



# Deborah means 'bee'



## JUDGE PROPHETESS POET MATRIARCH

The book of Judges is a compilation of bloody events: murder, mayhem, pillage, and rape. Of all the judges, only Deborah stays above the bloody model, but it is her voice that issues the battle cry! She is remembered in prose and poetry. Israel at this time was not a “whole” nation. Tribes took care of themselves and Canaanite influence was widespread, forcing Israel to hide in the hills, over 4,000 years ago.

The Hebrew word for judge is *shopetim* which means *to put right, to rule*, similar to a governor.

Judges documents seven cycles of deliverance and tells of 6 major and 6 minor judges; Deborah was the only female judge. Judges takes place in the years 1380—1050 BC and the pattern of behavior was well established by the time of Deborah: the hearts of the Israelites would fall away from God, they forgot His promises, they transgressed the ways that Moses and Joshua commanded them to follow, and they were led astray by foreign peoples to serve other gods.



Judges 4 is the prose or narrative chapter of Deborah’s story. Judges 5 is the poetic chapter. Putting them into outline form helps us to better understand the passages. One biblical literary technique used in narrative story passages is Chiasmic Structure: where a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order, in this case —A B C D C B A. Judges 4 is told in Chiasmic form.

- A** Sons of Israel are oppressed v.1-3
- B** Deborah is prophetess and judge v.4-9
- C** Barak and the Israelites vs. Sisera and 900 chariots of iron (Kenites introduced) v. 10-13
- D** YAHWEH is Israel’s warrior v.14 *This verse is the center of the chapter and the focal point.*
- C** Barak chases the enemy, Sisera flees on foot v.14-16
- B** Jael defeats the enemy, Sisera v.17-22
- A** Jabin, the Oppressor, is subdued v.23-24



### **Read Judges 4:1-5**

This chapter begins with the Israelites **again** doing evil in the Lord's sight; Judges 1-3 tell of Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar, the judges who fought prior to Deborah. Because the Israelites were disobedient, v.2 says "the Lord turned them over to King Jabin of Canaan" for twenty years of oppression. The Israelites were driven into the surrounding hills, afraid to travel the main roads, unable to tend to livestock or crops. **Think how conditions were for the Israelites at this time...kinda like living with COVID! This lasted for 20 years! Think of the changes we have had to make —maybe some of them permanent changes! What do you miss the most? What has been the hardest change in your life? What blessings have you received during this time?** The Canaanites were much more technologically advanced than the Hebrews. In v.3, the Israelites cried out to God, *not because of their sin*, but because they were afraid of 900 iron chariots! Their focus was totally wrong. We are now introduced to Deborah. **What is your first impression of her? What made Deborah stand out in her day?** We know Deborah means 'bee'. Her husband's name is Lapidoth which means 'flame' or 'torch'. She is depicted as sitting or 'presiding' under the Palm Tree of Deborah.



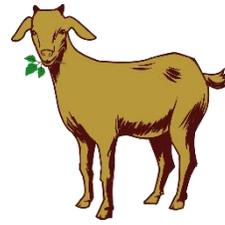
### **Read Judges 4:6-11**



In v. 6, we meet Barak. His name means "lightning". Some Hebrew writings think that Barak and Lapidoth are the same person (Lapidoth being a nickname) since the name meanings are so similar: torch and lightning. Deborah begins her instructions to Barak in v. 6 with "the Lord is commanding you". Deborah tells Barak to "**Go**", Hebrew word "masak" which means 'to draw along' and she gives Barak specific details: the place = Mount Tabor, number = 10,000 men of Naphtali and Zebulun, and outcome = the battle would be handed over to Barak. **How does Barak respond in v. 8? Why do you think he answered that way?** We see two opposing attitudes: Deborah's faith which accepts on trust the Word of God, even if it seems improbable or impossible and that of Barak, a man responsible for himself and 10,000 others, weighing the risks. The words in v. 6 were **God's** and you might feel that Barak should have acted without reservation or doubt. Instead, he makes a condition to his obedience. The Greek version of the Hebrew Bible adds a verse not seen in Christian versions: "*because I know not the day in which the Lord will send His angel to give me success*". **Does that add to your understanding?** Read Hebrews 11:32-33. **How is Barak presented? So, how can we see Barak's request to Deborah in a positive way?** In v. 11, the Kenites are introduced, who were descendants of Cain (Genesis 4:22). Their importance will be seen later.



