

Deborah Stepped Forward

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

Introduction: Judges 4:1-24, 5:1-31

A. Judge - Deborah - Hebrew: דְּבוֹרָה; "the bee"

1. A prophetess of God and the fourth Judge of pre-monarchic Israel, counselor to Israelite military commander Barak, and a leader of warriors.
2. The only female judge in the Bible, Deborah led a successful counterattack against the forces of Jabin king of Canaan and his highly skilled military commander Sisera.
3. Judges 4 gives the historical narrative, and Judges 5 tells the same story in poetic form intended to be sung as a hymn; The Song of Deborah is believed to be the earliest example of Hebrew poetry.
4. It is also the oldest passage that portrays women as combatants.
 - a. Deborah the Judge and military leader
 - b. Jael, the wife of Heber, a Kenite tent maker. She killed Sisera by driving a tent peg through his temple as he slept.
 - c. Both Deborah and Jael are portrayed as strong willed women who did the will of God when their husbands didn't or wouldn't.
5. The Jewish people used her name to express a dimensionless number, our equivalent of infinity. That's how highly she was esteemed by them.
6. Deborah was the wife of Lapidoth (Hebrew: לִפְיֹדוֹת; the name means "torches") - Judges 4:4
7. She made judgments beneath a palm tree between Ramah in Benjamin and Bethel in Ephraim - Judges 4:5
8. She was also a mother of children before she became a judge - 5:7

B. Setting: Ehud and Shamgar, great warrior judges who defeated the Moabites and Philistines, led Israel in peace, prosperity, and faithfulness for 80 years, but they were dead and Israel returned to sin, and there was no man courageous enough to lead Israel against the Assyrians.

1. After the people of Israel had been oppressed by Jabin, the king of Canaan, whose capital was Hazor, for twenty years, Deborah summoned Barak, who was the commander of the army at that time, to face the Assyrian General Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, in battle. This led to the victory of an Israelite force of ten thousand infantry over Sisera's force of 900 iron chariots plus support - 4:10, 15
2. Iron chariots had metal sides with projecting scythes to cut down infantry. On an open field, they were unstoppable; in hill country and after a rain, they were heavy and hard to control - 4:14
3. Kedesh was hilly, grass covered, and turned to thick mud after a rain.

C. Outcome - As Deborah prophesied, the Lord gave the victory to the Israelites. A torrent of rain came down from Kishon and mired up the chariots, and the horses broke free and ran off - Judges 5:21-22.

1. Sisera fled the battle and sought refuge in the tent of a woman named Jael, who killed him - Judges 4:16-24
2. There was peace in the land for 40 years - Judges 5:31

3. According to the Dictionary of World Biography: The Ancient World, she lived from 1200 B.C. to 1124 B.C., 76 years.
 4. "Jael being a woman is a further sign that Jehovah ultimately is responsible for the victory: The proud and mighty Canaanite general Sisera was sold by the Lord 'into the hand of a woman' (Judges 4:9) -- the ultimate degradation for an evil man." (Michael Coogan)
- E. Rom. 15:4 - What lessons do we learn from Deborah and Jael?

I. SPIRITUAL COLLAPSE OF ISRAEL

- A. Judges 4:1-3 - Men often depart from God's way.
- B. Their Corruption - It took just 80 years of peace for the people to abandon God so far that He sends the Assyrians to oppress them - Judges 3:30.
 1. Judges 5:8 - "They chose new gods."
 2. Ehud and Shamgar were gone; God's people needed strong leadership.
 3. Likewise in local congregations; btw, strong does not mean harsh.
 4. We are not safe from falling in this world, and we will not be safe until we get home to heaven and are delivered from this flesh.
 - a. Rom. 7:22-23; 1Cor. 10:12
- C. Their Chastisement - God "sold" them; means to "turn over; to give up."
 1. Judges 5:6-7 - They paid for allowing themselves to become reprobate.
 2. We can expect no less - Heb. 2:1-3, 10:26-29.
 3. No one gets away with sin - Num. 32:23
- D. Their Cry - According to Judges 5:8, the Israelites possessed no weapons. They were a conquered, defeated people. They were a people without hope.
 1. Notice that they did not cry out in repentance; they cried out for deliverance from their problems. Israel never seemed to realize that walking with the Lord brought His blessings, while rebellion and wickedness brought His judgment.

