

DEBORAH

1. Her name means bee.
2. She was married to Lappidot. His name means torches.
3. "In the Tenach, there is only one woman whose force of character and sagacity made her a leader in her own right." [Joan Comay – Who's Who in the Old Testament]
4. Led a successful Israelite revolt (c.12th C. BCE) against Canaanite domination in the north part of the land.
5. The fourth Judge – i) Othniel (Judah – Caleb's nephew); ii) Ehud (Benjamin); iii) Shamgar (tribe unknown).
6. A Judge was a person whose moral authority was regarded as inspired by God and, therefore, was accepted in the settlement of disputes [Joan Comay].
7. The only female Judge. *[A woman is ineligible to judge - Aruch HaShulchan Choshen Mishpat 7:4. Why? Mishna Niddah 49b says that any person who is fit to adjudicate a case and serve as a judge is fit to testify as a witness. Since a woman is unfit to testify, she is unfit to judge. Deborah was only accepted by the people because of the Shechinah. Judges 4:4 should not serve as a proof text that women may serve as judges.]*
8. Deborah (and Samuel?) acted as a judge for the people. The other Judges were military figures.
9. She was also a prophet, one through whom God expressed His will. She could also predict the future.
10. She was based between Bet-El and Ramah, which was in the territory of Benjamin, on Mt Ephraim.
11. The latter is a generic term for a range of mountains stretching from Bet-El north to the Jezreel Valley.
12. That suggests that Deborah operated at the southern tip of the Mt Ephraim range.
13. She decided the time was right to fight King Yavin of Hazor and summoned Barak from Kedesh-Naphtali.
14. Kedesh, one of the cities of refuge, was 20 miles north of Lake Kinneret and 120 miles from Deborah.
15. Barak's name means lightning.
16. Deborah's association with torches and lightning suggested to some commentators that she was a woman of fiery enthusiasm.
17. Deborah told Barak to muster 10,000 men from Naphtali and neighbouring Zevulun, travel south and fight Sisera at Mt Tabor, which is c.10 miles east of Nazareth, in the neighbouring territory of Issachar.
18. Mt Tabor's importance stemmed from its strategic control of the junction of the Galil's north-south route with the east-west highway of the Jezreel Valley.
19. Barak refused to fight unless Deborah accompanied him. This is a truly amazing statement in the Tenach.
20. She agreed but predicted that the ultimate prize, the death of Sisera, would be claimed by a woman.
21. Deborah had to urge Barak to attack. He still seemed fearful. She reminded him that God was with him.
22. After the victory, Deborah and Barak sang a paean reminding Israel and its enemies of the power of God.
23. They acknowledged the support of the tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir (E. Manasseh) and Issachar.
24. But they were very critical of the tribes of Reuben, Gilead (Gad), Dan and Asher who failed to materialise.
25. Curiously, they did not mention the absence of the tribes of Judah and Simeon.
26. They blessed Yael, a non-Israelite, for killing Sisera. A woman had achieved what the men could not.
27. The land had peace for 40 years. Presumably, from Hazor and possibly in the north only.
28. Deborah and Yael should take their rightful place in the pantheon of influential and virtuous women in the Tenach, alongside Eve, Sarah, Rebeccah, Leah, Rachel, Tamar, Miriam, Zipporah, Rahab, Ruth, Michal, the woman of Tekoah, Batsheva, Huldah and Esther.