

Deborah

Michael Heiss—January 16, 2016

Good morning, everyone! I hope you will enjoy what I have here as much as I have; as much as I do. I'm a great lover of history. One of my great loves is studying famous people, or people who have achieved a great deal. I have a folder at home entitled *Great Personalities*.

What I'm amazed at is the number of women among those great personalities. We tend to think that it's a man's world. To some degree it is; it's been a patriarchal society, that much is true. But you would be surprised at the number of women who arose to the top of power and exercised judgment.

This morning we're going to look into perhaps the most powerful woman in the Bible. She was a remarkable person. Just think of some of the great women through history who achieved greatness and power. In the 20th century alone we had:

- Indira Gandhi—prime minister of India
- the quintessential Golda Meir—prime minister of Israel
- the indomitable Margaret Thatcher—prime minister of Great Britain (4 times)

No other person in British history was ever prime minister four times in a row. The great William Gladstone did have four reigns, but not in a row. The great Benjamin Disraeli was only twice. And the greatest man of the 20th century, as some look at it, Sir Winston Churchill was only twice. You had:

- Catherine the Great of Russia
- Maria Theresa of Austria
- Queen Victoria of the British Empire at its height
- Elizabeth I—tempestuous daughter of Henry VIII, who defended Britain against the armada

and another little known queen, but still a remarkable woman:

- Queen Anne

If we realized it in the early years of the 18th century under her reign and the policies of her administration set Britain on a trajectory to become the greatest empire in the world. She's not given credit very much because we don't know very much about her, but she's remarkable.

We're not talking about any of those today. We are going to look at an incredible woman, a prophetess, a judge and also entitled 'a mother in Israel.' She had to hold the hand of faltering general who was afraid. She had to stand in the breach

between the Canaanites and the forces of Israel, because they were almost ready to run. She had to summon them.

- Who is this woman?
- Who are we talking about?
✓ *Deborah!*
✓ *She was a judge in Israel!*

We're going to spend the bulk of the time in Judges 4 & 5 and we will cap it off with some comments that Josephus makes, because he fills in some detail.

If you will recall, the period of Judges was period of time when Israel was constantly going after other gods. God then sold them into slavery and subjection. They cried out, they repented, God was merciful and raised a judge, and no sooner did that happen and the judge died, then back again went the Israelites.

Judges 4:1: "And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD when Ehud was dead. And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who ruled in Hazor. The captain of his host was Sisera who lived in Harosheth of the nations. And the children of Israel cried to the LORD, for he had nine hundred chariots of iron. And he mightily oppressed the children of Israel twenty years. And **Deborah, a prophetess**, the wife of Lapidoth, judged Israel at that time" (vs 1-4).

Deborah was a prophetess, but she wasn't the only prophetess in Israel's history, but she was in some pretty good company. You might recall Anna the prophetess who met Mary and Joseph at the temple in Jerusalem when coming to fulfill the purification rites. You can read about her in Luke 2:36.

Also, remember Holda in the days of Josiah when they came across the Book of the Law and realized the curses that would come upon Israel? Who did they go to? *A prophetess! A woman!* How's that for political correctness?

These women were powerful! They had the Spirit of God and God worked through them. Not just men!

Deborah's name, interestingly enough, in the Hebrew means *bee*, like a stinging bee. And she lived up to her name. God used her to *mightily sting* the Canaanites. But we'll also find that she was a judge.

Verse 5: "And she lived under the palm tree

of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in Mount Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.”

When it talks about the palm tree, it doesn't mean a single tree. It's more like a small grove of palms. It's called "...the palm tree... [or area] ...of Deborah..." because it was associated with her. She would sit there and hold court, and the people would come with their problems. Just as in the days of Moses they came to Deborah.

Verse 6: “And she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, ‘Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, “Go and draw toward Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? And I will draw... [lure] ...Sisera to you...”’” (vs 6-7). Either way, God is going to lure the Canaanites to battle and He is going to destroy them through the Israelites.

““...the captain of Jabin's army, at the river Kishon, together with his chariots and his multitude. And I will deliver him into your hands”” (v 7).

