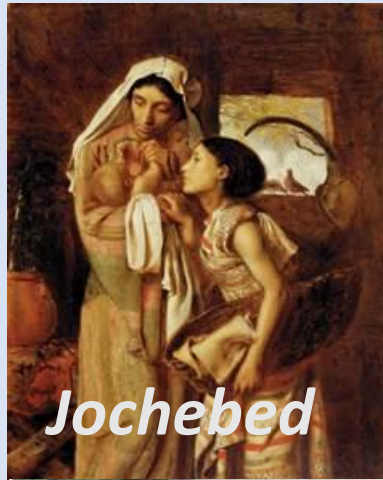
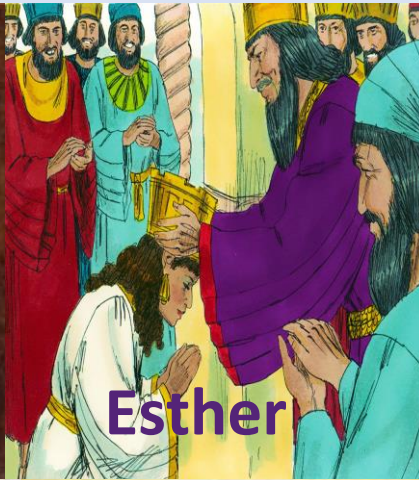


WOMEN OF THE BIBLE



Jochebed



Esther



Rebekah



Ruth

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT

Deborah and Jael -1

Judges 4:1-24

King James Version (KJV)

4 And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, when Ehud was dead.

2 And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.

3 And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

4 And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

5 And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

7 And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.

8 And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.

9 And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

10 And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.



11 Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh.

12 And they shewed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor.

13 And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, even nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon.

14 And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.

15 And the Lord discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet.

16 But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left.

17 Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet 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.

18 And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle.

19 And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him.

20 Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No.

21 Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.



22 And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

23 So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.

24 And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

COMMENTARY

Deborah, a Judge of Israel, summons Barak

The story of Deborah occurred in approximately 1125BC, when Deborah was a judge of Israel. The word 'judge' did not mean then what it means now. A judge in Israel was a tribal leader who

- in times of peace had authority to settle disputes and problems
- in times of war acted as a rallying point to gather the tribes and organize resistance

•A palm tree in the Middle East in times of peace had authority to settle disputes and problems in times of war acted as a rallying point to gather the tribes and organize resistance.



Deborah is the only woman judge mentioned in the Book of Judges. The people of her time had no difficulty in accepting her as a judge. This suggests that judges were seen as 'God's people', and their gender was unimportant.

'At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the *palm of Deborah* between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment.'

Deborah is introduced as a '*prophetess*', but a prophet was not someone who foretold the future. They 'heard' a message from God in some way and passed it on. Often the message was about staying apart from the surrounding cultures and maintaining the unique identity and beliefs of Israel.

Deborah also acted as an *oracle* when, sitting under a special palm tree in the hill country of Ephraim, she gave judgment on particular matters. Image of the oracle at the Greek shrine of Delphi. This palm tree was the ancient equivalent of a judge's courthouse, a place where people went when they needed a dispute settled.

- Oracles were common in the ancient world. People believed they had special wisdom given by God. Oracles could give advice on difficult problems.
- An oracle listened, considered the problem or question, then spoke words of advice. These words might be in the form of a riddle, which the listener had to interpret, or they might be more direct.

Deborah was inspired to speak out about the deteriorating state of the country around Ephraim. Law and order had broken down, and it was no longer safe to travel on the highways.

It has to be said that the Israelite settlers in the hill-country of Canaan were largely to blame for these problems. They continually raided the Canaanite farms and villages on the prosperous plains below their hill settlements, and of course the powerful city-states retaliated and ‘oppressed’ the Israelites.

