

# דְּבוֹרָה / Devorah

## *Prophetess beneath the Palm*

A. Deborah, wife of Lappidoth, was a prophetess; she led Israel at that time. She used to sit under the Palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites would come to her for decisions.

She summoned Barak son of Abinoam, of Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, “The Lord, the God of Israel, has commanded: Go, march up to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun. And I will draw Sisera, Jabin’s army commander, with his chariots and his troops, toward you up to the Wadi Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hands.” But Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go; if not, I will not go.” “Very well, I will go with you,” she answered. “However, there will be no glory for you in the course you are taking, for then the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.” So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak then mustered Zebulun and Naphtali at Kadesh; ten thousand men marched up after him; and Deborah also went up with him.

B. Sisera was informed that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. So Sisera ordered all his chariots—nine hundred iron chariots—and all the troops he had to move from Harosheth-goiimm to the Wadi Kishon. Then Deborah said to Barak, “Up! This is the day on which the Lord will deliver Sisera into your hands: the Lord is marching before you.” Barak charged down Mount Tabor, followed by the ten thousand men, and the Lord threw Sisera and all his chariots and army into a panic before the onslaught of Barak. Sisera leaped from his chariot and fled on foot as Barak pursued the chariots and the soldiers as far as Harosheth-goiim. All of Sisera’s soldiers fell by the sword; not a man was left.

C. On that day God subdued King Jabin of Hazor before the Israelites. The hand of the Israelites bore harder and harder on King Jabin of Canaan, until they destroyed King Jabin of Canaan. On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang:

When locks go untrimmed in Israel,  
When people dedicate themselves—  
Bless the Lord!

Deliverance ceased,  
Ceased in Israel,  
Till you arose, O Deborah,  
Arose, O mother, in Israel!

Hear, O kings! Give ear, O potentates!  
I will sing, will sing to the Lord,  
Will hymn the Lord, God of Israel.

And the land was tranquil for forty years (Judges 4:1–5:31).

# Classical Midrash

NOW DEBORAH, A PROPHETESS, THE WIFE OF LAPPIDOTH, SHE JUDGED ISRAEL AT THAT TIME [Judges 4:4]. What was the special character of Deborah that qualified her to prophesy about Israel and to judge them? Was not Phineas son of Eleazar still alive at that time? In the school of Elijah it was taught: I call heaven and earth to witness that whether it be a heathen or a Jew, a man or a woman, a manservant or a maidservant, the holy spirit will suffuse any one of them in keeping with the deeds he or she performs.

[What were Deborah's meritorious deeds?] It is said that Deborah's husband was unlettered [in Torah]. So his wife told him: "Come, I will make wicks for you; take them to the Holy Place in Shiloh. Your portion will then be with men of worth in Israel [who will be studying by the light of your wicks], and you will be worthy of life in the world-to-come." She took care to make the wicks thick, so that their light would be ample. He brought these wicks to the Holy Place [in Shiloh]. The Holy One, who examines the hearts and reins of mankind, said to her: Deborah, since you took care to make the light for the study of my Torah ample, I will make the light of your prophecy ample in the presence of Israel's twelve tribes.<sup>2</sup>

-Midrash on Psalms



*The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree, and grow mighty like a cedar in Lebanon. Planted in the house of Adonai, they flourish in the courts of our God. (Psalm 92)*

There are two kinds of tzadikim (righteous people). The cedar represents the first type of tzaddik: a strong tall tree but which bears no fruit. The date palm represents the second type of tzaddik: a tree that is both tall and strong: and also bears fruit in abundance.

(Ba'al Shem Tov)

לִפִּיד - Torch

דְּבוֹרָה - Bee



When God, who tests people's innermost thoughts, saw Devorah's actions, God told her: "Devorah, you intended to increase My light; I, too, shall increase your light in Judah and in Jerusalem."

(Seder Eliyahu Rabbah; 10<sup>th</sup> century)

# Contemporary Midrash

## Devorah's song

### CHORUS:

Arise, arise Devorah  
Arise, arise and sing a song  
Arise arise, Devorah  
*Uri, uri dabri shir*

Devorah the prophet was a judge in Israel  
She sat beneath her palm tree on a hill  
And people came from everywhere  
Just to hear her judgments honest and fair  
Devorah the prophet, Devorah a mother in Israel. (Chorus)

Devorah the prophet was courageous strong and wise  
Her people lived in peace for forty years  
The twelve tribes lived together as one  
For the first time since the world had begun  
Devorah the prophet, Devorah a mother in Israel (Chorus)

### BRIDGE:

Arise, Devorah, arise and sing a song  
Arise, Devorah, *uri uri dabri shir*

Devorah the prophet, a woman of fire, her torch in hand  
She led the Israelites to victory  
Barak said, "Devorah, I cannot fight  
Unless you are standing right by my side!"  
Devorah the prophet, Devorah a mother in Israel (Chorus)

(Debbie Friedman)