



Deborah

HER NAME MEANS

"Honey Bee"

HER CHARACTER: 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 and whose courage aroused the people, enabling them to throw off foreign oppression.

HER SORROW: That her people had sunk into despair because of their idolatry, forgetting God's promises and the faith of their ancestors.

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

KEY SCRIPTURE: Judges 4–5

Monday

HER STORY

*J*ericho, gateway to Canaan, had lain in ruins for two hundred years. From there, the Israelites had swept across the country like a storm of locusts, devouring everything in their path. But the native peoples had somehow managed to survive, and like well-rooted weeds, their idolatry spread until it began to strangle Israel's faith.

Rahab and Joshua were the palest of memories now, and the slaves-turned-warriors were once again underdogs, oppressed for twenty years by a coalition of Canaanite rulers, whose chief warrior was Sisera. His nine hundred iron-plated chariots terrified the ill-armed Israelite people, threatening to sweep over them with invincible force. Small wonder no one challenged him.

Sisera must have felt smugly secure, especially since Israel was now led by a woman. But his military calculations failed to account for one key variable: the strategic power of that woman's faith. Deborah was a prophetess who held court under a palm tree several miles northwest of Jericho. Though much of Israel was divided and dispirited, she refused to lose heart. How could she forget God's faithfulness, living so close to ruined Jericho?

She summoned Barak, a Hebrew from the north, and told him plainly: "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'"

But, like every other man of Israel, Barak was terrified of Sisera, and he refused to comply unless one condition was met: Deborah must accompany him in battle. She would be his talisman in the fight. "Very well," she replied, "I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman."

Hearing of the plot, Sisera led his troops and chariots to the Kishon Wadi, a dry riverbed, determined to crush the uprising. But his very strength turned against him as rain swelled the valley to floodtide. Suddenly, nine hundred iron chariots became a huge liability. No matter how furiously the soldiers flogged their horses, urging them onward, oozing mud held them. They became easy targets for Barak's troops sweeping down from Mount Tabor, putting every man but Sisera to the sword.

Once again, God had heard his people's cries and had sent a deliverer—this time a woman whose faith stilled the nattering voices of doubt and timidity so that the people could hear the one Voice that mattered. On their day of victory, Deborah and Barak sang this song:

When the princes in Israel take the lead,
when the people willingly offer themselves—
praise the LORD!
Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers!
I will sing to the LORD, I will sing;
I will make music to the LORD, the God of Israel...
Village life in Israel ceased,
ceased until I, Deborah, arose,
arose a mother in Israel.

Judges 5:2–3, 7

Indeed, a mother in Israel had arisen, a woman whose strong faith gave birth to hope and freedom and a peace that lasted forty years. Never again would the Canaanites join forces against Israel. Like an ancient Joan of Arc, Deborah arose and called the people to battle, leading them out of idolatry and restoring their dignity as God's chosen ones.

WOMEN AS LEADERS

*W*hile women leaders were uncommon in Israelite society, they were not unheard of. In this time of the judges, when Israel was spiritually malnourished, in a state of civic disorder, and oppressed by its enemies, Deborah stepped up to the challenge. Her leadership role probably evolved gradually, as her wisdom 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 noted in the Bible. Several others are listed: Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14), Anna (Luke 2:36), and four unmarried daughters of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:9).

Scripture describes Deborah as "a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth." Interestingly, when Deborah described herself, she didn't use terms like prophet or wife or judge or general or leader or any other term of influence and power. She described herself as "a mother in Israel" (Judges 5:7). Her position was one of mother not only to her own biological children, but mother to all the children of Israel. Though they had forgotten not only who they were but also whom they served, their mother Deborah reminded them and led them in a victory procession to peace.

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.

HER LEGACY IN SCRIPTURE

Read Judges 4:1-3

1. Describe what you think conditions might have been like for a family in Israel at the time? _____

2. How do you think you would have reacted to such conditions? Like most of the Israelites? Like Deborah? _____

Read Judges 4:4-8

3. What was Barak afraid of? Why would having Deborah along alleviate those fears? _____

4. Which of Deborah's characteristics would you most like to have? What would you do if you had that characteristic? What can you do to develop that characteristic? _____

Read Judges 4:9-10

5. How do you think the Israelite men felt about the honor for this victory going to Deborah and Jael? _____

6. When a woman succeeds today, what are the reactions of the men around her? _____

Read Judges 5:7

7. What does Deborah call herself in this verse? What does this tell you about Deborah? _____

8. What lesson from your own life can you gain from this verse? _____

9. What can you do to become more like Deborah? _____

HER PROMISE

Godly Deborah has been an encouragement to women throughout the centuries. When women feel confined or mistreated, when they are unsure of what is right or which way to proceed, when they are entering unknown territory, when they feel overlooked or ignored—they gain stability and help from remembering Deborah.

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.

Promises in Scripture

*Village life in Israel ceased,
ceased until I, Deborah, arose,
arose a mother in Israel.*

—JUDGES 5:7

*Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.*

—PSALM 20:7

*Who among you fears the LORD
and obeys the word of his servant?
Let those who walk in the dark,
who have no light,
trust in the name of the LORD
and rely on their God.*

—ISAIAH 50:10

HER LEGACY OF PRAYER

*Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers!
I will sing to the LORD, I will sing;
I will make music to the LORD, the God of Israel.*

—JUDGES 5:3

- REFLECT ON: Judges 4.
- PRAISE GOD: For speaking clearly to his people.
- OFFER THANKS: That God gives prophets to the church, women as well as men.
- CONFESS: Anything that makes you reluctant to listen for God's voice.
- ASK GOD: To help you discern his voice.

Lift Your Heart

*I*t's difficult, even unpleasant, to listen to two pieces of music at once. Likewise, it's hard to listen to God's voice at the same time you are listening to voices of confusion, discouragement, and condemnation. Deborah's peace and confidence as a leader stemmed in part from her ability to hear God clearly. This week ask the Holy Spirit to help you distinguish God's voice from all the background noise. Ask for grace to discipline your thoughts in order to hear God better. As you pray, put on some quiet background music to remind you to tune in to the one Voice worth listening to.

Lord, I want to hear your voice. Help me to recognize and resist all the phony voices that masquerade as yours. Help me to distinguish yours from all the others. Make me a woman who both listens and speaks your Word.