You will notice that it was Deborah who summoned Barak. Deborah took the lead in doing this. God had obviously revealed it to her, and notice what she said in v 6: “...Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded...” This is powerful in the Hebrew! Deborah is saying, ‘Go, Barak! Do your thing!’ Notice what Barak says:

Verse 8: “And Barak said to her, ‘If you will go with me, then I will go. But if you will not go with me, I will not go.’”

Does anybody remember a rock group that arose in the 1960s? They invaded from England and were known as the Beatles! When I talk about the Beatles, I'm talking about John Lennon, Paul McCartney, etc. They sang many songs but one of the songs had a refrain in it, which I find very appropriate for this: ‘I want to hold your hand; I want to hold your hand...’

This is Barak in a different twist! He's not saying to Deborah, ‘I want to hold your hand.’ He's saying, ‘Deborah, would you please hold my hand.’ What is this? If you want to get a feel for it:

Judges 5:7—Deborah speaking: “The leaders ceased in Israel, they ceased until I, Deborah, arose; until I arose, a mother in Israel.” What she's saying is, ‘Do I, *a mother in Israel*, have to arise to hold your hand? Have we sunk that far?’ The answer is *yes!* It's a commentary on the times.

- Where were the men of Israel?
- Where were the leaders?
- *They just weren't!*

God used Deborah!

Judges 4:9: “And she said, ‘I will surely go with you. But the journey that you take shall not be for your honor, for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.’....” That happened! Oh, did that happen to a woman named Jael and what she did.

“...And Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. 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. And Heber the Kenite, of the children of Hobab the father-in-Law of Moses, had separated himself from the Kenites and pitched his tent toward the plain of Zaanaim, near Kedesh. And they told Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. And Sisera gathered all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people with him, from Harosheth of the nations to the river of Kishon” (vs 9-13).

You've got to understand that a space of time that has occurred. They got there and saw the armies of Canaan—the Canaanites—and they were afraid. Josephus points that out. They're faltering and almost set to run. That's when:

Verse 14: “And Deborah said to Barak, ‘Up! For this *is* the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you?’....” She's got to bolster Barak! She's got to arouse the army of Israel! Nobody else would! But a woman in Israel! A mother in Israel!

“...So, Barak went down from Mount Tabor and ten thousand men after him. And the LORD struck Sisera, and all the chariots, and all the army, with the edge of the sword in front of Barak, so that Sisera got down from the chariot and fled on his feet. But Barak pursued after the chariots and the army, to Harosheth of the nations. And all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword. **There was not a man left.** And Sisera fled 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. And Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, ‘Turn in my lord, turn in to me. Do not fear.’ When he had turned aside to her into the tent, she covered him with a rug” (vs 14-18).

She put a covering over him. The guy is cold and he's cowering, shivering; this great commander of the Canaanite army!

Verse 19: “And he said to her, ‘Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.’....” Get this picture: Here is the mighty Sisera, the commander of 900 chariots, thousands of men, reduced to begging a woman for some food, for

some water!

It has been said, and I think it's true, most dictators—real dictators—and butchers are cowards at heart. They're afraid. Oh, when they have an army behind them and a helpless soul before them, they're big, brave and bold. But when you strip the power from them, their conviction, their character just melts like butter on a hot day. "...he said to her, 'Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.'...."

"...And she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink, and covered him" (v 19). This is more like sour milk. It was good milk; it was in a skin. Remember, there were no refrigerators, no coolers in those days. So, they put milk in skins.

Verse 20: "Again he said to her, 'Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be when any man comes asking of you, saying, "Is there any man here?" You shall say, "No."'" "Anyway, he's asleep.

Verse 21: "Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a peg of the tent..." This peg, mind you, was more like an iron rod. They would put the pegs around the tents so they could hold down the tents. It was like a foot long of sharp iron. What did she do?

"...and put a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him, and **struck the peg into his temple**, and beat it into the ground, for he was fast asleep and weary. So, he died" (v 21).

If you can get the picture: He's on the ground. No 'shrinking violet' was Jael! She took that iron peg, a foot long, put it to his temple and with one mighty blow pierced his skull into the ground! There he was thrust fast to the ground! She was praised in Judges 5.

Verse 23: "And on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel went on, and pressed hard against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

Judges 4 was written in prose. Now we're going to get to Judges 5, which is kind of a repeat of chapter 4, but is in magnificent poetry. This is some of Hebrew poetry at its best.

