

Deborah The Israelite Judge

'Deborah a prophetess, was the wife of Lappidoth. She judged Israel at that time and lived (spent her days) under the palm tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim. The Children of Israel came to her for judgment. She called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh (in the area of) Naphtali and said to him, "The God of Israel has commanded saying, 'Go up Mount Tabor and take with you ten thousand men of the children (tribe) of Naphtali and of the children (tribe) of Zebulun. I will draw to you, to the river Kishon, Sisera the captain of Jabin's army with his chariots and his multitude and I will deliver him into your hand.'"

Barak said to Deborah, "If you will go with me then I will go, but if you will not go with me I will not go."

Deborah said, "I will surely go with you. The journey you take will not be for your honour for God will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman."

Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak called (the fighting age men from the tribes of) Zebulun and Naphtali to meet together in Kedesh. There went up ten thousand men at his command and Deborah went up with him. Heber the Kenite (whose wife was Jael) had separated himself from the Kenites, from the children of Hobab, the brother-in-law of Moses and had pitched his tent as far as the oak in Zaanannim which is by Kedesh. Sisera was told Barak had gone up Mount Tabor. Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron and all the people who were with him from Harosheth of the Gentiles to the river Kishon. Deborah said to Barak, "Get up, for this is the day the Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand. God has gone out before you."

Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men after him. God confused Sisera, all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak. Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. Barak pursued after the chariots and after the army to Harosheth of the Gentiles. The entire army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword there was not a man left alive. However Sisera fled away on foot 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. Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Turn in to me. Do not be afraid."

Sisera came into the tent and she covered him with a rug. He said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink for I am thirsty."

She opened a bottle of milk, gave him drink and covered him. He said to her, "Stand in the door of the tent and it will be, when any man comes to inquire of you and ask, 'Is there any man here?' You will say, 'No.'"

Jael, Heber's wife took a tent peg and a hammer in her hand and went softly to him, struck the pin into his temples and it pierced through into the ground for he was in a deep sleep so he swooned and died. Behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said, "Come, I will show you the man whom you seek."

Barak came and behold, Sisera lay dead with the tent peg in his temples. On that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the Children of Israel. The hand of the Children of Israel prevailed more and more against Jabin the king of Canaan until they had destroyed him' (Judges 4:4 to 24).

Deborah, whose name means, 'A bee', with Barak saved Israel from Canaanite oppression. The Canaanites had been subdued by Joshua (circa 1,400 BC) but had become powerful again and with their iron chariots, were wearing Israel down. Deborah was an Israelite judge who lived about 300 years after Joshua (Judges 11:26) and judged Israel for forty years (Judges 5:31). Both Joshua and Deborah conquered a king named Jabin who ruled an area called Hazor in Canaan (Joshua 11:1; Judges 4:24). Living 300 years apart, the two King's Jabin (possibly distantly related) were enemies of Israel. Hazor was located about 16 kilometres north of the Sea of Galilee on the edge of the Hula Valley. It was about ten times the size of other cities in the area and was the most important city in the area for 600 years, between the 19th and 13th centuries BC. It linked Mesopotamia to Egypt making it a wealthy and powerful city. The name 'Hazor' means 'strong' or 'fortified' or 'enclosed'. The city is surrounded by steep man-made mounds of earth and stones forty metres high, making the city very difficult to conquer. During excavations, a palace, basalt building slabs and beams of cedar wood were found revealing an opulent lifestyle. Walls were lined with soot and layers of ash confirming the fire during Joshua's time (Joshua 11:11 & 13). Also found were jewellery, gold, bronze statues, bronze swords, ivory, wax seals, a cup with a lions head engraved, jars of wheat, ceramics and other normal everyday items. Also found at that site was a gold ornament depicting King Jabin receiving circumcised slaves, revealing evidence he had defeated the Israelites with a terrible defeat and subsequent oppression.

