

Follow The Leader
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Judges 4 and 5

- Finish the quote: Behind every great man there is _____.
- People have coined variations on that quote:
 - “Behind every great man is woman...rolling her eyes.”
 - “Behind every great man is a...surprised mother-in-law.”
- For today’s lesson I would change it up a bit to read:
“Behind every **SUCCESSFUL** man, is a **STRONG** woman.”

Opening question: Think about the women you have known in your life. Who were some **STRONG** women you have known...and in what ways were they strong? How were they **INFLUENCIAL** over the men in their lives?

Unfortunately, sometimes when God calls us to a leadership role we men don’t “step up” the way we should or as fast as we should. And many times in those situations God uses a **STRONG WOMAN** to push us where we need a push.

This morning as we study in Judges, we meet the only **FEMALE** Judge in this period in Israel’s history. Her name was Deborah. (Ironic timing) More about her in a minute.

- Quick review from last week: We said that the book of Judges is an account of **DYSFUNCTION** and **DISOBEDIENCE**, on the part of God’s people.
- When a **NEW**, younger generation took over after the death of Joshua, they began to **REPEAT** a **CYCLE OF DISOBEDIENCE** and **PUNISHMENT**:
 - Step #1 – (Judges 2:10) They **FORGOT** what the Lord had done for them.
 - Step #2 – (Judges 2:11) They **DID EVIL** in God’s eyes. (Idol worship)
 - Step #3 – (Judges 2:14-15) God removed his **BLESSING** and **POWER**; His hand was against them.
 - Step #4 – (Judges 2:16) A **PLEA** for mercy and God rescued them through the Judges.
 - Step #5 – (Judges 2:17) Back to step **ONE**. “**RINSE AND REPEAT**”! And the cycle of disobedience continues.
- In Judges 3 they repeated the cycle:
- They turned to idolatry. God let them be oppressed for 8 years. Then God raised up a judge named Othniel and they had 40 years of peace.
- But, they turned to evil again...18 years of oppression...God delivered them through judges named Ehud and Shamgar. Then, 80 years of peace...the longest period in their history.
- However, in Judges 4 (today’s lesson) we begin in verse 1 with a familiar sentence:

Judges 4:1-23

4 After Ehud died, the Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the Lord. 2 So the Lord sold them into the hands of Jabin, a king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth Haggoyim. 3 Because he had nine hundred iron chariots and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the Lord for help.

4 Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading[a] Israel at that time. 5 She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided. 6 She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. 7 I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'"

8 Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go."

9 "Very well," Deborah said, "I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this,[b] the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will hand Sisera over to a woman."

• Make a note of that last statement "the Lord will hand Sisera over to a woman"...it may not turn out to be what you're thinking.

- Before we see how things turn out. Get the "characters straight" in this DRAMA.
- Verse 2: Villain #1 - The Lord sold them into the hands of _____ (Jabin)
- Also, in verse 2: Villain #2 - Jabin had a commander of his army... (Sisera)
- Verse 3: Sisera was a "tank commander" for that day...what did he have with which to "roll over his enemies"? (900 IRON chariots). This is significant both in terms of the THREAT he represented to Israelites on foot...and to how God would WIN the battle.
- Verse 4: Who is our HEROINE? (Deborah) What was her role? (judge)
- Verse 6: Who is our HERO? (Barak) (Pr. BAIR-ak) What was his role?
- We'll have one more HEROINE...but, let's finish our text picking back up in verse 9:

So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh, 10 where he summoned Zebulun and Naphtali. Ten thousand men followed him, and Deborah also went with him.

11 Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law,[c] and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaananim near Kedesh.

12 When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, 13 Sisera gathered together his nine hundred iron chariots and all the men with him, from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River.

14 Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?" So Barak went down Mount Tabor, followed by ten thousand men. 15 At Barak's advance, the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera abandoned his chariot and fled on foot.

16 But Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim. All the troops of Sisera fell by the sword; not a man was left.

17 Sisera, however, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there were friendly relations between Jabin king of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite.

18 Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Come, my lord, come right in. Don’t be afraid.” So he entered her tent, and she put a covering over him.

19 “I’m thirsty,” he said. “Please give me some water.” She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up.

20 “Stand in the doorway of the tent,” he told her. “If someone comes by and asks you, ‘Is anyone here?’ say ‘No.’”

21 But Jael, Heber’s wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.

22 Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. “Come,” she said, “I will show you the man you’re looking for.” So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple—dead.

23 On that day God subdued Jabin, the Canaanite king, before the Israelites.

- This is a lesson about LEADERSHIP. Leading and following.
 - Following God’s leadership
 - Leading others as He directs, and
 - Following the Godly leaders He raises up.

