

The Study of Deborah: The Powerful Judge of Israel

A Character Study on Deborah| by Jade Lee

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Have you ever met or seen from a distance a strong, independent, powerful woman and found yourself admiring her strength, wondering, “How did she get so strong?” “How can I be like her?” Not in a way of comparison, but in a sincere admiration of her internal and physical beauty.

Deborah was one of those women and unlike popular opinion the Bible actually supports women of strength and independence. She was a career woman, a Politian, and a mother to a nation in a very much needed time period of shaking, of adversity for her people, the Jews.

Deborah was able to do it all- from career to everyday life and national motherhood!

She was a sweet, caring woman but she was not afraid of entire nations and armies that came against her.

This is the Story Deborah.

I. Judges Chapter 1-2: An Introduction to the Judges

Judges Chapter 4 begins with the Children of Israel being sold into captivity due to doing “evil in the sight of the LORD.” This is never how we want a chapter of our book to be written; instead, we would much rather start out on a good foot.

The Book of Judges is the story of the Children of Israel after Joshua’s death. Joshua was a mighty and powerful leader of Israel. He took the promised land of Moses and inhabited it by fighting off the Canaanites and many other enemies, including his heroic conquest of Jericho and supernatural stopping of the sun.

Joshua left the people serving the LORD and He was an excellent, GOD fearing leader, “And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that He did for Israel.” (Judges 2:7, KJV)

But there was a problem. The next generation after his did not know the LORD, “And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel.” (Judges 2:10, KJV)

The result was that they did evil in the sight of the LORD and they served other gods, the god Baalim (Judges 2:11, KJV).

This could have been avoided by the older generation reminding the next generation of what GOD had done for them in bringing them out of Egypt through signs and wonders (as Moses did in the Book of Deuteronomy, the Book of Remembrance). Instead, the generation would now have to wait for a righteous leader who knew GOD’s Word and their history to rise up and teach them the right way.

Serving these other gods was the judgment of GOD on their nation for evil and sin.

This judgment was really bad for the people of Israel and this was not GOD’s intention or desire for His people. We are in a similar state today in America: the next generation has not been properly taught what GOD has done for our forefathers as a people.

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GOD's judgment was extensive for Israel and we must pray that His same judgment will not come upon us for the evil and turning away to other gods that we have committed in America:

"If my people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14, KJV)

The children of Israel lost the victory GOD gave them in Judges Chapter 1 so quickly and GOD sent an angel of the LORD to communicate this loss to them due to their evil and idolatry:

"And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break My covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?"

When we think of gods and idolatry as Americans we usually separate ourselves from the previous time periods of idolatry. We think of bowing down to molden, engraved wooden or metal images. But how often do we think of other types of idolatry, like the idolatry of the heart.

What are some types of idolatry (anything we love more than GOD) that we have in America?

As Christians, how can we be sensitive to making sure that we do not take part in any form of idolatry (even if it is only in our hearts)?

The Israelites suffered tremendous consequences for not driving the idols out of their lives; this was due to the sin of individual after individual, family after family, which made an entire community and nation. Could you imagine being the first person to compromise? GOD knows exactly who that person was. And then one of your friends is influenced by your behavior, choosing to compromise. Then their family, then another family and another family. Before you know it a societal norm is formed. And the entire nation is known for idolatry. That's all it takes for GOD's judgment to come to a nation and for your actions to affect an entire people group.

How can your personal actions and decisions affect an entire people group? Describe exactly how you think this can happen step by step.

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What we think we are worshipping can actually become a snare to us and a thorn in our side. Notice what an angel of the LORD also said to the people of Israel:

“Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.” (Judges 2:3, KJV)

How can the gods in your personal life become a thorn in your side or a snare to you, even if at first you welcomed them with gladness? How is this judgment? Be detailed in your response.

Even with this warning from an angel of the LORD, the children of Israel still chose to serve these other gods, “And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.” (Judges 2:13, KJV)

Has there ever been a time in your life in which the LORD has warned you of the consequences of sin, but you still chose to do your own will instead of GOD’s will? Describe the situation and the outcome of your choices.

The LORD was very angry with the Israelites because of their disobedience, to the extent of giving them over to their enemies and weakening them:

“And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against

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them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.” (Judges 2:14-15, KJV)

Have you considered that when you are disobedient some of the friction you find, the difficulty you face and the hardness of transgression is due to GOD’s judgment of your sin? What are some consequences to your sin that you need to repent of so that GOD’s judgment can lift off of your life today and you can walk in a freedom and ease of mind and life again, so that you can stand before your enemies again in victory (as in Judges Chapter 1)? So that you will not be greatly distressed (depressed, confused, confounded) anymore?