Judges 5:1: "Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying, 'Praise the LORD for the avenging of Israel when the people willingly offered themselves. Hear, O kings. Give ear, O princes. I, *even* I, will sing to the LORD, I will sing to the LORD God of Israel. LORD, when You went out of Seir, when You marched out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. The mountains quaked from before the LORD, even that

Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel. In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath... [a previous judge] ...in the days of Jael, the highways were empty, and the travelers walked through crooked ways. The leaders ceased in Israel, they ceased until I, Deborah, arose; until I arose, a mother in Israel'" (vs 1-7).

There were many mothers in Israel, there are many mothers today—we all have had a mother—but she is saying this in the context that '*I, a simple mother in Israel, had to arise to stand in the breach. God called me, a mother, to do the job.*' In reality there was *no real man* in Israel who would do it. What a sorry state of affairs the children of Israel were in at this time.

Verse 8—Deborah continues: "They chose new gods; then war *was* in the gates. Was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel? My heart *is* toward the lawgivers of Israel who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless the LORD. Speak, you who ride on white donkeys, you who sit in judgment and walk by the way. *Louder* than the voice of archers at the watering places, there shall they tell again the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous acts of His leaders in Israel. Then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates. Awake, awake, Deborah. Awake, awake, sing a song. Arise, Barak, lead away your captives, son of Abinoam" (vs 9-12).

Again, this is poetry! This is beautiful poetry!

Verse 13: "Then He *made me* tread on the remnant of the nobles among the people. The LORD made me have dominion over the mighty. Out of Ephraim there was a root of them *against* Amalek..." (vs 13-14).

Verse 15: "And the rulers of Issachar *were* with Deborah, even Issachar, and also Barak. He was sent on foot into the valley. There were great searchings of heart for the divisions of Reuben. Why did you stay among the sheepfolds to hear the bleating of the flocks? For in the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart" (vs 15-16).

Verse 19: "Kings came and fought. Then the kings of Canaan fought in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo. They took no gain of silver. They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera" (vs 19-20).

We will see from Josephus that there was a might storm raging; the winds were furious that helped the Israelites against Sisera.

Verse 21: "The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, march on in strength. Then did the hooves of

horses beat from the galloping, the galloping of their mighty ones. ‘Curse Meroz,’ said the angel of the LORD; ‘Curse the people of it bitterly because they did not come to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.’ Blessed among women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be. **She shall be blessed above women in the tent**” (vs 21-24).

She took a peg and bashed in the brains of Sisera. Yet, God says she shall be blessed because she did this. She took action against the enemies of Israel.

Verse 25: “He asked for water, and she gave *him* milk. She brought forth butter in a lordly dish.” Read this carefully, this is poetry and it’s great poetry at its best!

Verse 26: “She put her hand to the peg and her right hand to the workman’s hammer. She hammered Sisera; she smashed his head; she pierced and struck through his temple. He bowed between her feet, he fell, he lay down. Between her feet he bowed; he fell. Where he bowed, there he fell down dead” (vs 26-27). Again, beautiful poetry!

Now comes the sad part: Sisera’s mother wondering why is he so long in coming. ‘He must be dividing the prey.’ Little did she know what had happened.

This is the Biblical account about Deborah. Now we’re going to spend a few minutes in *Josephus*, because Josephus adds some detail to it.

from *The Complete Works of Josephus*:

HOW THE CANAANITES BROUGHT THE ISRAELITES UNDER SLAVERY FOR TWENTY YEARS; AFTER WHICH THEY WERE DELIVERED BY BARAK AND DEBORAH, WHO RULED OVER THEM FOR FORTY YEARS

And now it was that the Israelites, taking no warning by their former Misfortunes...

They never learn! They always went after other gods!

...to amend their manners, and neither worshipping God nor submitting to the laws, were brought under slavery by Jabin the king of the Canaanites, and that before they had a short breathing time after the slavery under the Moabites; for this Jabin came out of Hazor, a city that was situate over the lake Semechonitis, and had in pay three hundred thousand footmen and ten thousand horsemen...

Well, Josephus was known to exaggerate a little bit when it came to men. I don’t know that there were 300,000 of them, but trust me, there were a lot of them.

...with no fewer than three thousand chariots. Sisera was the commander of all his army, and was the principal person in the king’s favor....