The Bible doesn’t tell us much about Deborah other than to call her a prophetess, a highly esteemed judge of Israel, and the wife of Lappidoth. We don’t know if Scripture’s description of her as “a mother in Israel” (Judg. 5:7) means that she had children or that she cared for Israel as only a loving mother could. Thomas Nelson, I. (1997). Woman’s study Bible . (Jdg 4:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The Hebrew word translated ‘held court’ was used to describe the way in which a magistrate would settle disputes. This was very important at a time when the infrastructure of the nation had broken down and the normal channels for justice did not exist. - Robinson, S. J. (2006). *Opening up Judges (25–26)*. Leominster: Day One Publications.

Deborah’s name: (Heb. lit. “honey bee”). She has been described as “a bee in peace and a wasp in war.” She was [not only] a prophetess [but became a] military leader. — Thomas Nelson, I. (1997). Woman’s study Bible . (Jdg 4:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

- Question? What kind of leader was Deborah?
- Question: Why could Deborah have easily, humanly, hesitated to take on this role?
- Question? What do you think it means to be a “Deborah” in someone’s life?
- Question? Do you have any examples of a “Deborah” you’ve known?
- Susan has been a Deborah in my life. And, she’s done it allowing me to be the leader of our home...but speaking wisdom into my life, and a little “push” when needed

Charles Stanley writes:

Deborah’s example indicates that it doesn’t take a certain set of credentials to become an effective servant of God. The Lord uses the person who listens to Him and obeys. Deborah made herself available to God, and God made her victorious. — Stanley, C. F. (2005). The Charles F. Stanley life principles Bible : New King James Version (Jdg 5:7). Nashville, TN: Nelson Bibles.

- Question: What kind of leader was Barak? (Discussion)

- Verse 8: How did Barak respond to Deborah's leadership?
- "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go."
- Question: Verse 10 - What does verse 10 indicate about Barak's reputation?
- Question: It appears that Barak was a respected military leader...why would he drag his feet? We don't really know why Barak responded this way. What are some possible reasons he would only go if Deborah would go?
 - Because the directive came from a woman?
 - Was he "weak"?
 - Because he wanted someone who had access to the voice of God with him?
 - What do YOU think?

Our Sunday School Commentary makes this point:

"In times of crisis we need proven leaders. Sometimes the best leaders may be the most reluctant to lead, while the poorest leaders are all too eager for power. But when someone is clearly the right person to take charge, and especially when a time of prayer leads others to the conviction that this person is right for the job, everyone needs to encourage that potential leader to take up the task."

It's obvious Barak was a skilled warrior. But even the most skilled leaders need ENCOURAGEMENT and sometimes a little "PUSH".

- Deborah was not only a LEADER, she was a FOLLOWER too. She agreed to go into battle, risking her life as Barak asked her to do.
- Question: When God raises up LEADERS, how can we as FOLLOWERS, SUPPORT them? (Personal involvement)

After the victory, Deborah and Barak did what we should all do after God DELIVERS: Praise Him, and worship Him! The beginning of Chapter 5 is known as "The Song of Deborah."

Judges 5:1-5

5 On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song:

2 "When the princes in Israel take the lead,
when the people willingly offer themselves—
praise the Lord!

3 "Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers!
I will sing to[a] the Lord, I will sing;
I will make music to[b] the Lord, the God of Israel.

4 "O Lord, when you went out from Seir,
when you marched from the land of Edom,
the earth shook, the heavens poured,
the clouds poured down water.

5 The mountains quaked before the Lord, the One of Sinai,
before the Lord, the God of Israel.

Judges 5:9-11

9 My heart is with Israel's princes,
with the willing volunteers among the people.

Praise the Lord!

10 "You who ride on white donkeys,
sitting on your saddle blankets,
and you who walk along the road,
consider 11 the voice of the singers[a] at the watering places.
They recite the righteous acts of the Lord,
the righteous acts of his warriors[b] in Israel.

So, What's The Take Away?

- When God clearly calls you to leadership: **STEP UP** and **MOVE OUT!**
- When there is reluctance in your heart (and that **WILL HAPPEN**), be open to the Deborah's in your life (whether male or female) and have "ears to hear."
- Ladies: Be a **DEBORAH!** Don't be hesitant to **CHALLENGE** that man in your life when God is clearly leading you to do so. Not to **URSURP** but to **ENCOURAGE** his role as the head of your household.
- When God raises up a leader, we need to be good **FOLLOWERS** and **SUPPORT** and **ENCOURAGE** them.
- And **ALWAYS** (like Deborah and Barak) after God brings the victory **PRAISE HIM** and **WORSHIP HIM** with a song in your heart! Praise him for **LEADERS WHO STEP UP!**