

Deborah in the Bible was one of these judges.

Though we know very little about Deborah's actual family, the book of Judges tells us that Deborah came from the hill country of Ephraim between Bethel and Ramah. There, under a palm tree, she sat, providing godly wisdom and guidance to those who sought counsel ([Judges 4:4-5](#)). We also know that Deborah was married to a man named Lappidoth ([Judges 4:4](#)), though not much is known about him beyond his name.

## The Story of Deborah in the Bible

Deborah would go on to lead Israel against the Canaanites, their king Jabin, and their military general Sisera, calling on a Jewish warrior named Barak to command Israel's army.

To Deborah's request, Barak famously replied, "if you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go" ([Judges 4:8](#)). Deborah would agree to accompany Barak. However, she informed him that, because of his hesitancy, "the honor shall not be yours... for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman" ([Judges 4:9](#)).

Deborah's prophecy would soon come to fruition.

As Israel routed Sisera's forces at Mount Tebor, Sisera, the Canaanite general, escaped, seeking refuge in the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite ([Judges 4:17](#)). But as Canaan's top military leader slept soundly, Jael shoved a tent spike through Sisera's head, killing him where he lay ([Judges 4:21](#)). With his army decimated and trusted general now watering the sand with a spike-shaped hole in his head, Jabin, the king of Canaan, was soon defeated. The people of Israel were liberated from the Canaanites ([Judges 7:24](#)). Deborah and Barak would then sing of this victory, praising God for His faithfulness and deliverance of their people. One of the first examples of Hebrew poetry recorded in the Bible is the Song of Deborah and Barak ([Judges 5](#)).

Deborah would serve God and Israel as a judge for forty years. There are several key lessons we can learn from Deborah's leadership and example during this time.

## 1. Prosperity Should Never Lead to Complacency

Although Israel's servitude at the hands of the Canaanites, Midianites, Philistines, and other nations was a result of their sin and idolatry, the Israelites had not done themselves any favors by refusing to remove these nations and their influence from the land, as God had instructed in the book of Joshua.

Instead, the temptation of foreign gods and the presence of false worship remained, slowly reshaping the culture and turning the hearts of the people away from God in the process.

The Israelites' prosperity following the days of Joshua should have solidified their faith. However, instead of being grateful and humble, the people became complacent and self-indulgent. Matthew Henry writes, "thus the prosperity of fools destroys them."

Because the people of Israel neglected to glorify God in good times, they were forced to seek Him in times of trouble.

The same is true for believers today.

God uses tough times and anointed leaders like Deborah to wake His people and break them of the habit of sin and complacency when necessary.

## **2. God Calls for Obedience**

Among the judges of Israel, Deborah was unique in that she not only led by example, but she was also bold, assertive, and obedient in both her personal and public life.

Deborah's calling as a judge was not her sole occupation. She was also a wife, a warrior, a prophetess, and a songwriter, and in all things, she proved faithful.

The lesson here is that God's ultimate call for His creation is obedience.

We all wear many hats and fulfill many roles in life, but whether it's in our jobs, our relationships, or our families, God calls us to be faithful and obedient in *all* areas of life, big and small, public and private.

## **3. Leaders Lead**

Though Deborah called upon Barak to lead Israel's army into battle, her delegation should not be seen as an attempt to shake responsibility or "pass the buck." On the contrary. Barak insisted Deborah accompany him, and Deborah committed to going. She would not send him somewhere she was not willing to go herself.

Like any good leader, Deborah led the way. She stepped up when called ([Judges 5:8](#)) and did not hesitate to act; what she called Israel to do in public, she committed to do in her personal relationship with God.

Sadly, the later kings of Israel did not follow suit; as their hearts went, so went the nation of Israel. Deborah, however, led by example and modeled courage, swift action, obedience, and a willingness to speak the truth, standing behind those she called to action. "Those who in God's name call others to their duty, should be ready to assist them in it" (Matthew Henry).

