wisdom, justice and discernment; it was from here she gained the respect of all of Israel. *See insert C

12. The ancient world was predominantly a man's world. Women were treated as slaves and lived a life of hardship. They had no rights and they were regarded as a piece of property by their husbands; however when God made the woman, He made her in the image of God and to be the helpmeet of man—equal in nature but different in sex and role. Because of man's sinful (pride, ignorance and moral perversion), women were considered greatly inferior to man in all areas of life. Only in Israel under the Jewish law did the Jewish women experience more liberties, greater tasks and a higher social standing than the women in the surrounding heathen nations. God has used and elevated women throughout history to accomplish His redemptive plan for mankind.
13. According to God's instructions, Deborah summoned Barak and gave him the command to gather 10,000 soldiers from Naphtali and Zebulun, the two tribes most affected by the Canaanite oppression. God wanted to show Israel and the Canaanites that He alone is sovereign in the affairs of men. The odds were greatly against Israel for Sisera commanded an army of 100,000 men and 900 chariots. Not only was the Israelite army small but they had few weapons and no chariots [Judges 5:8]. God instructed Deborah that Barak was to meet Sisera in the Valley of Jezreel which was to Sisera's advantage. Although the task looked humanly impossible, God gives a promise of victory [Judges 4:6-7].
14. Barak requested that either Deborah go with him or he would not go into battle [Judges 4:8]. For whatever reasons Barak gave this ultimatum, Deborah agreed to go with him. She was dedicated to put all aside to serve her beloved country; however, she tells Barak that the honor of the victory would not go to him but to a woman. Deborah accompanies Barak to Kedesh where 10,000 Israelite men respond to Barak's call to service. They all go up to Mt Tabor to prepare for battle [Judges 4:6].
15. God advances Sisera and his men and chariots to the Kishon River just as God had promised [Judges 4:7]. Deborah does not accompany Barak in actual battle for this was not a place for a woman, but she gives a word of encouragement to Barak in that God had gone before him to secure Israel the victory [Judges 4:14]. Barak who had little faith in the beginning demonstrates tremendous faith by leading his little army [outnumbered and ill equipped] into battle. God continued to be with Barak and his men until Jabin, the king of Canaan and his army were destroyed [Judges 4:23-24]. It was God who undeniably brought the victory to Israel; without God's

help, Israel would have easily been slaughtered. God commends Barak in that his name is listed among the heroes of faith [Hebrews 11:32].

16. Sisera's confidence was chiefly in his military might. It was God who fought for Israel and confused the Canaanite army by sending a violent thunderstorm with torrential rains. Sisera's chariots became inoperable when the Kishon River overflowed its banks. This supernatural event made victory possible for the small Israeli army. Barak and his men relentlessly pursued the fleeing enemy to Harosheth killing all of Sisera's men while Sisera ran north in an attempt to reach Hazor to report the battle to King Jabin. However, Sisera took refuge in the tent of Jael the Kenite [Judges 4:15-17] which was located not far from Barak's hometown of Kedesh.
17. Jael Invited the weary Sisera into her tent in the usual form of Oriental hospitality. Under the guise of hospitality, she removed any suspensions by giving him food and shelter. While he was asleep, she killed him by driving a tent nail through his temples. Shortly afterwards when Barak arrived and was invited into Jael's tent, he witnessed the fulfillment of Deborah's prophesy that Sisera would be delivered into the hands of a woman. There before him, Sisera was dead; thus depriving Barak the glory of victory [Judges 4:21-22].
18. Jael, the Kenite, lied and deceive Sisera which ultimately lead to his death. Was this right? The Scriptures say that God of Israel does not like lying and hates wickedness and deceit of every kind [Proverbs 12:22; Psm. 120: 2]. Deborah did prophesied that Sisera was going to meet his death by the hands of a woman. However, does this justify the way Jael did it? Was it right that she used lying and deceit to lure Sisera into her tent and then murder him in cold blood while he was sleeping. Or did Jael err when she took the situation in her own hands by not allowing God to designate the means of punishment? Again, there are two thoughts on this — (1) never lie under any circumstances [Prov 6:16-17] or (2) lying during times of war or when saving a life is permissible [Exodus 1:17, 20-21]. It appears that Deborah praises Jael for killing Sisera. It may be because Sisera's death was justified because of war and she was praising Jael for her bravery not her deceit [Judges 5:24-27]. *See insert D
19. Deborah, the prophetess and judge, also had a remarkable poetic ability [Judges 5]. After the Canaanite defeat, Deborah composed a song which she sang with Barak that is considered one of the finest in ancient Hebrew poetry. The song is a brilliant piece of work in which the language is descriptive and full of meaning. This song is a song of praise and magnifies the Lord who enabled Israel to have complete

victory over their enemies. R.H. Feiffer states that it “deserves a place among the best songs of victory ever written”. This God-given victory over their enemies brought forty years of peace and rest to the land of Israel [Judges 5:31]. *See notes on Deborah’s Song of Victory.