II. SPECIAL CALLING OF DEBORAH

- A. God gives victory to whomever and by whatever means He chooses.
- B. Her Position - Deborah was both a prophetess and a judge; Only Deborah, Moses and Samuel were both.
 1. Deborah means "Bee", and Matthew Henry says that her very name suggests the work of the bee: industrious, sharp perception, great usefulness, sweetness to her friends, and sharpness to her enemies.
 2. Deborah was not the only woman prophet: Miriam, Ex. 15:20; Huldah, 2Kings 22:14; Anna, Luke 2:36; the 4 daughters of Philip, Acts 21:9
 3. There is no contradiction between this fact and the fact that in this dispensation, God only permits men to preach (2Tim. 3:1-8). God gets to choose His messengers - Heb. 1:1-2
- C. Her Problem - Barak is afraid to follow God's word. He is willing to go to battle, but only if Deborah will go with him. She agrees to go, but tells him that since he depended on a woman, the glory of victory will be given to a woman.
 1. Barak gets 10,000 from his own tribe of Naphtali and the neighboring tribe of Zebulun (Judges 4:6, 10; 5:14, 18). Later, the ranks swelled to 40,000 (5:8) with volunteers from Benjamin, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Issachar (5:14-15). Some of the tribes refused to come (5:15-18)

2. It isn't enough to have great resolves of heart to do the work of God.
 3. Considering the fact that Israel had no weapons and no standing army, what Barak and Deborah did was an amazing act of faith.
- D. Her Partner - Sisera fled the battlefield on foot. He went to the tent Heber, who was of the Kenites. The Kenites aligned themselves with Israel. But this Kenite turned on the rest of the tribe and took sides with Sisera and his army.
1. Jael hides him and offers him milk, which served two purposes. First, it eased the mind of Sisera; he thought he was safe. Second, the milk would have helped this tired warrior fall asleep.
 2. Jael takes one of the tent nails and drives it through Sisera's head, killing him. In that culture, it was the woman's responsibility to put up and take down the tents. So, Jael was used to swinging that hammer.
 3. She was not stupid. When she saw Sisera come to her tent on foot, she knew that he had been defeated in battle and no help was coming.

III. SWEET CHORUS OF VICTORY

- A. Judges 5:1-12 - They began with praising God for His virtues.
1. God gave them unity so that they could raise an army.
 2. God gave them victory in the past to reassure them that He would give them victory now.
 3. God in His faithfulness gave them the leader He knew they needed.
 4. God allowed them to defeat their enemies and free themselves from the bondage of their oppressors.
 5. Do we understand that if we prosper, it is God's will; if we fail, it is because we left something out of God's will.
- B. Judges 5:13-18 - They praised God for His volunteers.
1. Few answer the call to work in the vineyard of the Lord; God be glorified for those few who do.
- C. Judges 5:19-31 - They praised God for His victory.
1. One married mother is an unlikely force in overcoming the best general of the meanest king in that world, but combined with God, she becomes an unstoppable force.
 2. One raindrop is a tiny, fragile thing, but when it is united with many other raindrops into a torrent, it becomes a force that humiliated the greatest armored division in the known world. God used rain to destroy the world in Noah's day; Sisera's tanks were nothing by comparison.
 3. It isn't numbers, wealth, or human influence that gets the job done; it is the power of God - 1Cor. 1:26-31
 4. We have Deborahs and Jaels in this building right now. The prayer warriors, the quiet servants, the people who do the little things that no one notices, and the people who unnoticed are constantly bringing people to Jesus.
 5. There is a God in heaven who sees who you are and knows what you do. Carry on, and He will bless you in His way, in His time - Gal. 6:9.