

Heroines of the Bible

Devorah

With Adina Landa

Devorah – 3000 years ago. [Leader from 2654 until her death in 2694 \(1067 BCE\)](#)

Deborah: (a) Fourth of the Judges, a prophetess who judged and taught the Israelites for forty years (1107-1067 BCE) following Ehud and Shamgar's deaths. When the Israelites relapsed into idolatry they were subjected to the rule of the Canaanite king, Jabin, and his general, Sisera. Deborah and Barak led a small Israelite army in battle and completely destroyed the Canaanite army and gained independence.

The Backdrop:

Text 1- Shoftim/Judges 17:6, 21:25:

In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was proper in his own eyes.

Practical Application #1:

A very powerful lesson right at the beginning of our lesson. As soon as we lose our sense of unity and each begin doing whatever seems right in our own eyes, with little regard for the nation as a whole – when no leaders seem to be in sight, and we all seem to be creating those little ghettos to protect ourselves instead of reaching out – the results are never pretty.

Text 2: Shoftim/Judges 4:1-3:

And the people of Israel again did evil in the sight of the L-rd when Ehud [judge at the time] was dead. And the L-rd sold them into the hand of Yabin, King of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor, the captain of whose army was Sisra, who lived in Charoshet-Hagoyim.

Text 3: Shoftim 4:4:

...a prophetess, the woman of Lapidot, [who] judged Israel at that time.

In the above text, three descriptions are attributed to Devorah:

1. A prophetess
2. The woman of Lapidot
3. Judged Israel at that time

These facts – that Devorah was 1) a prophetess 2) from Lapidot and 3) a judge – are very significant.

Practical Application #2:

A true leader doesn't impose oneself upon others. That is called exploitation. A true leader is someone who inspires others to be themselves. There are "leaders" who drown out all other sounds, even cries for help, so long as their own preachy voice rings loud and clear. Then there are true leaders who can

barely whisper softly (or say nothing at all) and motivate you to find your own voice. Devorah was such a person. And she paved the path for us to emulate her.

Practical Application #3:

Act in ways that aren't just holy; act in ways that inspire others to be holy as well. Do not only make sacrifices; also make candles!

Other Sages interpret *ishet Lapidot* as a description of Devorah's character. She was a "burning torch" a fiery woman who radiated energy, purpose, and a sense of mission. She sought to ignite others and motivate them to action. She began to work in ever-expanding circles of influence: in her own home, later in the communities in which she worked and did business, and finally within the Jewish people as a whole.

Practical Application #4:

Be fiery! The unique quality of a candle is that it can easily illuminate other candles, at no loss to itself. Ignition is contagious and the flame only grows, never diminishes!

Text 4: Shoftim 4:5:

And she would sit under the palm tree of Devorah between Ramah and Beth-El on Mount Efraim; and the people of Israel came up to her for judgement.

Text 5- Shoftim 4:3:

...[Sisra] had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he sorely oppressed the people of Israel.

Practical Application #5:

Our growth and accomplishment, who we are and what we can be, is a miraculous blessing from Above. But we should never be satisfied. We should raise ourselves up, for our effort and initiative inspires a heavenly response of even greater proportions!

Practical Application #6

Rising up means being a mother: not sitting as the world turns but nurturing and developing the world to run smoother.

Text 6: Shoftim 4:6:

And she sent and called Barak, the son of Avinoam of Kedesh-Naftali, and said to him, "Behold, G-d the L-rd of Israel has commanded..."

Text 7: Shoftim 4:8:

If you will go with me, I will go; but if you do not go with me, I will not go.

Text 8: Shoftim 4:10:

And Barak called Zevulun and Naftali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet; and Devorah went up with him.

Practical Application #7:

In life, there are two contrasting elements: 1) our own individual abilities and 2) our faith and trust in something more than ourselves. Bitachon – trust and faith – is not depending on G-d as a crutch; bitachon is trusting in our innate, G-dly spark, knowing that no matter what the odds seem to be, we can transcend nature and turn the ordinary into the extraordinary! Faith in G-d is the most empowering thing, inspiring us to act even when the whole world says that a situation is hopeless.

