



# DEBORAH

## *Her Name Means “Honey Bee”*

### **KEY SCRIPTURE:** *Judges 4–5*

The Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the Lord. So the Lord sold them into the hands of Jabin, a king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera. . . . Because he had nine hundred iron chariots and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the Lord for help.

Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah . . . and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided. She sent for Barak . . . and said to him, “The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men. . . . I will lure Sisera . . . and give him into your hands.’”

Barak said to [Deborah], “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.” “Very well,” Deborah said, “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.” So Deborah went with Barak. At Barak’s advance, . . . all the troops of Sisera fell by the sword; not a man was left.

### **Women as Leaders:**

While women leaders were uncommon in Israelite society, they were not unheard of. In this time of the judges, when Israel was spiritually malnourished, in civic disorder, and oppressed by its enemies, Deborah stepped up to the challenge. Her leadership role probably evolved gradually, as her wisdom in making judgments 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. 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.

### **Our Life and Times**

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.

### **Deborah’s Legacy in Scripture**

#### **Read Judges 4:1–3.**

1. Describe what you think conditions might have been like for a family in Israel at this time (4:1–3).
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 (4:8)? 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 for your own life can you gain from this verse?

## **HER CHARACTER**

**Judges 4:  
1-9, 15-16**

*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, whose courage aroused the people, enabling them to throw off foreign oppression.*