Deborah modeled this aspect of leadership better than most.

## **4. When God Goes Before Us, What Have We to Fear?**

Although Deborah's courage is legendary, her confidence did not come from her abilities or Israel's army. In fact, the armies of Israel were largely outnumbered by Sisera and his many

chariots. But where Sisera trusted in the might of his army, Deborah trusted in God's power and provision ([Psalms 20:6-9](#)).

Knowing that God was not only for Israel but had gone before them was all the strength she needed to take action, get the job done, and inspire others to step out in faith as well ([Judges 5:14](#)).

For Christians today, Matthew Henry offers this powerful reminder: "be not dismayed at the difficulties thou meetest with in resisting Satan, in serving God, or suffering for him; for is not the Lord gone before thee?"

## 5. God Deserves Swift Gratitude and Praise

Following their victory over Sisera and the Canaanites, Deborah and Barak did what Israel had failed to do since the days of Joshua: ascribe all glory, honor, and praise to the Lord ([Judges 5](#)). And like most things in life, Deborah and Barak did not hesitate to worship.

In this way, complacency and self-adoration had been momentarily overcome by Israel's leadership. They recognized that, no matter what they or the army had done, God deserved the credit.

Believers today would be wise to imitate this behavior and not waste time giving credit and praise to the Lord when it is due.

## 6. Look to the Past, But Look Beyond to the Promise of the Future

In the Song of Deborah and Barak, the songwriter(s) remind the people of the cost of their disobedience and the reasons they had gotten into trouble with the Canaanites in the first place.

Here we find an honest reckoning with the past and a charge for Israel to "wake up" and return to their God. However, in acknowledging the sins of Israel's past, Deborah also looks to the joy of their present [salvation](#) and hope for an even better future. This is vital to the survival of any civilization.

As Eric Metaxas writes in his book [\*If You Can Keep It: The Forgotten Promise of American Liberty\*](#), "seeing the sins and failing (of the past) is not fatal and fatalistic. We see them, but we see beyond them to the possibilities of goodness and forgiveness and redemption. We recognize that the 'story's not over.' We see the hope on the other side of where we are" (231).

Deborah reminded the people that, though they had betrayed God and broken covenant with Him, He had remained faithful. Knowing this, the children of Israel could look forward to even better days if they would cast aside their idols and return fully to the Lord.

## 7. God Elevates Those He Chooses

It is no coincidence that the great Canaanite general Sisera was brought down by a girl and a single iron nail. In this way, God demonstrates His tendency to use the “weak things of the world to confound the mighty” ([1 Corinthians 1:27](#)). The apostle Paul would continue, “God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him” ([1 Corinthians 1:29](#)).

In this way, as Deborah had promised, Jael was given a special honor for her role in killing an enemy of God’s people. “Most blessed of women is Jael,” Deborah sings ([Judges 5:24](#)). Furthermore, a lot has been written about Deborah’s role as a woman in the Old Testament, and it is true; it was not common for women to hold positions of such power and influence in that culture at that time. However, as we see throughout Scripture, God does not hesitate to raise up, equip, empower, and promote His faithful servants, regardless of their social status, abilities, or lack thereof. As Matthew Henry writes, “Though He needs no human help, yet he is pleased to accept the services of those who improve their talents to advance his cause.”

In the end, God elevates those He chooses. Deborah sings, “thus let all your enemies perish, O Lord; but let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might” ([Judges 5:31](#)).

“Such shall be the honour, and joy of all who love God in sincerity, they shall shine forever as the sun in the firmament.” (Matthew Henry)

Deborah would play an incredible role in the history of Israel and has gone on to become one of the most influential women in all of Scripture. However, it is not Deborah or Barak, or Jael who deserves glory or praise. They are not worshipped because they are not the ultimate heroes of this story or the ultimate saviors of Israel. That role is reserved for God and God alone, before whom “the mountains quaked at the presence of the Lord” ([Judges 5:5](#)).