So they continued to undergo that hardship for twenty years, as not good enough of themselves to grow wise by their misfortunes. God was willing also hereby the more to subdue their obstinacy and ingratitude towards himself...

So, Josephus is acknowledging that God is doing this.

...so when at length they were become penitent, and were so wise as to learn that their calamities arose from their contempt of the laws, they besought Deborah, a certain prophetess among them (which name in the Hebrew tongue signifies a Bee), to pray to God to take pity on them, and not to overlook them, now they were ruined by the Canaanites....

Remember when Samuel was in that position with the Philistines? The people of Israel came to Samuel that he would pray to God for protection?

...So God granted them deliverance, and chose them a general, Barak, one that was of the tribe of Naphtali. Now Barak, in the Hebrew tongue, signifies *Lightning*. So Deborah sent for Barak, and bade him choose out ten thousand young men to go against the enemy because God had said that that number was sufficient, and promised them victory. But when Barak said that he would not be the general unless she would also go as a general with him...

This is her reply according to Josephus:

...she had indignation at what he said, and replied, “Thou, O Barak, deliverest up meanly that authority which God hath given thee into the hand of a woman...”

Again, this just confirms that ‘Barak, come on, be a man! Lead the army; God will be with you!’ But he was fearful!

...and I do not reject it!”

So, she accepted the charge! There was no one else! What if she hadn’t? God can raise up stones, we know that, but not unless He has to.

So they collected ten thousand men, and pitched their camp at Mount Tabor, where, at the king's command, Sisera met them, and pitched his camp not far from the enemy...

Remember where we read in Judges 4:14: "And Deborah said to Barak, 'Up! For this *is* the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand...'" Well, this is what happened. When they saw that:

...whereupon the Israelites, and Barak himself, were so affrighted at the multitude of those enemies, that they were resolved to march off, had not Deborah retained them...

So, she had to encourage them; she had to stand between them and the Canaanites, saying, 'God will be with you.' The battle began:

So the battle began; and when they were come to a close fight, there came down from heaven a great storm, with a vast quantity of rain and hail, and the wind blew the rain in the face of the Canaanites, and so darkened their eyes, that their arrows and slings were of no advantage to them, nor would the coldness of the air permit the soldiers to make use of their swords...

It must have been a freezing rain that came from God!

...while this storm did not so much incommode the Israelites, because it came in their backs....

It's like the wind coming almost horizontally, straight behind me into your eyes, as though you were the Canaanites. You could hardly see anything. It was such a cold wind that their muscles were not functioning properly. When God fights for you, ***He fights for you!***

...They also took such courage, upon the apprehension that God was assisting them, that they fell upon the very midst of their enemies, and slew a great number of them; so that some of them fell by the Israelites, some fell by their own horses, which were put into disorder, and not a few were killed by their own chariots.

At last Sisera, as soon as he saw himself beaten, fled away, and came to a woman whose name was Jael, a Kenite, who received him, when he desired to be concealed; and when he asked for somewhat to drink, she gave him sour milk, of which he drank so unmeasurably that he fell asleep; but when he was asleep,

Jael took an iron nail, and with a hammer drove it through his temples into the floor; and when Barak came a little afterward, she showed Sisera nailed to the ground...

What a sight that must have been!

...and thus was this victory gained **by a woman...**

I emphasize that! Josephus emphasized it!

...as Deborah had foretold. Barak also fought with Jabin at Hazor; and when he met with him, he slew him; and when the general was fallen, Barak overthrew the city to the foundation, and was the commander of the Israelites for forty years.

In this particular saga, this particular episode of slavery, God used a mighty woman judge named Deborah!

If anybody ever feels that they can't do much, God always uses men, 'we women are just low mothers in Israel,' I beseech you, I beg of you, remember ***the prophetess, the judge, and a mother in Israel whose name was Deborah!***

Scriptural References:

- 1) Judges 4:1-7, 6-8
- 2) Judges 5:7
- 3) Judges 4:9-21, 23-24
- 4) Judges 5:1-16, 19-27
- 5) Judges 4:14

Scripture referenced, not quoted: Luke 2:36

Also referenced: Book: *Josephus*

(http://www.isdet.com/_PDF/Complete_Works_%20of_Josephus.pdf)

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