

Who was Deborah in the Bible?

Deborah was one of the judges of Israel during a time of oppression. She is called a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth. The Lord spoke through her as she held court under a tree called “the Palm of Deborah” in Ephraim. The Lord also used her to set her people free and defeat the king of Canaan. Deborah’s story is found in Judges, chapters 4 and 5.

Deborah was Israel’s only female judge. Some scholars have suggested that her position as judge was itself a judgment on the weak-willed men of Israel. Because Israel’s men were unfit to judge, God chose a woman for the job, partly to shame the men who should have taken the leadership. Other commentators believe that Deborah’s role as judge was a sign of God’s comforting presence in the midst of His oppressed and downtrodden people.

When Deborah became judge, the Israelites had been subjugated for 20 years by Jabin, king of Canaan. The commander of Jabin’s army was named Sisera, and he had 900 iron chariots – formidable weapons against Israel’s foot soldiers (Judges 4:3). The Israelites were treated very cruelly by Sisera and his army, and Israel’s spirits were very low. Deborah describes the hardship of living under Jabin and Sisera this way: “The highways were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways. The villagers ceased in Israel; they ceased to be” (Judges 5:6-7). In other words, people feared to leave their homes; traveling was very dangerous.

God’s word comes through Deborah to a man of Naphtali named Barak. The message is that he will lead the revolt against Sisera. Barak’s response is, “I’ll only go if Deborah goes with me” (Judges 4:8). Everyone was afraid of Sisera, including Barak. Deborah agrees to accompany Barak, but she also prophesies that the honor for the victory would

belong to a woman, not to Barak (Judges 4:9).

When the time came for battle, God again spoke through Deborah, who prompted Barak to marshal his forces. The Israelites came against the army of Sisera, and God granted the victory. The mighty Sisera himself was brought down by the hand of a woman, just as Deborah had said. As the commander rested after the battle, a woman named Jael drove a tent peg through his head.

Who was Deborah in the Bible? We can see that God's power is what matters, regardless of the instrument He chooses to use. Man or woman, strong or weak, confident or hesitant - all are strong when they are moved by God's Spirit and filled with His strength. We can also see in Deborah a picture of God's tender care for His people. As a mother cares for her children, so Deborah led and nurtured Israel (Judges 5:7).