

Deborah: The Woman Who Was a Fearless Patriot

Truth does not change with circumstances - neither do leaders who have integrity.

~George Settle~

Her names	Her name means “Honey Bee” (1),
Key Scriptures	Judges 4-5
Promises In Scripture	Judges 5:7, Psalm 20:7, Isaiah 50:10

Her Background, Life and Times

Women as Leaders: While women leaders were uncommon in Israelite society, they were not unheard of. Her leadership role probably evolved gradually, as her wisdom in making judgments became known. When God spoke to Deborah, she immediately responded by calling to Barak to lead the people in a battle against their oppressor of twenty years. Barak’s reluctance to go without Deborah starkly revealed Israel’s lack of strong male leadership. Deborah was the only female to hold the position of judge in Israel, but she was not the only female prophet. Several others are listed: Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), Anna (Luke 2:36), and four unmarried daughters of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:9). (1)

Women as Leaders: Deborah illustrates an important truth. Even in a male-oriented society, women with exceptional personal and spiritual qualities can rise to leadership. Deborah’s impact is only partly explained by her call as a prophetess. Judges 5:6-7 describes a total breakdown of Hebrew society, which Deborah’s vigorous leadership was able to repair. (8)

Woman as Leaders: God does endow some women with superior gifts and for such women, as Deborah, even men will step aside or follow in her train. (3)

Family Connections: The only personal touch we have is that she was “the wife of Laidoth” whose name is the only thing the Bible gives us. Their home was between Bethel and Ramah in the hill country of Ephraim. The palm tree under which Deborah ruled and possibly lived was a land mark, as palms were then rare in Palestine.

Israel’s Enemies: We read that God sold the nation to their enemies, as if to say, “They are not mine, they are yours; do with them as you will” (Joshua 23:13, Judges 4:2). So Israel was exploited, oppressed; their crops were eaten by another, their property pillaged. People were turned out of their homes, their women were molested, and their young men were made slaves. Warriors were cowed, and leaders dispersed. They were in extreme distress. Independence was gone and they were oppressed by a strong military power with no sense of justice. This time it was Jabin, the King of Canaan, and the ruthless Sisera, who held them in iron clutches. (3)

Sisera: A mighty man who had terrorized Israel for many years. Sisera commanded 100,000 fighters, (to Israel’s 10,000), and had 900 iron chariots. (2)

Jabin: Jabin is most likely a dynastic title. Hazor heads a coalition of Canaanite peoples who have dominated the Hebrews for some 20 years! (8)

Iron Chariots: The Canaanite chariots mentioned here are defined by their iron stud work as the heavier Mesopotamian type. These chariots, often equipped with blades attached to the wheels, were used to charge infantry and scatter the enemy. Such chariots were ineffective in hill country, but on flat plains were terrifying instruments. In Judges, chariots represent the military superiority of the enemy: a superiority which should have called Israel to greater reliance on God, but instead lead to a failure to complete her mission of conquest. Spiritually, chariots stand for any overwhelming challenge we may flee from in fear, but can overcome by faith and confidence in God. (8)

Forced Labor: The most critical failure of the post-Joshua era was the practice of letting defeated Canaanites remain in the land, in direct disobedience to God’s command. (8)

Israel: It was a bleak time for Israel, a time characterized by disobedience, idolatry, and defeat. Israel had entered the promised Land, but because of the many pagan strongholds that remained, the Israelites suffered spiritual decline and the ever-present threat of battle. During these turbulent times, God let the children of Israel fall into the hands of Jabin, the king of Canaan, who harshly oppressed the Israelites for 20 years. (7)

