

YOU ARE THERE

DEBORAH THE PROPHET

Introduction, through the eyes of someone who was there

You are Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth of Ephraim, and God has made you both a prophet and a judge for Israel. As a prophet, you are a spokesman for God — He tells you what He wants you to tell them. As a judge, you make decisions for people who come to you with problems.

The Israelites in the north have a big problem. For their evil acts, God has given them into the power of Jabin, one of the remaining Canaanite kings, ruling in Hazor. Jabin has been oppressing them for twenty years, and they have finally repented and asked God for help. God tells you to send Barak, with 10,000 warriors, against Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army. But Barak knows how strong Jabin's army is — it is led by 900 chariots — and he refuses to go to war unless you go along with him. As you consider your reply, you feel a prophecy coming on ...

Original illustration (also available in full-color card sets)



Basic verses and other related passages

THE BASIC STORY

Judges 4 (Deborah guides Barak to victory over Jabin)

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE ...

Judges 3 (The first three judges — Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar)

Judges 5 (Deborah and Barak's song of victory)

More depth and detail

Deborah's reply to Barak is indeed a prophecy: she will go with him, but the honor of killing Sisera will go to a woman. And so it happens. Warriors from Naphtali (Barak's tribe), Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulun, Issachar and Reuben answer his call to arms. When Sisera hears that an Israelite army has assembled on Mt. Tabor, he marches to oppose it with everything he's got. Deborah sends Barak down from Mt. Tabor with God's promise that victory is his. True to His word (and Deborah's prophecy), God destroys Jabin's army ... but Sisera escapes. (In Judges 5:21, it seems that God assists with a heavy rain and flood.) Exhausted, Sisera hides in the tent home of Heber and Jael, but while he sleeps, Jael drives a tent peg through his head. When Barak, pursuing, arrives, Jael shows him Sisera's dead body. The honor is hers, not Barak's. (With the army gone, the Israelites soon conquer Jabin, as well.)

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT DEBORAH?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

"Summing up" time (if needed)

DID YOU KNOW? FEMALE PROPHETS

Related facts about Bible life & times

A prophet is a person who speaks for God. He or she is God's mouthpiece — both by proclaiming His word and also by urging the people to obey and serve Him. Sometimes this message foretells future events; often the prophecy is about what is happening right now. In all cases, the prophet must speak only God's words. Most prophets mentioned in the Bible are male, but a few are female. Among them are:

- Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron (Exodus 15:20; Numbers 12:1-2; Micah 6:4). Miriam is also known as a leader of the women.
- Deborah, who is both prophetess and judge (Judges 4:4).
- Huldah, who is consulted by King Josiah (2 Kings 22:14-20), and who encourages him to continue on his mission to return Judah to God.
- Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3).
- Anna, who sees Jesus as a baby (Luke 2:36) and praises God.
- Philip's four daughters (Acts 21:9).

In addition to these women, in the Corinth church there are female prophets whom Paul instructs to cover their head when prophesying in public (1 Corinthians 11:5).

These women have two things in common with all prophets (male or female). First, they do not learn how to prophesy from another person; they are chosen by God to deliver His message. Second, the men around them acknowledge their gift, some (such as Josiah and Barak) to the point of actively seeking their advice and messages from God.

1 The story of Deborah repeatedly involves the role of men and women in Israelite society. Deborah is one of the few female prophets and the only female judge mentioned in the Bible; is she doing something that would normally be forbidden to women? Does her husband accept divine judgment from her? (Is she still married at this time, or a widow? Are her children still young, or adults?) Some have said that God’s choice of Deborah is a rebuke against all the men of Israel — that not a one is qualified to judge, so God selects a woman instead. We don’t know.

We do know that what she does is approved by God. We know that **she** is a judge, not Barak. We know that Barak’s lack of faith results in a loss of honor (when a woman is given the honor of slaying Sisera). And of course, we know that while the Israelites then and Christians today have similar laws and responsibilities, the Law of Moses is not identical to Christ’s Law (so we must be careful about how we apply Deborah’s example to our lives today).

However, Deborah is a good example for us today. What should Deborah’s example inspire us to do?

2 Throughout the time of the judges, Israel is in a sad cycle of repeated sin and punishment. What can the Israelites do to prevent this cycle?

The heart of the lesson: What can we learn from Deborah? How can we use her experiences to make us better?

What can we do today to prevent falling into sin the way that the Israelites do?

Teacher notes with ways to discuss and develop each question are available (at no cost)

3 God (through Deborah) tells Barak to attack Jabin’s army. Does Barak obey? Is his hesitation understandable? List one or two times that you have hesitated to do what God tells you to do. How can you avoid hesitating?

4 We know even less about Jael than about Deborah; what good examples can we draw from her part of the story?

THE REST OF THE STORY OTHNIEL, EHUD & SHAMGAR

Deborah isn’t the first judge over Israel; she’s the fourth listed in the Bible. The book of Judges begins where the book of Joshua ends — summarizing the places that haven’t been conquered. Chapters 1 – 3 set the pattern that the Israelites will follow for the next 400 years: sin, oppression from a conqueror, repentance, deliverance, righteous living, until eventually, more sin.

Sidebar for each lesson, on a related theme

When the generation who know Joshua die, their children turn to false gods, and God sends a king of Mesopotamia (the area around the Euphrates and Tigris rivers) to conquer them. Caleb’s nephew, Othniel, is the first judge and deliverer, and the people stay faithful for 40 years. (Judges 3:5-11)

The Israelites fall into sin again, and God sends Eglon, the king of Moab, to oppress them (18 years). When they turn to God, He appoints Ehud as judge. Ehud meets with Eglon privately and draws a sword lefthanded (which is rare enough that Eglon’s guards haven’t considered it). Ehud buries his sword in Eglon and calmly walks away, telling the servants not to disturb the king. Ehud then rallies an Ephraimite army and drives out the Moabites. (Judges 3:12-30)

Israel has peace for 80 years, after which Shamgar strikes down an oppressive Philistine force (Judges 3:31). And after Shamgar comes Deborah.

The maps in this book include the locations of the twelve tribes in Canaan.

The nations that Israel fails to remove include **Philistia**, Canaan (various peoples throughout the Promised Land), **Sidon** and the **Hivites**.

When the Israelites turn from God, He sends the **Mesopotamians**, the **Moabites** (aided by **Ammon** and **Amalek**), and the **Philistines** to punish them. They are rescued by Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar, respectively.

Jabin, the Canaanite king, rules in **Hazor**.

Deborah judges in Ephraim, between **Ramah** and **Bethel**.

The Israelite army gathers at **Kedesh** (Barak’s home) and then moves to **Mt. Tabor**.

The Canaanite army gathers near **Harosheth-hagoyim** (Sisera’s home) and the river **Kishon**.

After the two armies clash, the Canaanite army is pushed back to the river.

Sisera flees and reaches Jael’s tent at **Zaanannim**, perhaps a few miles north of Mt. Tabor.

Map with notes on the places in the lesson