**Read Judges 4:12-17**



The description of the battle is brief, showing that the battle is not the focus of the story. **What are the seemingly insurmountable obstacles facing Israel? What are some obstacles Wyldwood Baptist has been facing during COVID?** The 900 chariots of Sisera were indeed superior to any weapons the Israelites had. Deborah gives Barak the imperative command from God to **“Spring into action!”** or **“Get up!”** The words in Hebrew are powerful. **Who is the champion in v. 15? But notice what happens to Sisera!** He leaves his chariot—his position of authority and strength—to run away to a position of weakness! Notice that Barak chases the chariots and allows Sisera to escape on foot. In v.17, we see why the Kenites are important to the story. Jael is married to a Kenite and her name means ‘wild mountain goat’. We are not told if Jael and Deborah had known each other previously. **Why is the peace treaty mentioned in v. 17 important? Did it make any difference in the end? How do you think the 10,000 men reacted to Deborah as the co-commander for the battle?**

**Read Judges 4:18-21**

The execution of Sisera by Jael occupies almost 30% of Judges 4. **Why do you think so much attention is given to this gruesome account in both Judges 4 - 5?** All of Jael’s actions were meant to give Sisera a sense of comfort and security. Sisera is totally in her power, although he thinks he is in control by giving her commands. **Use 3 adjectives to describe Sisera. Use 3 verbs to describe Jael.** It is obvious that Jael knows who Sisera is. Her use of a tent peg is meant to remind us of the promise of Genesis 3:15.



**Read Judges 4:22-24**



Deborah’s prophecy in Judges 4:9 that the Lord would turn Sisera over to a woman has come to pass. God has humiliated the Canaanites and King Jabin is an enemy no longer. **Who is our greatest enemy?** Satan knows our name, but he calls us by our sin. God knows our sin, but He calls us by our name! It is interesting to note that feminine names in Hebrew often end with the letter **H**, as in Deborah. The consonants of Deborah’s name in Hebrew are the same as in the Hebrew for ‘speak’ and ‘word’. Deborah’s words were indeed prophetic.

# Celebrating the Victory in Song

The *Song of Deborah* is considered the oldest fragment of Hebrew literature, written 2,285 years before Christ or about 4,285 years ago! The *Song of Deborah* uses brief and quickly changing images to give the reader a sense of fast-paced action and power. In a sense, it is like a constantly moving camera angle, making us ask questions during the poem: where are we? what is happening now?

Again, an outline will help us to understand this beautiful, but difficult passage in Judges 5.

## I. Facing the Challenge

- A. Call to the Song v. 2-3
- B. The Lord Appears v. 4-5
- C. Oppression v. 6-8
- D. Volunteering v. 9-11

## II. Mustering the troops

- A. The Call v. 12-13
- B. Tribes Respond v. 14-15
- C. Other Tribes Stay Behind v. 16-17
- D. Two Brave Tribes v. 18

## III. Joining the Battle

- A. Combatants fight v. 19
- B. —From Above v. 20
- C. — From Below v. 21
- D. Someone flees v. 22

## IV. The Aftermath

- A. Curse the Non-Fighters v. 23
- B. Blessing of Jael v. 24-27
- C. Sisera's Mother v. 28-30
- D. Final Blessing v. 31