Text 9: Shoftim 5:2-18:

Praise you, the L-rd, for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves ... My heart goes out toward the rulers of Israel, who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless you, the L-rd...out of Efraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after you, Binyamin, with your tribes; from Machir came down leaders, of Zevulun those who handle the marshal's staff. And the princes of Yisachar were with Devorah; Yisachar, and also Barak; into the valley they rushed forth, at his feet... Zevulun was a people who risked their lives to the death, and Naftali likewise, on the high places of the field.

Text 10 Shoftim 5:15-17:

In the divisions of Reuven, great were the resolves. Why then did you sit among the sheepfolds? To hear the bleating of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuven there were great searchings of heart. Gilead dwells beyond the Jordan; and why did Dan remain by the ships? Asher continued on the seashore, and abode by his bays.

Text 11: Shoftim 4: 12-16:

And they told Sisra that Barak, the son of Avinoam, had gone up to Mount Tabor. And Sisra gathered together all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the people who were with him, from Charoshet-Hagoyim to the river of Kishon. And Devorah said to Barak, "Arise, for this is the day in which the L-rd has delivered Sisra into your hand. Has not the L-rd gone out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor, and 10,000 men after him. And the L-rd confounded Sisra, and all his chariots, and all his army, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisra alighted down from his chariot, and after the army, to Charoshet-Hagoyim. And all the army of Sisra fell upon the edge of the sword, and there was not a man left.

Yael:

Text 12: Shoftim 4:12:

And Sisra fled away on foot to the tent of Yael, the wife of Hever the Kenite; for there was peace between Yabin, the king of Hazor and the house of Hever the Kenite.

6 Pesukim (verses) back:

Text 13: Shoftim 4:11:

Now Hever the Kenite, who was the descendant of Hobab, the father in law of Moshe, had separated himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent near the Elon-Betsa'ananim, which is by Kedesh.

Text 14: Shoftim 4:18-22:

And Yael went out to meet Sisra, and said to him, "Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not." And when he had turned in to her, into the tent, she covered him with a mantle. And he said to her, "Give me, I beg you, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty." And she opened a skin of milk, and gave him a drink, and covered him. Again he said to her, "Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man comes and inquires of you, and says, 'Is there any man here?' that you shall say 'No.'" Then Yael, Hever's wife, took a peg of the tent, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him, and struck the peg into his temples, and fastened it into the ground; for he was fast asleep and he died. And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisra, Yael came out to meet him, and said to him, "Come, I will show you the man whom you seek." And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisra lay dead, and the peg was in his temples.

Text 15: Midrash, Eliyahu Rabah, CH 9:

Yael was a woman who acted fittingly. Who can be considered a woman who acts fittingly? A woman who does the will of her husband.

Text 16: Shoftim 5:28-30

The mother of Sisra looked out through the window, and cried through the lattice, "Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why do the hoof beats of his chariots tarry?" Her wise ladies answered her, she even answered herself, "Have they not found booty? Have they not divided the plunder? To every man a maiden or two; to Sisra, a booty of diverse colors, a plunder of many-colored needle-work, dyed double-worked garments for the necks of those who take the plunder.

Closing:

The name, Devorah, in Hebrew also means bee. While a bee provides a sweet substance, it can also sting. The enemy at that time employed physical oppression as well as psychological warfare, by hurtling harsh stinging words. Devorah's leadership sweetened the lives of the people, by driving away the forces and retorting with her own stinging remarks.

Like Devorah, we can be like a bee, bringing sweetness to the world, stinging anyone who wishes to sour that sweetness. Being strong is knowing when, what and whom to embrace, while simultaneously protecting and nurturing our loved one from any harmful situations.

We may not all be prophetesses and judges, but we can nevertheless judge favorably and envision a better tomorrow; one without battles, neither physical nor spiritual. With the lessons of Devorah at hand, we know that this better tomorrow will be here today!