

Deborah the Judge



Deborah's background

- Deborah was one of the seven prophetesses God raised in Israel: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther
- She was the "wife of Lapidoth"
- The Jews believe this is a reference to mean she furnished wicks for the "lamps" of the sanctuary. The story is told more elaborately in Jewish Text (Tanna debe Eliyahu R. ix.: Deborah, being married to an "am ha-arez," induced him to furnish wicks for the Shiloh sanctuary, and he made them so big as to turn the lights into blazing torches. His real name was "Barak," given to him because his face "shone like lightning" ; he was also called "Michael," because he was modest before God; and his name "Lapidoth" for furnishing wicks

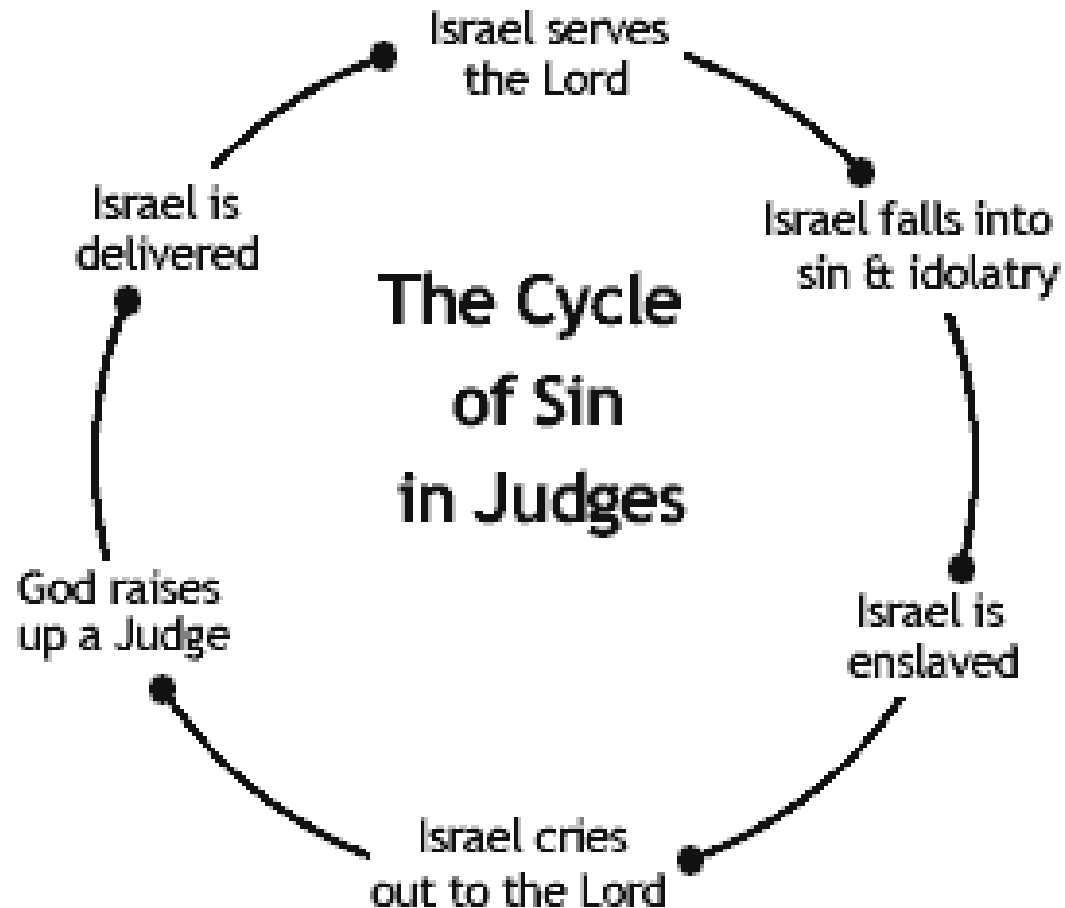
How did a woman become a judge?

- Deborah's emergence as a judge was extremely remarkable if not miraculous at best. Though she may have been known as a prophetess, this in no way makes way for her to become a judge.
- As a Judge, she mediated in disputes, ethical questions, advice that would have been social, political as well as moral-None of which were considered women's expertise
- Women at the time were likely to be taught reading, writing and house duties. Some were taught some trades by their families/husbands
- Many derogatory responses of Rabbi's to women who asked religious questions are recorded in history so it is very unlikely she would have had much of a religious education at all, (although it is possible if she had no brothers and her father felt obliged by some Laws to pass on his religious knowledge)

God-given authority

- If her authority did not come from superior knowledge, it had to come from God. He wanted her to fulfill this role and gave her the ability to do so.
- God also wanted Moses for a role he didn't think he was suited for (a leader when his speech was poor)
- God can equip us for whatever role he has for us (within the limits of what the church teaches on priesthood only for men!)

The state of Israel at Deborah's time



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- After the death of Ehud the Judge, the Israelites strayed again
- So God allowed them to be overtaken and humiliated by the Canaanites. They were under the ruling of the cruel Canaanite king Jabin of Hazor who mercilessly oppressed the Jews. He had an equally cruel and brutal general named Sisera who, for twenty years, did everything possible to make the lives of his Jewish neighbors miserable.
- When the Jews could stand it no longer, they cried out to God to send them a deliverer
- Deborah the prophetess prayed and asked the Lord to save her people from their oppression
- (following slides for the story or this link for video of the story 7 mins
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yNVKXiAyTUQ&noredirect=1>

The story of Israel's deliverance

- Deborah sends to Barak (possibly her husband) who declines to go without the prophetess.
- Deborah consents, but declares that the glory of the victory will therefore belong to a woman, for a woman will capture Sisera.
- Meanwhile Sisera learned of the battle being planned against his Canaanite army. He brought out his iron chariots and cavalry in preparation, confident that he would be able to crush the ill prepared Jewish army.

The story of Israel's deliverance

- At the beginning of the battle things certainly seemed to be on the side of the mighty Canaanites, but suddenly, Sisera's army was thrown into confusion and terror, causing his terrified warriors to flee in all directions. Sisera, unable to regain control of his demoralized army, also took to his heels and fled to a house, where he intended to hide until it would be safe for him to return.
- This was the home of Heber the Kenite, who was a descendant of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. Heber had been on good terms with Jabin, king of Hazor, and Sisera felt safe in hiding there. But he did not reckon with Jael, the wife of Heber. She hated Sisera's cruel treatment of the oppressed Jews. She tiptoed into the room where Sisera had fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion. Cautiously she approached him and, with all her might, drove a long nail through his temple, putting an end to his chances of doing any further harm to anybody.

The story of Israel's deliverance

- In the meantime Barak had been hot on the track of Sisera, and traced him to Heber's house. Just as he reached the entrance, Jael came out to meet him, with a flushed look of triumph on her face.
- "Come in," she exclaimed, "and I will show you the man you are seeking." Jael led him into the house and showed him the dead body of the cruel general
- After the victory of the Israelites, the Canaanites lost their power, and the Jews were able to live peacefully. Deborah returned to her abode in the mountain of Ephraim, and composed a joyful poem about the battle. It is a song In Jewish tradition considered second only to the song of Moses

Deborah fulfills the Proverbs definition of an admirable woman

- **“She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come, she speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all. Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised... ”(Proverbs 31: 25-30)**