

DEBORAH

“Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah...and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided.”

—JUDGES 4:4-5

We normally think of military leaders as men but the Bible gives us the story of a woman who ruled as a judge over Israel at a time when they were being cruelly oppressed. She was not only a great military leader, but a prophetess, a woman of God. Her name was Deborah.

During the 400 years judges ruled over Israel, there is a pattern of rebellion against God, leading to repression, then to restoration, and then to rest. This cycle is repeated seven times, and when the people cried out to God, He would raise up a judge to restore them, bring the nation back into rest again and into dependence on Him. Deborah is the restorer in the third of these seven cycles. She is beautifully described as “a mother of Israel”.

For twenty years, the Israelites were ruthlessly exploited by a Canaanite king, named Jabin. The roads were so dangerous people took to winding paths through the woods and over mountains. Village life ceased and the national life of Israel was ground to a halt. Deborah sent for Barak, Israel’s commanding officer, and said to him, “The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your

hands.’ Barak replied, ‘If you go, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.’ ‘Very well’, Deborah said. ‘I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman’” (Judges 4:6-9).

Deborah was not deterred by the fact she was a woman, nor by going up against 900 iron chariots, many of which were stuck in the bog of the Kishon River. Deborah said to Barak, “Go, this is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has the LORD not gone ahead of you?” (4:14) And that is a key factor in our own struggles and conflicts. Deborah’s confidence was not in her ability, nor in military strength and strategy, but was entirely in God. She knew she was already battling from a position of victory, and under her reign, Israel enjoyed 40 years of peace.

We all need the makings of a Deborah – the courage to step out in faith and trust God for who He is. As we act in obedience, He goes on ahead of us to prepare our way so that we may enter into the rest He promises.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, grant me the courage of Deborah, and a heart so in tune with yours that I will not fail to recognize your voice.

TO REFLECT UPON: Am I willing to step out in faith, confident of God’s working in my own struggles?