

My Name is Honeybee Read Judges 4

My name is Honeybee. Actually, you call me Deborah. But my people call me Honeybee because that is the Hebrew meaning for Deborah. I reside in Ephraim in the central part of Israel where I judge my people under a palm tree called the honey bee tree. This name is due to the honey-like substance that the tree produces. My people come to me for the judgments that I give from Yahweh's Law. According to the psalmist, these judgments are "sweeter than honey" and "sweeter than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb." You might say that I am a honeybee sitting under the honeybee tree that yields a honey-like substance as I provide the judgments of God that are sweeter than honey.

My people had come to Canaan years before in response to Yahweh's promises. Yet, they had ignored the command of Yahweh to rid the land of its inhabitants. As a result, the sons of Israel began to "live among the Canaanites" and they "took the daughters of the Canaanites for themselves as wives." These actions led them to "forget Yahweh their God and serve the Baals," the Canaanite gods. Thus, the "anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel" and Yahweh placed them into the hands of enemy kings. Their land of "milk and honey" which Yahweh had sworn to give them became a land of deprivation due to my people's propensity for idolatry.

In the midst of one of these demoralizing situations, Yahweh, who listens to His people's cry for help, sent a deliverer. Barak, Yahweh's valiant warrior, was dispatched to rout Sisera, the commander of the enemy's armed forces. With his nine hundred chariots, Sisera had overrun and oppressed my people. Yet, Barak was hesitant to obey. Hence, I confronted him with the assurance that Yahweh would deliver Sisera and his nine hundred chariots into his hand. Barak's reply became the turning point in the whole story.

Barak challenged me with a faithless demand: "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go." Until Barak demonstrated his lack of faith, Yahweh's assurance of victory was placed into the hands of a man. Now victory would go to a woman. I told him, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours" for Sisera will be placed "into the hands of a woman." I am sure that you think that the woman was to be me. But, though I stood on Mount Tabor with Barak and his ten thousand foot-soldiers, ready for Yahweh's victorious battle, I was not the woman prophesied.

The storm clouds gathered quickly as, on the mount, we prepared to defy the odds of defeating a massive army which included nine hundred chariots. A deluge of water rained upon us as our men charged down like the lightening flashes around us. As at Sinai in the days of Moses, the mountain trembled with the noise of thunder. So thick were the mud slides from Yahweh's tempestuous storm that many of the chariots were rendered inoperable and abandoned by the fleeing army of Sisera. Thus, "Yahweh routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army."

While Barak and his foot-men pursued the enemy army, Sisera, now on foot, fled in the opposite direction. He arrived at the campsite of a woman named Jael, a Kenite, who offered him sanctuary in her tent. Once she covered him with a heavy blanket, Sisera

pleaded for a drink of water. Since Jael's name means mountain goat, she offered him, not water, but that which is produced by a goat: milk.

You may be perplexed. You have been eagerly awaiting a woman from among Yahweh's people to be a deliverer. But this was a gentile woman who, rather than hindering the enemy, was giving refuge to Sisera. However, as Sisera fell soundly asleep from exhaustion and a belly full of milk, Jael "took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand." She secretly entered the tent and "drove the peg into his head" so that it "went through to the ground."

Hence the prophecy was complete. The honor went to Jael, for the enemy was delivered "into the hands of a woman." And so the two of us—Jael, the mountain goat who gave milk, and I Deborah, the honeybee who gave honey—delivered the people of the land of milk and honey.