

# Deborah Brings God's Blessings

God promised Israel many blessings if they were faithful to Him, and we can read these in Leviticus 26:3–12 and Deuteronomy 28:1–14. In stark contrast, the nation would be subject to severe punishments if they were unfaithful; these can be found in Leviticus 26:14–39 and Deuteronomy 28:15–68. One such curse was that God said:

*I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies (Leviticus 26:17).*

The people of Israel were in this sorry state before the prophetess Deborah inspired them to spiritual renewal. They were being oppressed by the Canaanites whose military commander was called Sisera. Thanks to her leadership, Israel enjoyed the 'blessings of obedience', as God freed them from Canaanite rule and the land had rest for forty years.

## Female Authority

Deborah is introduced to us in the Bible as a 'prophetess'. This is a rare description and it is even rarer for the name of a godly prophetess to be provided as well (Miriam, Huldah and Anna are the others). Although never explicitly described as such, Deborah was clearly also a 'judge', or governor:

*Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah*

*and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment (Judges 4:4–5).*

Her husband is only mentioned by name on this one occasion, which serves to emphasize that it was Deborah: female prophet, female judge and wife who was to play a central role in the deliverance of Israel – not a male prophet, male judge and husband as we might expect given that Israel's society was highly patriarchal.

Such was Deborah's standing in the nation, that when she called the army commander Barak to take his men and fight against Sisera, he would only go if she accompanied him. Here Barak's fear and anxiety is contrasted with Deborah's faith and courage. Perhaps this explains why Barak was told:

*There will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman (Judges 4:9).*

We may be forgiven for thinking (as Barak surely did) that Deborah herself was the woman being spoken of. However, it was a different woman, Jael, who was given the honour of killing Sisera (4:17, 21).

## Inspiring Leadership

Deborah's faith and spiritual understanding combined beautifully in her inspiring words of encouragement to Barak:

*Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you? (4:14).*

This faithful prophetess knew that it was the LORD God of Israel who fought their battles and brought about their deliverance. Neither she nor Barak nor a rejuvenated army of ten thousand men could bring about salvation through human means alone. As the Proverb states:

*The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance is of the LORD (Proverbs 21:31).*

Barak was clearly energized by Deborah's confident words – no longer was he reluctant to fulfil the command to go into battle against Sisera's army:

*Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him (Judges 4:14).*

This powerful transformation into a valiant leader surely helps to explain why Barak is listed as a man of faith in that great list of the faithful in Hebrews chapter 11 (verse 32). It seems that this is part of what Deborah wanted to do all along, to contribute to the spiritual renewal of men such as Barak. This is seen later, when they sang with joy:

*When leaders lead in Israel, when the people willingly offer themselves, bless the LORD!... My heart is with the rulers of Israel who offered themselves willingly with the people. Bless the LORD! (Judges 5:2, 9).*

It was not Deborah's objective to become a permanent leader or a com-

mander of the army; rather to inspire the leaders and commanders with her wise words, her spiritual understanding and ultimately, her faith.

## **Blessings from God**

Israel's spiritual revival resulted in numerous blessings for them, just as God had promised. The account in Judges of God bringing about the victory for Israel refers to the blessings, and they are especially striking when the passages in question are placed side by side. These comparisons provide a fitting way to conclude this brief consideration of Deborah, who was clearly an exceptional prophetess and judge:

- *The Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army... before Barak (Judges 4:15).*
- *I will... make all your enemies turn their backs to you (Exodus 23:27).*
- *Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot (Judges 4:15).*
- *The LORD will cause your enemies... to be defeated... they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways (Deuteronomy 28:7).*
- *God subdued Jabin king of Canaan in the presence of the children of Israel (Judges 4:23).*
- *The LORD your God is He who goes over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and bring them down before you (Deuteronomy 9:3).*

**Stephen Blake**