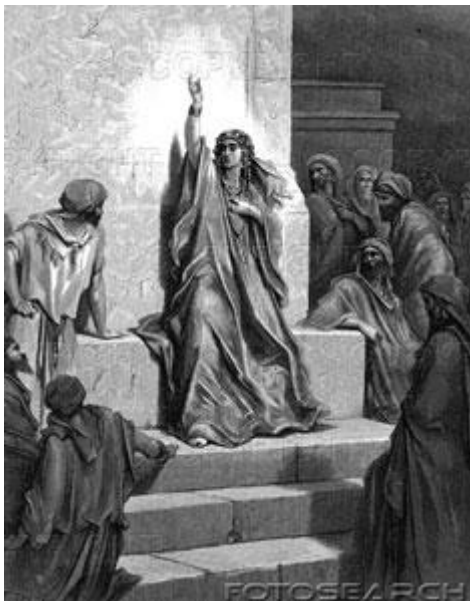


Deborah The Judge



Objective:

To learn the story of Deborah as a wise judge.
To learn from the courage, leadership and wisdom that she displayed.

Memory Verse:

“Let those who love Him be like the sun when it comes out in full strength” (Judges 5:31)

References:

The NKJV Bible- Judges 4 and 5
Judges, Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty
Deborah the Judge, Bishop Youssef, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Sth USA

Introduction:

Judges existed in Israel before the Kings.

Today we are going to talk about one of the judges of Israel. She was a woman and her name was Deborah. She was a prophetess and a wise woman. She used to Judge the children of Israel under a palm tree.

The children of Israel were suffering under the mercy of the king of the Canaanites. They had suffered terrible atrocities for 20 years and finally began to cry out to God for deliverance from this enemy. (Judges 4:3) God heard their cries and so He sent Deborah to lead the Israelites. (Judges 4 and 5).

Ask the students what is the difference between a King and a Judge?
Let them give examples of Kings and Judges from the Bible.

Characteristics of Deborah:

1. A Prophetess and Wife

We first read about in Deborah in the Holy Book of Judges as a...

"Prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth who was judging Israel" (Judges 4:4).

According to this verse, first, Deborah is characterized as a prophetess. In Deborah's Song, her love for the Lord is described as *"like the sun, when it comes in full strength"* (Judges 5:31). Most probably this is the reason why God chose Deborah to communicate His Will to the Israelites. Deborah was considered by the people as God's spokesperson and this helped to establish her respect among them. Though Deborah was the only Israelite woman to become a judge; other Israelite women were prophetesses such as Miriam and Huldah.

Second, Deborah is described as the wife of Lapidoth. Deborah's husband played no role in her judgeship. In fact, nothing is known about Lapidoth, not even the tribe he was from. It is important to note, that Deborah was not only a prophetess and highly respected, she was a wife. She belonged to a household and we can rightly assume it was a household of faith.

We read of no conflict between her and her husband with the role God had selected for Deborah. We do not read that Lapidoth had a problem with her putting God first rather than himself, nor do we read that he hindered her service to God in any way or was resentful of it.

Rather we can assume because Deborah was a wife, she was of good character and had many social roles as a wife whom she capably fulfilled. Also due to her position and love for God, she must have encouraged her husband to be Godly and ultimately won the Israelite respect for her husband as well.

2. A Judge and Leader

Deborah was a judge that mainly settled disputes *"holding court under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim"* (Judges 4:5).

Being a prophetess must have helped Deborah to solve these disputes spiritually rather than simply politically or judicially. Also we can assume that being a prophetess, the people who came to her to settle their disputes, which could not locally be resolved, would respect her opinion regardless of the outcome of the dispute.

3. Her Mission & the Battle against the Canaanites

Deborah was not a military leader nor did she pretend to be one by asserting her judgeship or standing in the eyes of the Israelites. She was historically not characterized as one who demanded authority or as one who always insisted upon her own way.

She had a mission to conquer the King of the Canaanites whom commanded 900 chariots of iron. While the 900 chariots sounds threatening, the Israelites had not learned to work with iron therefore, the number of chariots and what they were composed of forced the Israelites to go to battle by sheer faith in God.