GOD’s answer for the Israelites brings us full circle to our study of Deborah. He raised up judges to deliver them out of the hand of their enemies that were spoiling them (taking everything that belonged to them and giving it to others):

“Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.” (Judges 2:16, KJV)

These judges were a true sign of the mercy of GOD.

But even when GOD sends us mercy we still have to choose to receive His mercy and use it wisely. These people were unblessable, they had chosen to waste His mercy to do what they wanted to do even though He told them what they wanted to do was bad for them:

“And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so.” (Judges 2:17, KJV)

GOD raised up these judges because He loved His people so much, but they did not see the value in Him raising up judges as gifts to them, just as He has raised up five-fold ministry leaders as gifts to His people today and people do not always value His gifts:

“Wherefore He saith, When he ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.) An He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:8-12, KJV)

Jesus went up above the heavens and He went into hell after He was resurrected from the dead and died on the cross for our sins, but when He left He gave us gifts. These gifts are apostle, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These are the instruments (people) that GOD has chosen to use in our time period like the prophets in some time periods, the kings in others and the judges of Deborah’s day.

For each time period on the earth, GOD has established a particular system of leadership to represent His kingdom and dominion on the earth and to keep the people in a blessable state of mind and being.

If the people understand their history and background, they will find themselves getting the understanding needed to appreciate when GOD sends them GOD Fearing Leaders. But if they do not

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understand the ways of GOD they will fall into the trap of independence from leaders, believing this is freedom when it is really bondage and idolatry (the worship of self-pleasure).

They will then immediately be driven into the hands of their enemies (even if it takes time to see this realized fully in their lives).

Do you appreciate the leaders GOD has placed in your life and see them as a blessing, a way of escape from your own idolatrous ways? Can you see yourself in Judges Chapter 2? Even when you were determined to go your own way, GOD established leaders (such as pastors) in your life to deliver you out of the hands of the enemies that came due to your own sin. But can you see that as it is? Do you value what the LORD has done for you?

Ask GOD to help you see the truth and walk in the light in this area of your life!

The LORD will lead your leaders as He did with the judges of Israel and He will be with them to help you! It is up to you and I not to go “whoring after other gods” and bowing back down to them when your leaders are trying to guide you out of bondage. You should be grateful and appreciative of their guidance in your life. Ask the LORD to help you have an attitude of gratitude and a positive perspective of the leadership He has placed over your life, for your good.

“And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.” (Judges 2:19, KJV)

God’s mercy was abundant for the children of Israel, but they were stubborn (Judges 2:19) and decided to do even worse sin than their forefathers did after the judges died. This created a super stronghold in their lives that GOD allowed to stay there to prove whether they would follow the LORD or not (Judges 2:22). He allowed the stronghold to remain in the Israelites lives and would not deliver them too quickly so that the Israelites would be proven to love Him and live for them. He knew that if He delivered them and they did not listen to Him they would be worse off after His deliverance so He let them remain in bondage for a time.

What area of your life do you currently desire to see the hand of the LORD bring you out in deliverance? Have you been stuck in that are for a long time? Is your heart surrendered to the LORD and determined not to turn to these other gods again? This may determine how quickly the LORD will see fit to deliver you.

Choose life. Choose not to be stubborn in your ways and to turn to the LORD with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength today.

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II. Judges Chapter 3-4: The Story of Deborah

The Children of Israel had to live in the midst of their enemies to see whether they would live for GOD or not when He delivered them. If they could pass the test of serving the LORD in the midst of their enemies then they would live for Him when their enemies were not around and everything was going well for their lives.

But the Children of Israel did not take advantage of passing this test or the opportunity to be proven. Perhaps you find yourself amongst the enemies of GOD, in the midst of a sinful environment, you can also be proven to be like a fish (unsalted by the salty ocean water surrounding), consistently living for the LORD.

The time will come when the LORD will bring you out of the environment of temptation into a field of life and joy. But you must pass the test you are currently in to live in the peaceful place of refreshing.

The Children of Israel had begun a tumultuous journey of being in bondage to an enemy as punishment then being saved by a judge the LORD raised up. The judge would then die and the children of Israel would go back to their evil ways only to be back in bondage. This is akin to the lifestyle of a backslidden Christian, going back and forth in their sin, never living in consistent victory- crying out to the LORD when the state of your life gets extremely bad, then falling right back into sin when He brings you victory.

Apparently when the Israelites chose to do evil again, they had forgotten about the long periods of time (i.e. 40 years) of rest that came when they obeyed the LORD and listened to their GODLY judge.

How quickly we forget the blessings of the LORD that come when we obey Him!

How quickly we forget the bondage of sin when we choose not to serve Him! We forget all of the loss we previously encountered- the loss of joy, peace of mind and the warmth of His presence.

We choose to believe that the bondage we face is all the enemy and not a consequence of sin; it is all due to chance and "bad luck"; when, in fact, there are times that this bondage is a consequence of sin.