Judge Deborah was a God-fearing woman who had remained faithful to God throughout the backsliding of Israel. The sin of Israel grieved her and she tried to bring them back to the Lord. She was known as the Mother of Israel (Judges 5:7) for her wisdom and compassion. Deborah listened to the Lord's instructions so He elevated her to lead the nation's government militarily and spiritually. God gave her the strategy to defeat the evil enemy Jabin. Deborah trusted the Lord implicitly and did not shy away from His command. Barak was not so confident and refused to go to war unless Deborah accompanied him. Initially, he did not seem to have the faith she had. The Canaanites had 100,000 men, 900 chariots, spears and shields but none of the Israelite troops had any weapons of war because the Canaanites had taken them all (Judges 5:8) and going

to war without any weapons was suicidal. However, knowing Deborah had heard from the Lord of Israel, Barak gathered the troops together on the summit of Mount Tabor and led them into battle, knowing there would be no honour in it for him because he refused to go unless Deborah, a woman, went with him. Further to that, Deborah had to tell Barak to get up out of bed (Judges 4:14) so he could fight. Barak overcame his initial fears and was listed as one of God's heroes of faith and courage who subdued a kingdom (Hebrews 11:32). Deborah encouraged the 10,000 troops telling them God would fight for them and deliver them into the Israelites hands at the Kishon River that same day. The Lord destroyed the entire Canaanite army. The Israelite's victory over the Canaanite army was a miracle only God could provide. In these last days, the Lord has brought modern Israel great victories over their evil enemies and He will do the same again and again. God fights for Israel and He always will. He will not allow His enemies to root Israel up again.

Deborah's faith and obedience led Israel to peace for forty years. She judged Israel from 1107 BC until her death in 1067 BC or in the Hebrew calendar, 2654 until 2694 after Creation. She gave the Israelites the heart to worship and serve God again. Her song of victory (Judges 5:1 to 31) revealed her heart-felt commitment to the Lord. Worship is an essential part of our spiritual battle. The ancient Israelites fought with spears and shields. Modern believers fight with the whole armour of God. 'Put on the whole armour of God so you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Our wrestling (struggle, trouble) is not against flesh and blood but against the (evil) principalities, against the (evil) powers, against the world's (evil) rulers of the darkness of this age and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on the whole armour of God so you can withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand strong. Stand therefore, having (1) the belt of Truth buckled around your waist and (2) having put on the breastplate of Righteousness, (3) having fitted your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace. Above all, (4) taking up the shield of Faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. Take (5) the helmet of Salvation and (6) the sword of the Spirit which is the spoken Word of God' (Ephesians 6:11 to 17).

A prophet or prophetess is a spokesperson for the Lord and for them to fulfil their ministry of prophecy, God Himself put the Spirit of the Lord onto His chosen prophet. An example of this is found in Numbers 11:25 & 26 ... 'God came down in the cloud and spoke to Moses and took of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders ... There remained two men in the camp; Eldad and Medad, and the Spirit rested on them ... and they prophesied in the camp'. Deborah was elevated above her people, above all of the Jewish heroes and the calm Spirit of Wisdom dwelt in her. Scriptural history reveals, when men despaired, women rose up and saved the nation. There was another Deborah mentioned in the Bible but she was not involved in the Book of Judges. This Deborah lived during the days of Isaac and Rebekah and was known only as 'Rebekah's nurse'. 'Deborah, Rebekah's nurse died and was buried in Allon Bacuth south of Bethel under the oak' (Genesis 35:8).

Our modern world is not all that different to that of the ancients. Their battle played out on the land but was actually a Spiritual battle between good and evil. When we think of Israel, we know they are surrounded by enemies that would love to destroy them (Psalm 83:3 to 5). We need to pray for Israel. We battle against unseen enemies in our neighbourhoods, streets and some even within our families, wicked people that are driven by evil thoughts and behaviour. We can subdue them through prayer, submitting to the Lord and asking His advice and wisdom so we can deal with our spiritual enemies by faith, claiming great victories. 'A wise man (or woman) has great power and a knowledgeable person increases strength, for by wise guidance you wage your war and victory is in many advisors' (Proverbs 24:5 & 6). 'Give thanks to God Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus' (1 Corinthians 15:57). 'Whoever is born of God overcomes the world. Your faith is the victory that has overcome the world. Who are they who overcome the world, but those who believe Jesus is the Son of God' (1 John 5:4 & 5).

Amen and God bless you.

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