Deborah called upon Barak, a known military man, in the name of the Lord to lead the Israelites in battle against the Canaanites. She then passed down to him the instructions given to her by God. Barak willingly accepted the role of military leader with one provision, that Deborah would accompany him. She reluctantly agreed to his request, as she desired to carry out the will of God and destroy the Canaanites. She was disappointed in Barak's lack of faith in God alone, and that his faith needed bolstering by her presence at battle.

Barak is described as a "military man" not a "spiritual man of God". He felt he needed her presence at the battle. Why?

- She must have represented someone whose relationship with God was so supreme that they knew God would not allow anything to happen to her or to them.

- Deborah's relationship with God must have been so great that it was recognizable to all those around her and so strong that they were willing to go to battle with her in the midst no matter the odds against them.
- Her gender must have been viewed as second to her love for the Lord.

Deborah told him that she would go with him but the people may say that they won the war because of the company of the prophetesses, Deborah. However, Barak did not care and still insisted that she would go with him, which she did. Subsequently, Barak and Deborah gathered 10,000 men and went to Mount Tabor.

When it was the right day and time as God revealed to Deborah, she told Barak the day they should go for war. Barak listened to Deborah and started the battle. God was with him and with his army so they won the battle.

The battle of the Israelites against 900 chariots of irons was a decisive one. The Israelites defeated the King of the Canaanites (King Hazor) and he was killed while seeking refuge from the battle.

The defeat was so strong that the city of Hazor fell within a few short years thereafter. The Israelites under Deborah's strong leadership would come to enjoy forty years of peaceful times.

Deborah's song of triumph (Judges 5) is thought to be one of the earliest poems in existence and is considered one of the few pieces of inspired writing, showing her faith in God. In the 'song of triumph' Deborah sings to the Lord with thanks and praise for delivering the Israelites from the Canaanites. Deborah does not consider her position for the times and the success of the battle but instead gives all the glory to God and also recounts the miracles He performed.

3. Strength of Character not Personality

Deborah's relationship with God was first. As mentioned, she was also a wife, perhaps even a mother, and she was a judge. She balanced many roles (like all women!!) and with each role we are not told she did not have "the time" to fulfil a certain role.

She served God faithfully and God provided Deborah a way to balance all her roles according to His calling. Deborah:

- did not have a strong personality,
- did not manipulate,
- did not use strong language,
- did not use a loud voice to use her authority,
- is not described as tough in her judgment of others.

Worldliness was not a part of her lifestyle, as she did not mix with the Canaanite culture, environment, or desire anything of their way of life. We can assume her background and education was centered upon the teachings of the Lord.

Deborah's spirituality, power, and inner peace were not disturbed by either adversity or prosperity. She was stable and of strong character:

"For the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two edge sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, ad of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrew 4:12).

How can we build good character like Deborah ?

- By putting away worldly things and placing God first in your life.

- Instilling habits that will assist you to guard your emotions from worldly teachings and desires will help us to avoid the emotions associated with heartache and pain. Emotions help to shape how we are known by others.
- Deborah is historically described as a woman who had a special relationship with God not a woman who allowed her emotions to overtake her.

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandment, for this is man's all" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Strength in character opposes sinful ways and does not enter into them. Deborah's strength of character helped her to overtake King Hazor who had earlier been defeated by a man, Joshua. But this man had not completely conquered King Hazor as he had regained power and rebuilt his army. Deborah's defeat was total destruction.

4. Modesty

With all the respect, acclaim, and power that go along with the position of prophetess and judge, Deborah remained modest. She was an obedient servant. She willingly without hesitation carried out the will of God. She was Godly and used discernment of leadership. We are not told that she flaunted or "dressed up" to do the job. Rather her perspective was one of a spiritual nature. We do not read that she assumed authority in her own home or that her home life was unimportant.

Rather one can assume that Deborah through the guidance of the Lord balanced roles as only one that walked with the Lord could do. She used her gifts and talents as directed and it was not written that she failed at a single task. Rather, Deborah served the Lord competently, with capability, and in confidence of her abilities.

We also learn from Deborah's example that the prophetess role and the role of judge were more significant than the role of military leader or fighter. Deborah would settle disputes but she would not lead the army. Maybe the confines of women's roles in the Old Testament times or that Deborah neither needed nor wanted any credit for a battle victory to sustain her, helped to maintain the modesty within her.