The Judge Deborah entered the scene at yet another fallen time in the Children of Israel's lives. They were sold into slavery by the LORD Himself. Wow! That is a sobering thought that the LORD Himself can sell His people (you and I) into slavery. They were sold to Jabin, the king of Canaan, whose captain was Sisera (Judges 4:1). They were now crying out to the LORD for freedom from Jabin and his captain Sisera, because he had 900 chariots of iron and they were in slavery to him for 20 years (Judges 4:2).

Deborah was their judge. She was also a prophetess and a wife. Her husband's name was Lapidoth. Deborah had a career, she was a woman of GOD, who spoke the Word of GOD in accuracy to the people of GOD, she was a politician and she was a wife. Deborah was the epitome of what every woman deems to be successful in our day and time.

Deborah was powerful and submitted. She was a leader and a follower of GOD. She was well rounded.

All the Children of Israel came up to her for judgment. She was famous and well respected.

When she gave an instruction it was executed.

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Deborah was even a leader over the men of her day. For example, she called for Barak and gave him a Word from the LORD saying, "Hath not the LORD GOD of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand." (Judges 4:6-7, KJV)

Deborah was a prophetess and she corrected Barak for not obeying the LORD. She called him out to find out why he was not being obedient to the instruction the LORD had given him, just as Samuel the prophet had done for King Saul and Nathan the prophet had done for King David.

Many times due to the lack of Biblical living in our land, we find it hard to relate to a woman such as Deborah. We are told that we cannot have it ALL as women. We cannot be a politician, a prophetess, and a wife. We must choose one profession and sacrifice our household. But following the voice of the LORD and His leading for our lives looks much grander than living in the culturally acceptable norms of our day. She was able to embody all three callings and they flowed very well together.

We can learn from Deborah's example that we should not limit ourselves as women to what we have seen others do in our time or throughout history. We should be inspired that whatever GOD is calling us to do is possible with His help and grace. We do not have to fit the mold or norm that culture tells us we cannot break out of; we can overcome with dignity and grace.

Deborah had to encourage a man to obey the LORD.

Barak responded to her that if she would go with him then he would go and deliver the children of Israel out of Sisera's hands.

She chose to go with him but told him that he would lose his own honor (that the LORD wanted to give to him) and that a woman would kill Sisera. He would not gain the honor of being the one known for killing Sisera and delivering the children of Israel. This would have been a heroic action in any time period- to deliver an entire people group out of slavery. But it would have been really sad to lose this honor to a woman (twice over).

Instead, Barak is now known for his cowardice and slow obedience to the LORD.

Deborah's strength, honor and dignity reveals to us as woman what it looks like to lead with power as opposed to leading out of a Jezebel type of spirit and demeanor. There are clear Biblical examples of a woman's leadership proving that GOD has no problem with women being prevalent as key leaders (even when they are married and even over men).

Deborah was not leading for self-glory or to prove that she could do it even though she was a woman (this would be demeaning); she was leading to glorify the LORD, out of a heart of service to the LORD and His people.

She must have been a fierce woman for Barak to feel comforted like a baby boy with his mother when going to war!

Remember, he was coming against Sisera's army of 900 chariots. This would have been intimidating to say the least but Deborah's presence alone gave him confidence that he could win this war.

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When they got to Sisera, Deborah confidently said to Barak, “Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee?” Barak then took his 10,000 men to fight Sisera.

The LORD then stepped in to trouble Sisera and all of his warriors (with 900 chariots) to the point that he literally ran off of his chariot on his feet, running away from Barak.

Barak then chases their chariots down and kills every single one of them with the sword (not one man was left alive).

By the hand of the LORD, Sisera ran straight into a woman’s home. Her name was Jael and she was married to a man named Heber. She was very hospitable to Sisera saying, “Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not.” (Judges 4:18, KJV). She then housed him giving him a blanket to get nice and comfortable in; Sisera then asks for a little water to drink because he was thirsty. She opens a bottle of milk and gives him some milk and covers him with the blanket.

There’s nothing like a woman’s hospitality to get you nice and comfortable. Jael proved to value of housekeeping in this passage.

Sisera was still very afraid, he was shaken with fear because he told Jael to stand at the door of the tent so that if anyone comes to ask if he is there she can say there is no one there.

As he is laying there, Jael then gets a nail from her tent, takes a hammer in her hand and goes gently towards him, driving the nail into his temples (head) all the way to the ground!

Can you imagine the fierceness of this woman who was just a second ago so calm and gentle, so wise and loving? This is the power of a woman led by GOD.

She can embody more than one stereotype or attribute. She is not a Jezebel, nor a mamie, nor a housewife, nor a career woman. She embodies Proverbs 31. This is a woman of GODLY Power.