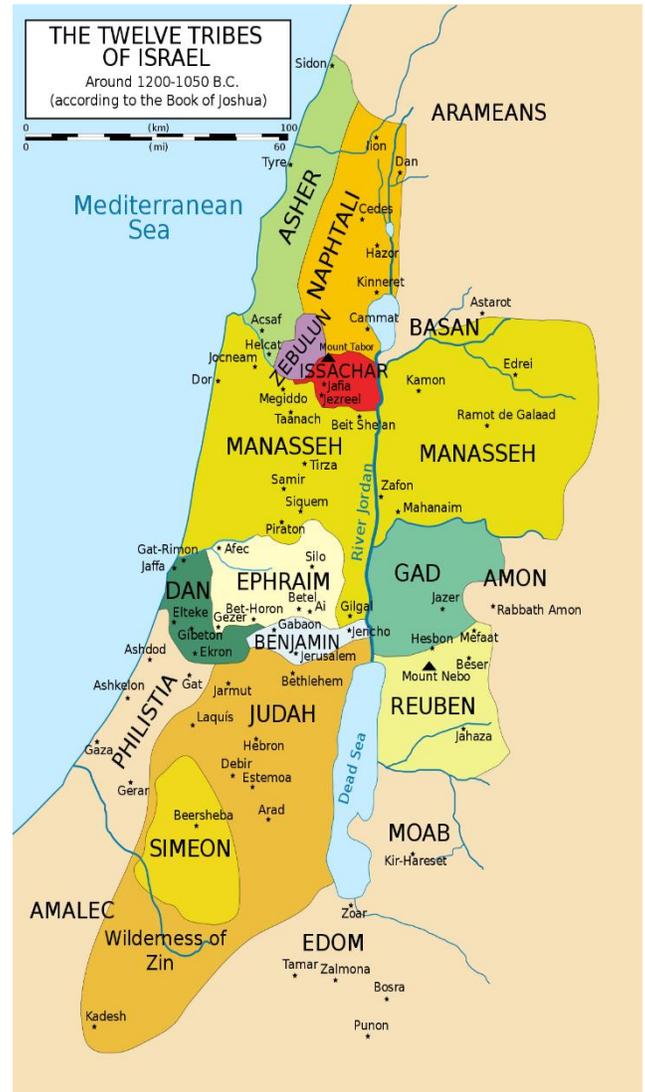
### **Read Judges 5:1-5**

Judges 5 has been called a **Grand Hymn of Victory**. **When does the singing of this hymn take place?**

Depending upon your Bible version, v. 1 says "On that day" or "Later that day" meaning that Deborah and Barak wasted no time in giving praise to God for the victory. The Hebrew word for "sang" is "**v'tashar**" which is feminine and specifically means "and she sang". Some Bible versions have v.2 as "when hair grows long in Israel", while other versions have "when leaders took the lead". The reference to long hair may mean that some of the men had taken Nazarite vows to not cut their hair until the enemy was defeated. Twenty years of oppression would be long hair! Hebrew poetry uses parallelism or words used repeatedly for emphasis. Notice v. 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 11 all have "in Israel" or "of Israel". Each repetition intensifies the meaning of the line. **Compare Judges 4:15 with 5:4-5. Both chapters tell of the Lord's actions in the battle, but the words in chapter 5 express the awe and wonder at God's working. Can you see the differences in the writing? Also, v.4 contains a theophany or a physical manifestation of God: "O Lord, when You marched, the earth shook".** The poem uses the Hebrew word "**nahal**" to describe the water; it is a very forceful word to depict the rushing waters. The irony of these verses is that Baal, the Canaanite god who controls storms is powerless against the Lord God of Israel who washes away the iron chariots with a torrent of water! Baal is even depicted in idols as holding a lightning bolt! **Does the drowning of the chariots remind you of anything?** These verses emphasize the strength of God through human weakness; it's a picture of 'saving weakness'. Christ was crucified in weakness, but He lives through the power of God! Amen!