Her Character
<p>Leader: Her vision of the world was shaped not by the political situation of her day but by her relationship with God. Though women in the ancient world did not usually become political leaders, Deborah was just the leader Israel needed - a prophetess who heard God and believed him, whose courage aroused the people, enabling them to throw off foreign oppression. (1)</p>
<p>Prophetess: Deborah is one of several females in Scripture distinguished as being endowed with the prophetic gift, which means the ability to discern the mind and purposed of God and declare it to others. In the days of the Old Testament, prophets and prophetesses were the media between God and His people Israel, and their gift to perceive and proclaim divine truth stamped them as being divinely inspired. (2)</p>
<p>Agitator: AS one meaning of “agitation” is to stir up or excite public discussion with the view of producing a change, then Deborah was an effective agitator who stirred up Israel’s concern about its low spiritual condition. The land was debauched and well-nigh ruined, and under the rule of the Canaanites liberty had been lost. The people were dejected and afraid, for their spirits had been broken and all hope of deliverance had vanished. But Deborah did more than prophesy; she aroused the nation from its lethargy and despair. Hers was a fearless and unsolicited devotion to the emancipation of God’s people, and she awoke in them a determination to free themselves from their wretched bondage and degradation. Out went her call and challenge to the help of the Lord against the enemy. (2)</p>
<p>Warrior: Having fought with words she went forth to throw off the oppressor’s yoke with swords, and what a fighter this patriotic and inspired heroine roved to be. Deborah sent for Barak, the son of Abinoam of Naphtali, and told him that it was God’s will that he should lead her forces and deliver the country. Long slavery and repeated failures made Barak hesitate, but ultimately he decided to lead the army provided Deborah, the brave-hearted and dauntless ruler, went with him. (2)</p>
<p>Poetess: The prose and poem of Judges 4 and 5 are associated with the same historic event, and reveal that Deborah could not only prophecy, arouse, rule and fight, but also write. Deborah, after her victory over the Canaanites, composed a song which is regarded as one of the finest specimens of ancient Hebrew poetry, being superior to the celebrated song of Miriam.</p>
<p>Maternal Figure: The last glimpse we have of Deborah is as “a mother in Israel” (Judges 5:7). Deborah became as a mother to all in Israel, and the source of this spiritual motherhood was her piety. Above all of her remarkable gifts was her trust in God which is ever the source of any woman’s highest adornment. (2)</p> <p>Maternal Figures: Before she became great in war she was a homemaker, a mother of Israel. She had a heart touched with compassion for not only her family, but for all of Israel. (3)</p>
<p>Ultimately Capable: Deborah was one of those women who made you want to follow her. Her strength of character and her wise, confident resolve won her a place of unrivaled leadership in the house of Israel - and showed again that God can bring us success when our trust is in Him. Deborah was one of those women who did it all. She was a wife, a prophetess, a civic official, a judge, a worship leader. Wow. God seems to equip some people with an incredible load of talent and versatility. And those who make those gifts available for His use are able to accomplish amazing things with their 24 hours. Are you able to look at women like that and - without picking them apart of feeling the need to make excuses - thank God for what they do? And thank God for what He’s given you to do? (4)</p>
<p>Virtuous: The Hebrew word for <i>virtuous</i> is used more than 200 times in the Bible to describe an army, and, as you’ll agree, it aptly describes Deborah. This Old Testament term refers to “a force” and means “able, capable, mighty, strong, valiant, powerful, efficient, wealthy, and worth.” The word is also used in reference to a man or men of war and men prepared for ward. Simply change the masculine to the feminine, and you begin to understand the power at the core of a virtuous woman, the power at the core of Deborah! To lead God’s people into battle against their oppressors, Deborah called upon her complete store of mental toughness and physical energy. Such toughness and energy are the primary traits of a successful army, and they also characterize Deborah, God’s prophetess. (7)</p>
Her Sorrow
<p>Her People: That her people had sunk into despair because of their idolatry, forgetting God’s promises and the faith of their ancestors. (1)</p>

Her Joy

God: That God turned the enemy's strength on its head, bestowing power to the weak and blessing the land with peace for forty years. (1)

Her Husband: Lapidoth, although not so forceful and capable as his wife, yet he was illuminative in his own way and behind the scenes was as good and conspicuous in faith as the woman he loved, and in whose glory he was content to bask. Deborah would never have become the dazzling figure she did, had she not had the love, sympathy, advice and encouragement of a husband who was happy to ride in the second chariot. (2)

Her victory A fearful hailstorm overtook the land during the battle of Sisera, and the Canaanites were almost blinded by the rain, and were ultimately overwhelmed in the swollen river of Kishon. Sisera escaped but was killed by Jael while asleep in her tent (that story next week!). Deborah gained undying fame as the female warrior who rescued her people from their cruel foes. (2)

Her Promises, Her Lessons, Her Legacy

Motherhood: Perhaps you're not in an influential position of authority - you can still be a mother to your children and the children in your neighborhood and lead them in the right direction. Perhaps you have little power in your job or position - you can still be a mother to those around you and inspire them to righteousness. Perhaps your life allows little time or opportunity for significant positions of leadership - you can still be a mother in your sphere, whether big or small, wielding influence far beyond your lowly position. You can be like Deborah, used of God to be a mother in Israel. (1)

Wisdom of Deborah: Deborah shows us the way of wisdom. She truly lived out the adage that the way up is down. The way to greatness in God's kingdom is the way of humble service. Never seeking, never aggressive, never too assertive, Deborah waited on God, encouraged others to take the lead, and assisted only when needed. (7)