The **Wadi Kishon** (*Kishon stream*) The Canaanites were led by King Jabin of Hazor. Jabin ruled a large, fortified city-state in upper Canaan, and may have been the leader of a confederation of Canaanite city-states. His aim was to restore Canaan’s power by exterminating the Israelite invaders (*Judges 4:6-11 and 5:12-18*).

Now threatened with the might of King Jabin's army, the Israelites turned to Deborah. *She summoned Barak*, an able military leader and spoke very direct words to him. He must go to Mount Tabor with as many fighting men as he could assemble, and so draw King Jabin out. She in turn would draw out Jabin's fearsome general, Sisera, and taunt him into fighting at the Wadi Kishon.

- At first, Barak was reluctant to enter into battle against Sisera, the military commander of the substantial troops of King Jabin of Hazor. His hesitation is hardly surprising, since the Canaanites possessed vastly superior military technology. Sisera had a disciplined, professional army, and his troops were armed to the teeth with iron weapons and chariots in large numbers.
- What the fight was about: the rich farming land of the Plain of Esdraelon and Jezreel Barak had citizen militia from most of the twelve tribes of Israel, though some of the tribes ignored the situation and stayed at home - to their eternal disgrace.

So Barak knew that his own forces were fewer in number, comparatively untrained, and with inferior weapons. Against such odds, it was unlikely that he could succeed. To an onlooker his reluctance must have seemed common sense rather than fear. He did not wish to enter into a battle he could not win.

Deborah had the charisma needed to convince Barak that he could take the extraordinary risks and succeed. The force of her personality and her complete faith in God gave Barak the courage to face odds that he knew to be overwhelming.

4:4,5 The Spirit-Filled, Multitalented Woman (Deborah), WOMEN. Deborah literally means



"Bee" reminding us of this woman's wisdom, how she liberally shared with her friends, and how her influence and authority were used by God to "sting" Israel's enemies. Her creative talents and leadership abilities distinguish her. Deborah wrote

songs and sang them, and she was a patriotic woman of God who judged (or led) Israel for 40 years. She might be called the first woman military commander and first female Supreme Court Justice. The keys to Deborah's effectiveness were her spiritual commitment and walk with God, seen in the fact she is called a prophetess. She demonstrates the possibilities for any woman today who will allow the Spirit of God to fill and form her life, developing her full capacities to shape the world around her.

4:2 The northern tribes of Israel were now oppressed by the Canaanites under the leadership of Jabin who reigned in Hazor, an important Canaanite stronghold in northern Galilee. In the narrative, attention is focused on the role of Sisera, the Canaanite commander, who dwelt in Harosheth, a town in Galilee situated on the Kishon River.

4:4 Deborah, whose name means, "Honeybee," was a prophetess and a judge in Israel. God raised her up and gave her leadership abilities. Judged here refers to functioning in a recognized office, including rendering decisions on people's inquires. She also played an undefined role in battle.

4:6 Barak, whose name means "Lighting," was the commander of the Israelite army. Mount Tabor: Because of its height and strategic location in the northeastern part of the Valley of Jezreel, 10 miles from the beginning of the Kishon River. It was ideally suited for deploying troops.

4:7 The river Kishon flows through the Plain of Esdraelon and the Valley of Jerzeel. Often it floods much of the valley in the rainy season. Sisera wisely chose this area along the river because he was able to move his chariots freely. However, the Lord sent a storm and a flood, which swept away the forces of Sisera and they were defeated.

4:8, 9 Barak's hesitation, to go to battle without Deborah showed a lack of trust in the Lord. Consequently, the honor of victory over Sisera, according to Deborah's prophetic word, would go to a woman. Nonetheless, Barak is mentioned as of the heroes of faith (Heb. 11:32).

4:11 Heber the Kenite migrated north with his wife, Jael from the Negev, the southern region of Palestine and became an ally of King Jabin. Jael, on the other hand, did not share her husband's allegiance. When she killed Sisera, Jael demonstrated her faithfulness to the alliance of the Kenites with the Israelites, which had existed since the time of Moses. Hobab is more commonly know as Jethro.



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