Deborah was reluctant to go to battle with Barak, knowing that God chose Barak to lead the army. She may have been even uncomfortable with the role as a woman. Deborah would have preferred that Barak trusted in God and went off to battle without her. Maybe God's choice of Barak also indicated that women were not appropriate for every type of leadership role. Regardless of Deborah's personal limitations she accompanied Barak and when the battle was won, in her song, "The Song of Deborah" she gave credit to God and the battle's leader Barak omitting any role she may have played in the defeat of the Canaanites of Hazor.

May we all look to Deborah's example of her love for the Lord, using her gifts and talents, and the end product of her obedience to the One she loved above all.

Conclusion

Deborah was a wise and courageous woman who loved God and was guided by Him. She guided her people to victory through her relationship with God and her prophecies. Similarly if we have a strong relationship with God we can lead others to better life and better relationship with God.

Application

Read Judges 4 and 5 at home during this week.

Ask God for wisdom in your lives.

Be courageous like Deborah who is a key reminder to Christians that they have the potential to do great things through God if they only listen, trust and obey Him.

Pictorial depictions of Deborah show her with a scroll in her hand, delivering judgment or under a palm tree.



Further Reading Material:

Deborah the Judge

Objective:

- 🕒 To learn from the courage and strong faith of this judge.
- 🕒 To encourage female students to participate actively in the church and the service.

Memory Verse:

“I, even I, will sing to the Lord. I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel” (Judges 5:3)

References:

- 🕒 The Applied Explanation of the Bible
- 🕒 The New Open Bible- New King James
- 🕒 “Judges” by Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Introduction:

- 🕒 Open an introductory discussion asking the students about the role of women in our church and service.
- 🕒 How are the functions of the males and females coordinated in our services?
- 🕒 Finally ask them if they know of any female leaders in the Bible? And what was their role?

Lesson Outlines:

Deborah was the fourth Judge in the era of judges in Israel. The judge in the Old Testament was perceived as the person that God uses to lead His people to freedom and light. The Judge was supposed to help alleviate any oppression falling on his people from their enemies. The judge was also used by God to communicate with His people to help them overcome sin and face temptations. Thus he was their spiritual leader and guide.

There were no special physical requirements or characteristics that God required in anyone who became a Judge. They could be rich or poor as Gideon, weak or strong as Samson, male or female as Deborah, right handed or left handed as Ehud, even when left handed people were considered disabled at that time. They were all human that had their slips and mistakes sometimes but they had a pure and strong heart and most importantly they were able to communicate with God and hear His voice clearly. God was able to overcome their weaknesses and use them to lead His people to repentance and triumph so that they may glorify the name of the Lord.

After the death of Ehu, the Israelites were strayed away from God into the path of sin. So God allowed them to be overtaken and humiliated by the Canaanite. They were under the ruling of the Canaanite for 20 years till Deborah the prophetess prayed and asked the Lord to save her people from their oppression.

Deborah was a wise and faithful woman who cared very much for her people. She was able to judge between her people using the laws of God. Thus her people accepted all of her decisions and ruling. When she felt the suffering of her people under the Canaanite, she asked God to save them and liberate them. So, God instructed her on what to do and she carried the instruction to Barak. She told him that God has commanded Barak to take 10,000 of his troops and go to fight the Canaanite. Barak was worried and wanted to be sure that God's messenger is with him and that these instructions are truly from God. He asked Deborah to come with him to the fight and she surely did. However, she told Barak that you might lose the glory of the triumph because people will think that because Deborah, a prophetess, was with you won the war. She really was referring to the fact that Barak did not believe the

promise of God through her and depended on her presence, a human, to assure him that he will win the war.

Deborah, courageously, left her place under the trees where she used to judge between the people and went with Barak's troops to fight the Canaanites and God led them to victory. Then, Deborah and Barak sang a praise song to the Lord (Judges 6) to glorify Him and thank Him. The song was also to remind the sons of the Israelites with God's great salvation to them. This is a great example of how we should remind ourselves and talk to others about the great things God is going for us each and every day of our life.

God had chosen Deborah at that time because she was the right person for this great task. She was the only woman judge among 12 men judges for Israel.

Conclusion:

🕒 God can use a man or a woman for His great and wondrous work and service. He can use a woman to lead as long as her strength is the word and the promise of the Lord.

Applications:

🕒 In the light of this lesson, discuss with the students or give them a project to research why the Coptic Church does not allow women to priesthood.

🕒 Invite all your students to participate equally in the service in the church and the community.