

DEBORAH'S STORY

Deborah was a prophet and one of the judges; leaders who ruled Israel before kings. You can read about her in Judges 4-5 at <https://www.biblegateway.com>

The story occurs at a time when the Israelites were being oppressed by the Canaanite King Jabin and Sisera the commander of his army. Towns were being attached and looted because of the military superiority of the Canaanites. Barak was the military leader of the Israelites and Deborah sent for him. She instructed him ***“The God of Israel commands you, ‘Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bring ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will draw out Sisera with his chariots and troops and. I will give him into your hand’.***

Barak responded ***“I will go only if you go with me”*** and Deborah agrees to go with him. The entire story is written in the song sung by Deborah and Barak: Judges 5:1-31

2. ‘When locks are long in Israel,
when the people offer themselves willingly—
bless^[a] the ALMIGHTY GOD
3. ‘Hear, O rulers; give ear, O commanders;
to Yahweh I will sing,
I will make melody to Yahweh, the God of Israel.
4. ‘GOD, when you went out from Seir,
when you marched from the region of Edom,
the earth trembled,
and the heavens poured,
the clouds indeed poured water.
5. The mountains quaked before the ALMIGHTY GOD, the One of Sinai,
before Yahweh, the God of Israel.
6. ‘In the days of Shamgar son of Anath,
in the days of Jael, caravans ceased
and travellers kept to the byways.
7. The peasantry prospered in Israel,
they grew fat on plunder,
because you arose, Deborah,
arose as a mother in Israel.
8. ⁸When new gods were chosen,
then war was in the gates.

- Was shield or spear to be seen
among forty thousand in Israel?
9. My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel
who offered themselves willingly among the people.
Bless Yahweh.
10. 'Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys,
you who sit on rich carpets,^[b]
and you who walk by the way.
11. To the sound of musicians^[c] at the watering-places,
there they repeat the triumphs of the ALMIGHTY ONE,
the triumphs of the peasantry in Israel.
'Then down to the gates marched the people of Yahweh.
12. 'Awake, awake, Deborah!
Awake, awake, utter a song!
Arise, Barak, lead away your captives,
O son of Abinoam.
13. Then down marched the remnant of the noble;
the people of Yahweh marched down against the mighty.
14. From Ephraim they set out^[e] into the valley,^[f]
following you, Benjamin, with your kin;
from Machir marched down the commanders,
and from Zebulun those who bear the marshal's staff;
15. the chiefs of Issachar came with Deborah,
and Issachar faithful to Barak;
into the valley they rushed out at his heels.
Among the clans of Reuben
there were great searchings of heart.
16. Why did you tarry among the sheepfolds,
to hear the piping for the flocks?
Among the clans of Reuben
there were great searchings of heart.
17. Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan;
and Dan, why did he abide with the ships?
Asher sat still at the coast of the sea,
settling down by his landings.
18. Zebulun is a people that scorned death;
Naphtali too, on the heights of the field.

19. 'Rulers came, they fought;
then they fought the rulers of Canaan,
at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;
they got no spoils of silver.
20. The stars fought from heaven,
from their courses they fought against Sisera.
21. The torrent Kishon swept them away,
the onrushing torrent, the torrent Kishon.
March on, my soul, with might!
22. 'Then loud beat the horses' hoofs
with the galloping, galloping of the steeds.
23. 'Curse Meroz, says the angel of YAHWEH curse bitterly its inhabitants,
because they did not come to the help of Yahweh
to the help of God against the mighty.
24. 'Most blessed of women be Jael,
the wife of Heber the Kenite,
of tent-dwelling women most blessed.
25. He asked water and she gave him milk,
she brought him curds in a lordly bowl.
26. She put her hand to the tent-peg
and her right hand to the workmen's mallet;
she struck Sisera a blow,
she crushed his head,
she shattered and pierced his temple.
27. He sank, he fell,
he lay still at her feet;
at her feet he sank, he fell;
where he sank, there he fell dead.
28. 'Out of the window she peered,
the mother of Sisera gazed^[a] through the lattice:
"Why is his chariot so long in coming?
Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?"
29. Her wisest ladies make answer,
indeed, she answers the question herself:
30. "Are they not finding and dividing the spoil?—
A girl or two for every man;
spoil of dyed stuffs for Sisera,

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spoil of dyed stuffs embroidered,
two pieces of dyed work embroidered for my neck as spoil?"

31. 'So perish all your enemies, Yahweh!
But may your friends be like the sun as it rises in its might.'

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What surprised you?

What questions would you like to ask Deborah?

Why might Deborah be referred to as Mother In Israel? Judges 5:7

What was Deborah's source of inspiration and courage to go into battle?