She is not afraid nor shy. She is quiet when she needs to be, but full of wisdom. She opens her mouth with kindness but also wisdom. She is bold and fierce when needed. She is timely.

This woman waited until her enemy was asleep and tired to kill him. He died right in her tent and she saved her people from the bondage of years of slavery.

Then she goes out to Barak as he is looking for Sisera and says to him, “Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest.” (Judges 4:22, KJV)

Barak follows her to her tent, finding Sisera laying there dead with a nail in his temples.

This was how GOD destroyed the bondage of the Canaanites over the Israelites until Jabin the king of Canaan was destroyed and the Israelites were prosperous.

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Life Reflections:

A. Did you know that the LORD could use women in such powerful ways and He wants to use us as woman to destroy the works of the enemy? How can GOD use you as a woman of GOD to destroy Satan's works in your nation?

B. What can you learn from Deborah's demeanor and actions when responding and talking to Barak in this chapter of the Bible?

C. What do the judges and Deborah reveal to you about the character/attributes of GOD (who GOD is)?

D. Compare Jael's fierceness towards Sisera to your own fierceness towards the sin in your life. How can you be more determined and wise about defeating sin in your life, without fear?

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III. Judges Chapter 5: The Song of Deborah and Barak

There are many songs in the Bible, such as the Song of Moses and the Song of Mary signaling the victory of GOD's people! This is one of those songs, sealing the victory of the Children of Israel during Deborah's day.

These songs are usually a summary of what the LORD has just done in the people of GOD's lives.

There is even a song in the Book Revelation sung in heaven about the judgments of GOD on His enemies in the End Time Church. This is a very exciting topic whereas we live in the End Times today and there are already songs written about our time period in heaven.

Deborah and Barak's song began with Praise:

"Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves."
(Judges 5:2, KJV)

This reveals to us that the appropriate response to the LORD's deliverance in our lives is praise. We should not doubt or wonder if we are going to fall back into bondage. Instead we should seal GOD's deliverance with the fruit of our lips.

How do you normally respond to GOD's freedom in your life, especially in areas you have been stuck in for years? The children of Israel were in bondage for 20 years, which is a long time to be in slavery, but they were solidified in their freedom, following their leaders in celebration.

Deborah and Barak went on to celebrate GOD in front of the other kings of their day saying, "Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel." (Judges 5:3, KJV)

Even the victorious one, Deborah, the Judge of Israel (who would have been well known at this point for winning a war during her reign) celebrated the LORD and sang praise to the LORD GOD of Israel. Could you imagine that being the heartfelt response of our leaders in America when we won a battle or a war? We set up an entire national day of praise and worship, writing a song that lifted up GOD, then putting it on every major news station for the international press to see it? But furthermore, we started out the song by saying that we want every other national leader to know who our GOD is that has delivered us? This would be an amazing tribute to our GOD.

Then we went on to say that GOD was the one who was out on the battle field of Iraq or whomever we were currently fighting. That would be a powerful statement.

After giving glory to GOD, Deborah began to proclaim who she was, a mother of Israel. A mother was a tremendous honor in her day and time. It was not seen as a burden or unnecessary hindrance to a woman's life. Deborah knew who she was and confidently stated it in her song:

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“The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel.” (Judges 5:7, KJV)

Deborah arose as a mother to Israel, leading her people with great poise and wisdom. She led them right out of slavery into prosperity.

As a mother, she caused the inhabitants of the villages to be refilled and the family to return to Israel. Israel, their home, was now seen as a good and safe place to dwell.

Isn't that the role of a mother? To bring comfort? To bring hope? To bring a sense of safety and joy?

That's exactly what Deborah's motherly presence brought to the nation of Israel and without female leaders such as Deborah we would lack in our balanced understanding of who GOD is. He brings that comfort like a protective mother's embrace to her children in great times of need.

Deborah then ends her song with a beautiful replaying of the current events of her time. She celebrates the heroic action of the woman Jael, who killed the enemy of GOD, Sisera:

²⁴ Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent.

²⁵ He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish.

²⁶ She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.

²⁷ At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead.

²⁸ The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots?

²⁹ Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself,

³⁰ Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?

³¹ So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.

(Judges 5:24-31, KJV)

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Deborah's perspective is GODLY and positive. She sees the murder of Sisera as a good action on Jael's part because he was an enemy of GOD. She did not feel condemnation or bad feelings when the LORD's work was completed. She was happy for her people's victory! She even mentioned Sisera's mother asking about his chariot.

Deborah was clearly a warrior.

She ends with a prophetic declaration, "Let all thine enemies perish, O LORD." Deborah's heart was for the LORD. And she wanted everyone that loved the LORD to be as the sun when it is coming out at it's strongest.

Because of Deborah's presence and GODLY Leadership, Israel had restful peace for forty years.

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