### **Read Judges 5: 6-18**

Now the mood changes to describe the oppression of the Israelites. Problems piled up for the people. Even going to draw water for daily use had become dangerous. **How do people suffer oppression now? What do we cry out to God about today?** Warriors to fight for Israel were scarce. **What is now added to Deborah's identity in v. 7?** Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe says: "For God to give His people a woman judge was to treat them like little children, which is exactly what they were in spiritual matters!" The fighters are described next. **According to v.8, what weapons did the Israel have?** No wonder they were terrified of 900 iron chariots. The volunteer fighters are in 3 groups in v.10: those who rode white donkeys (wealthy elite), those who sat and those who walked. **Does the mention of a female donkey remind you of anything? It is symbolic of the Messiah entering Jerusalem!** Deborah is clear in the poem about which tribes showed up for battle and those who did not, to their shame. But the victory did not belong to the tribes and even the tribes who did not come will not be left out of the final blessing! When the people of God prevail, it is because He is working for us! **Name the tribes who volunteered in v. 14-15. Compare those to the tribe of Reuben in v.15-16. The Hebrew words used depict reclining and hiding. Deborah almost calls them cowards!** Apathy is shown for some of the tribes in v. 17. **What words are used to describe the actions of Zebulun and Naphtali in v.18?**



<https://worldeventsandthebible.com/bible-questions/what-are-the-12-tribes-of-israel>

**Read Judges 5:19-27**

Josephus, the Hebrew historian, writes that when Barak saw the enemy forces come up and surround the mountain where he and his men waited, Barak wanted to withdraw to a place of greater safety, but that Deborah encouraged and stayed him. The Hebrew words in these verses that describe the battle evoke power and action, loud noises, and swift motions. **Where was the battle fought? Notice v.19 says Megiddo. What other battle takes place in the same valley? See Revelation 17:16. Are you surprised?**

The Valley of Jezreel has been a perpetual battleground because of the caravan traffic that ran North and South through the plain. The nation that controlled Megiddo, could control everything. **Notice what is mentioned in v.20 as fighting against Sisera, and later in v. 23, the celestial command of judgment. This begins a series of blessings and curses for those who did or did not help.** The difficult passage of Jael is described in the next 3 verses. **What word is used twice to describe Jael in v.24? Why do you think Deborah described Jael in this glowing way? Do you see Jael positively or negatively?**

The Bible does not actually give Jael praise or blame, but a simply an account of the event and how Deborah portrayed it. Jael was not Hebrew. There is a constant struggle between God's chosen people and the heathen nations around. By the time Sisera reached Jael's tent, the battle was over, but he was still alive—only one man. **Could he have been spared? Could he have been left alive to fight again?** The Hebrew words used in v. 26 are raw and guttural sounding verbs with harsh consonants. It is as if the poem is re-enacting the climax in slow-motion by repeating four times how Sisera collapsed or fell! In our ceaseless warfare against Satan, women must battle alongside men. Israel's greatest need was not salvation from enemy oppression, but salvation from the SIN that led to the oppression. Israel's occupation of the land and the destruction of their enemies is intended to serve as example of the final judgment of God, in which He will secure the inheritance of the new heavens and the new earth for His people by annihilating every hint of evil. **"These things happened to them as an example and warning to us; they were written for our instruction" 1 Corinthians 10:11.**

**Read Judges 5:28-31**

As the poem begins to come to an end, we are introduced to a new female character, experiencing her thoughts and emotions. **Who does v. 28 describe? Where is she? What is her mood?** Sisera's mother is a woman of power and prestige. We know this because of the use of the word "lattice" (window) which denotes a palace or harem; the mention of "her ladies" showing that she has command over others. The women imagine that the warriors are "gathering and dividing the plunder" v.30 and even seem to condone the pillage and rape that would have occurred. The Hebrew words for "girl" rehem and "cloth" or "embroidery" rekem are very similar and were chosen on purpose.

The Canaanites never again oppressed Israel with military might, but their idols and religion continued to snare God's people. The poem closes with praise. **What was the end result for Israel in v.31? The use of 40 years reminds us of the years of Moses' leadership through the wilderness. The word rest means prosperity, peace, and enjoyment. The final words are typical in the book of Judges each time the story of a certain judge is finished: "and the land had rest".**

We know nothing more of Deborah's subsequent life or death, but the testimony of 40 years of peace is perhaps the most fitting epitaph. Let us finish with these thoughts: **How did God feel when the Israelites so quickly disobeyed Him? How does God deliver us today from disobedience? How can we be like Deborah in our world today?**

**I hope you enjoyed studying the thrilling story of Deborah.**