JUDITH'S STORY

The book of Judith celebrates the story of an Israeli widow who by infiltrating the enemy camp, accompanied only by her maid, delivered her people from certain conquest.

The enemy is the army of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians, led by his general Holofernes whose mission is to capture all the lands who have not paid homage to Nebuchadnezzar. The Israelis, in the hill city of Bethulia, also refused to surrender to the Assyrian army. The Assyrian army then encamped on the plains and surrounded the hill city shutting off the water supply of Bethulia. After thirty four days the people were ready to surrender. Their leader Uzziah persuaded them to give God five more days to rescue them from their enemies and if God did not rescue them they would surrender to Holofernes and his army. In the meantime, when Judith, a wealthy widow heard about the situation she sent for the leaders. Her entire speech is written in [Judith 8:12-27](#)

Key messages in her address to the leaders are:

Do not try to bind the purposes of our God; for God is not like a human being, to be threatened, or like a mere mortal, to be won over by pleading. ¹⁷ Therefore, while we wait for God's deliverance, let us call upon God to help us, and who will hear our voice if it so pleases God.²⁵ In spite of everything let us give thanks to the our God, who is putting us to the test like our ancestors were. ²

Judith's story is a must read [Judith 8-15, 16:21-25](#)

Briefly: Judith changes her widow's garments for beautiful clothes and slips out of the village with her maid. She is apprehended by an Assyrian patrol and brought to Holofernes, the general. She tells him that unlike her fellow villagers she wishes her life to be spared. She advises him that she will learn the best time to defeat the Israelites and she herself will lead him successfully into Jerusalem. Over the course of four days, she gained Holofernes's' trust and on the fifth night she acts as if she will seduce him. She gets him totally drunk and when he passes out she takes his sword and cuts off his head and puts it in her food bag.

Over the previous four nights she established a pattern of leaving the camp and for this reason is not stopped when she leaves on the fifth night. When she and her maid return to their village she instructs the leaders to put Holofernes' head on the parapet. When the Assyrians found Holofernes dead and saw his head on the parapet they fled.

And Judith sang

***Begin a song to my God with tambourines,
sing to God with cymbals.***

***Raise to Yahweh a new psalm;^[a]
cry out for joy, and call upon God's name.***

- 2. For Yahweh is a God who crushes wars;
and lives among the people in a tent ;
who delivered me from the hands of my pursuers.***
- 3. The Assyrian came down from the mountains of the north;
with myriads of warriors;
their numbers blocked up the wadis,
and their cavalry covered the hills.***
- 4. They boasted that they would burn up my territory,
and kill my young people with the sword,
and dash my infants to the ground,
and seize my children as booty,
and take all our young women as spoil.***
- 5. But Almighty God has foiled them
by the hand of a woman.^[b]***
- 6. For their mighty one did not fall by the hands of the young soldiers,
nor did the children of the Titans strike him down,
nor did tall giants set upon him;
but Judith daughter of Merari
with the beauty of her countenance undid him.***
- 7. For she put away her widow's clothing
to exalt the oppressed in Israel.
She anointed her face with perfume;***
- 8. she fastened her hair with a tiara
and put on a linen gown to beguile him.***
- 9. Her sandal ravished his eyes,
her beauty captivated his mind,
and then the sword severed his neck!***
- 10. The Persians trembled at her boldness,
the Medes were daunted at her daring.***
- 11. Then my oppressed people shouted;
my weak people cried out,^[c] and the enemy^[d] trembled;
they lifted up their voices, and the enemy^[e] were turned back.***
- 12. The children of the oppressed pierced them through
and wounded them like the children of fugitives;
they perished before the army of my God.***

- 13. I will sing to my God a new song:
Yahweh, you are great and glorious,
wonderful in strength, invincible.**
- 14. Let all your creatures serve you,
for you spoke, and they were made.
You sent forth your spirit,^[a] and it formed them;^[a]
there is none that can resist your voice.**
- 15. For the mountains shall be shaken to their foundations with the waters;
before your glance the rocks shall melt like wax.
But to those who fear you
you show mercy.**
- 16. For every sacrifice as a fragrant offering is a small thing,
and the fat of all whole burnt-offerings to you is a very little thing;
but worshipping in reverence is the greatest gift of all.**
- 17. Woe to the nations that rise up against my people!
Almighty God will take vengeance on them in the day of judgement;
Yahweh will send fire and worms into their flesh;
they shall weep in pain for ever.**

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What surprised you in this story?

How would you describe Judith?

What are her chief characteristics?

How does Judith prepare for her encounter with Holofernes?