Virtuous You Declare to Him your desire to become a woman who, like a warrior, moves through the challenges and duties of life with valor, courage, bravery, stamina, endurance, and power - *His* power. (7)

Modern day Deborahs: Whatever Deborah had is available to you today. Her wisdom is discovered in the Scriptures. Her confidence in God is found in a relationship with him. Her bravery is achievable when you put your trust in God and his promises. Her inner strength and calm leadership are characteristic of confidence not in herself but in her God. All Deborah offered to Israel she offers to you as an example of a woman willing to be used by God. (1)

Modern day Deborahs: May was, as Deborahs, *awaken* to the need of the Kingdom of God, *arise* to do our part, and *march on* with the Lord of Hosts to victory. (3)

Modern day Deborahs: You may feel that you don't have a lot of influence on anybody. But you do. Offer up to God your talents and your relationships. And begin using them to extend His kingdom. (4)

Modern day Deborahs: Christian womanhood is at a risk in our culture today. We are in desperate need for women of faith who are willing to courageously stand against sin and stand for righteousness. But it is not enough for us to make this decision for ourselves and to carry the banner alone. We must motivate others to follow. Christian women need to have a vision of women confidently and boldly serving the Lord God. We need to challenge them to lives of virtue and servanthood in order to glorify our glorious God. We cannot issue the challenge in a vacuum. We must be willing to make the investment, to give faithful instruction, to nurture, then to sound a clarion call to biblical womanhood. Are there women who will step forward and bring their lives under the authority of God's Word regardless of the risks? Together we will celebrate a resurgence of virtuous living among the daughters of the King. (Susan Hunt) (4)

Wholeheartedness: All women who love God desire, deep in their souls, to possess and display the same remarkable, wholehearted devotion to God that Deborah had. Do you desire this? Pause now and give thought to a few of the factors that contribute to a fervent and unqualified commitment to God, that foster a life of great faith, deep commitment, and abundant spiritual energy: *A life spent in God's Word* (2Timothy 3:16 & 17: All Scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness, and God's Word thoroughly equips you for a lifetime of good works.), *A life spent in prayer* (James 4:2: You do not have because you do not ask, so ask for greater strength and perseverance, greater faith and devotion), *A life spent in obedience* (James 1:22, 25: As you dedicate your life to being "a doer of the word," God promises that you will be blessed in all you do.) (7)

Deborah

Bibliography:

<i>Source 1. Women of the Bible: A one-Year Devotional Study of Women in Scripture</i> By Ann Spangler & Jean E. Syswerda, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999, ISBN: 0-310-22352-0
<i>Source 2. All the Women of the Bible</i> by Herbert Lockyer, Zondervan Publishing House, Michigan, ISBN 0-310-28151-2
<i>Source 3. she shall be called Woman</i> by Frances Vander Velde, Kegel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1957, ISBN:0-8254-4003-3
<i>Source 4. Women of Character</i> Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee, 1998 ISBN: 0-8054-9277-1)
<i>Source 5. Great Women of the Bible</i> by Clarence Edward Macartney, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1942, ISBN: 0-8010-5901-5
<i>Source 6. Bad Girls of the Bible and What We can Learn From Them</i> By Liz Curtis Higgs, Waterbrook Press, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 1999, ISBN: 1-57856-125-6
<i>Source 7: Women Who Loved God</i> By Elizabeth George, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 1999, ISBN: 1-56507-850-0
<i>Source 8: The Bible Reader's Companion</i> By Lawrence O. Richards, Chariot Victor Publishing, Wheaton Illinois, 1991, ISBN: 0-89693-039-4
<i>Source 9: Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective</i> by James B. Hurley, Academie Books, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1981, ISBN: 0-310-42731-2
<i>Source 10: Manners and Customs of the Bible</i> , By James M. Freeman, Whitaker House, New Kensington, PA, 1996, ISBN: 0-88368-290-7
<i>Source 11: Archaeology and Bible History</i> , By Joseph P. Free, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992, ISBN: 0-310-47961-4
<i>Source 12: 30 Days to Understanding The Bible</i> , By Max Anders, Word Publishing, Dallas, 1994, ISBN: 0-8499-3489-3
<i>Source 13: Illustrated Dictionary of Bible Life and Times</i> , Barbara J. Morgan, Editor, Reader's Digest, The Reader's Digest Association, Inc. Pleasantville, NY, 1997