Conclusion: Deborah is known as one of the most amazing women in the O.T. God raised her up in a time of moral and spiritual decay. She was such an outstanding leader that even men admired her character, wisdom and courage. She was a woman who possessed many incredible gifts. She was not only given the gift by God to prophesy but she was the only woman judge appointed by God during this dark time in Israel’s history. She was a warrior, encourager, and poetess. However, among her greatest assets were her faith in God. She was wise in her counsel, fearless in her leadership and steadfast in her faith. She was also known as the “mother of Israel” for her love and concern for her people and nation. Her remarkable life and spiritual legacy are a wonderful testament in how God can use any woman who allows God to be in complete control of her life.

DEBORAH'S SONG OF VICTORY

[Judges 5]

First Section

- Vs. 1 Deborah & Barak sang the song but it was Deborah who wrote it.
- Vs. 2 Praises God for the courage of the people to fight against their enemies.
- Vss. 3-5 Glorious time when Israel was exalted to be a nation.
- Vss. 6-8 The disgraceful decline of the nation.
- Vss. 9-11 The joyful turn of events following the appearance of Deborah.
- Vs. 12 Deborah summons them to rejoice in their victory.

Second Section

- Vss. 13-15a The mighty gathering of the brave to battle.
- Vss. 15b-18 The cowardice of those who stayed away from the battle and the bravery of the warriors who risked their lives.
- Vss. 19-21 The successful result of conflict.

Third Section

- Vss. 22-23 The flight and pursuit of the foe.
- Vss. 24-27 A commemoration of the slaying of Sisera by Jael.
- Vss. 28-30 A scornful description of the disappointment of Sisera's mother, who was counting upon the large arrival of booty.
- Vs. 31a The hope that all the enemies of the Lord might perish and Israel increase in strength.
- Vs. 31b The account of this event is brought to a close.

*Please note: The above information was taken from the book, Commentary on the Old Testament by Kiel and Delitzsch, Vol. 2, pages 307-308.

INSERTS FOR THE STUDY OF DEBORAH

“A”

Leon Wood, Distressing Days of the Judges, p. 24 comments on theocracy:

A true theocracy, for this form of government, knows no earthly king at all. There are no ministers of state, no court, no parliament, no congress. God Himself is Ruler, and He employs no earthly representatives through whom to work. He expects people to look to Him for leadership and to render obedience to Him. In this way, God is made the center of interest for people, the focal point of their lives, and the highest object of their attention. It was this form of rule that God desired and planned for Israel as the twelve tribes came to dwell in the promised land of Canaan.

“B”

Leon Woods, Distressing Days of the Judges, p. 24 explains why Eli and Samuel are considered major judges:

Two of the eight major judges are presented outside of the Book of Judges and neither effected a military deliverance. They are Eli and Samuel. On what basis can they be called major. The answer is twofold: First, both qualify on the score of the length of report. In fact, each is talked about in considerable detail in the early chapters of 1 Samuel. Second, both were unusually important in Israel's history . . . Samuel was easily the most important of all the judges, and Eli, too, carried a significance not usually recognized.

“C”

Jamison Fausset and Brown, A Commentary, Critical and Exploratory on the Old and New Testament, Vol. 1, p. 78 remarks about Deborah:

She was a woman of extraordinary wisdom and piety, instructed in divine knowledge by the Spirit and accustomed to interpret the will of God. She acquired an extensive influence, and was held in universal respect, insomuch that she became the animating mind of the government and discharged all the special duties of a judge except that of a military leader.

“D”

Kiel-Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 2, p. 306 comments on Jael’s deception:

For Jehovah God of Israel not only abhors lying lips (Proverbs 12:22), but hates wickedness and deception of every kind . . . God had no doubt so ordered it, that Sisera should meet with his death in Jael’s tent, where he had taken refuge; but this divine purpose did not justify Jael in giving to the enemy of Israel a hospitable reception into her tent, making him feel secure both by word and deed, and then murdering him secretly while he was asleep. Such conduct as that was not the operation of the Spirit of God, but the fruit of a heroism inspired by flesh and blood; and even in Deborah’s song it is not lauded as a divine act. . . The act itself was not morally justified, either by this prophetic announcement, or by the fact that it is commemorated in the song of Deborah.