

People of the Bible

Deborah

Deborah was a judge, warrior, prophetess, and poetic singer. Deborah is the only judge said to have been a prophetess. She was the fourth judge of pre-monarchic Israel. She was the wife of an obscure man named Lapidoth. Her name means "bee." The account of her life is recorded in Judges, chapters 4 and 5.

God sent Deborah to judge Israel at the time when they again did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. Because of their sin they were sold into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan. The captain of Jabin's army was Sisera and he oppressed Israel for 20 years.

Deborah was judge at a most critical period in the history of Israel. Their national spirit was at its lowest ebb. The oppression of the Canaanites was great. The people had lost not only their freedom, but also their courage and hope for deliverance when God sent them Deborah, the judge.

Stirred by the wretched condition of Israel she encourages the Israelites to rebel. She sends a message to Barak, the military leader. She directs him to muster ten thousand troops of Naphtali and Zebulun. Barak declines to go without the prophet. Deborah consents and when she saw the army, she prophesied according to Judges 4:14: "Go! This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. So Barak went down Mount Tabor, followed by 10,000 men. Sisera rushed upon them like an avalanche of destruction 100,000 strong. He also had 1800 horses and 900 chariots of iron. They had scythes in their hands ready to mow down their enemies.

At the very beginning of the battle a mighty hailstorm struck the Canaanite (Sisera's) army in the face and blinded their vision. Streams grew into torrent, the River Kishon became like an ocean, and the whole valley was transformed into an impassable marsh. Horse and chariots stuck in the mud and made advance impossible. Thousands were swept away by the raging torrents of water, and those who were left turned and fled. Those who fled were cut down by the pursuing Israelites. The proud army of Sisera was wiped out even as that of the haughty Pharaoh at the Red Sea.

The gift of prophecy is a divine gift. Whosoever has that gift is inspired of God. Deborah had that gift. She dwelt under the palm-tree of Deborah between Rama and Bethel in the hill-country of Ephraim. This is where the children of Israel came for advice and judgment.

The poetic song of Deborah and Barak (Judges 5) is in memory of the great victory and has been preserved to posterity as one of the greatest and loftiest war songs. In this song we have the purest Hebrew that is known to the world. It compares very favorably with the song of Moses and Miriam. In beauty of expression and flow of poetic thought and fervor it has not been surpassed by any later singer.

The Biblical account of Deborah ends with the statement that after the battle, there was peace in the land for 40 years. (Judges 5:31)