

## I. THE ERA OF THE JUDGES: GOD'S INTENDED ORDER

### A. HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

- The time of the Judges (approx. 450 years) is often misrepresented as an age of chaos and decline.
- In reality, it reflected the governmental system envisioned in the Torah—local, tribal rule under the kingship of YHWH.
- The recurring phrase “In those days there was no king in Israel” (Judges 17:6; 21:25) is descriptive, not condemnatory.

### B. LIFE WITHOUT A KING WAS THE INTENDED DESIGN

- No Human King Was Required or Desired by God
  - The Torah established a self-governing tribal system (Deuteronomy 16:18–20; Exodus 18:21–26).
  - Israel's later demand for a king was a rejection of God's rule (1 Samuel 8:7).
  - Gideon affirmed this principle: “I will not rule over you... the LORD shall rule over you.” (Judges 8:23)
- Monarchy Was a Concession, Not a Command
  - Deuteronomy 17:14–20 permits kingship if the people demanded it—never presents it as ideal.
  - The Judges period therefore represents the theocratic norm: God as King, Torah as law, Judges as local administrators

### C. JUDGES AS THE GOD-ORDAINED CIVIC LEADERS

- Institution Established in the Torah
  - “Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates...” (Deuteronomy 16:18).
  - Moses appointed judges of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens (Exodus 18:21–26).
- Function of the Judges
  - Enforce justice locally and interpret Torah for daily life.
  - Restore order during times of covenant violation.
  - Represented men of truth, hating covetousness (Exodus 18:21).
  - Operated under God's authority, not royal hierarchy.
- Pattern in the Book of Judges: Cycles of apostasy → oppression → repentance → deliverance → peace.

- Each deliverer (Othniel, Ehud, Gideon, Samson, etc.) functioned within this system, not outside it. The system itself was sound; the people's obedience was inconsistent.

### D. A LARGELY NON-PROPHETIC AGE

- The Torah Was Already Sufficient Revelation. “The word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.” (Deuteronomy 30:11–14)
- Obedience, not new prophecy, was expected.

## II. WHO SHE WAS AND WHAT SHE DID

### A. HER IDENTITY AND ROLE

- Prophetess (נְבִיאָה, nevi'ah) – one who speaks forth God's revealed word.
- Wife of Lapidoth – likely means “woman of torches” or “fiery woman,” perhaps describing her zeal.
- Judge of Israel – she sat under the palm tree between Ramah and Bethel, where the Israelites came for judgment (Judges 4:5).

### B. HER PROPHETIC MESSAGE

- Deborah's authority did not derive from tribal or military status but from prophetic revelation.
- Her message to Barak (Judges 4:6–7):
  - She declared God's command: “Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward Mount Tabor...?”
  - The prophecy contained both military instruction and God's assurance of victory.
  - God promised to “draw unto thee Sisera”—indicating supernatural orchestration of the battle.
- Barak's hesitation (v. 8) revealed weak faith; Deborah responded with both rebuke and prophecy:
  - “The journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman” (v. 9).
  - This prophecy was fulfilled not by Deborah herself, but by Jael, who slew Sisera with a tent peg (Judges 4:21).
- Her Song in Judges 5 is both historical record and prophetic praise:
  - Exalts the LORD as Israel's true deliverer.
  - Condemns the tribes who refused to fight.
  - Praises the courage of Jael and Barak.
  - Interprets the event theologically: God fought for Israel—“the stars in their courses fought against Sisera” (Judges 5:20).