

JUDGES SESSION #6

We turn our attention now to the 4th judge, a woman named **Deborah**. Her story involved a partnership with a man named Barak.

Twelve hundred yrs before Christ, these two leaders were the hottest duet team around. The first line of their best-known song (probably their *only* song!) went like this:

“*When leaders lead* in Israel...wow! bless the Lord!” (5:2)

- in this session we continue our series in Judges by looking at Deborah, a remarkable judge & mighty OT leader, not primarily for her memorable music (we’ll look at the song itself in the next session), but for her **leadership lessons**

- note first the **situation** of the people of Israel:

Judg 4:1-2

When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did **evil** in the sight of the Lord. ² So the Lord **sold** them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army *was* Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim.

³ And the children of Israel **cried** out to the Lord; for Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and for twenty years he had harshly oppressed the children of Israel.

- there is that familiar **cycle of sin** all over again (now for 3rd time)

... this resulted in servitude again (a grim reminder that sin *always* **enslaves**; it does not liberate)

- now for the first time in this Book, Israel is oppressed by people *inside* the land – Canaanites! – the very ones they should have driven out long before

- these Canaanites now controlled the northern and central areas of Israel with the latest **military technology**: iron chariots (often with sharp blades attached to wheels – a fearful weapon indeed!)

- by way of contrast, vs. 8 of the next chapter tells us that there was a complete lack of weapons among Israel

- that chapter also tells us that it was not safe to travel by road & villagers had to move to walled cities for protection

- but ...what was the **real problem**?

... it was not military; it was **spiritual** – the problem was not iron chariots, it was iron **hearts**!

...later, the difference made by a living faith in the living God is nothing less than sensational

[A. DEBORAH, THE **PERSON**]

- let’s begin by looking at Deborah, the *PERSON*

Judg 4:4-5

⁴ Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. ⁵ And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

- her name means “**honeybee**”! ...some humorist has suggested that this was a good name for her because she had honey for her friends and a stinger for her enemies (*God’s* enemies, actually)!

- her strong character reminds me of what the American General Haig said some yrs ago about British P.M. Margaret Thatcher: “*she* was the best *man* in the British cabinet!”
- ...the same thing could have been said about Deborah in her day
 - she is the only woman in Biblical history who had a major, God-given leadership role...and she did a great job of it!
- US President Truman once defined leadership as “the ability to get men to do what they don't want to do and to like it”
 - Truman didn't have gender differences in mind, but his definition of leadership is esp. true of Deborah – in some ways the men of her day were “children”, so God raised up a ‘mother’ for them in the person of Deborah; and she got men to do what they were reluctant to do
- the whole story, as recorded in Judges 4 & 5, emphasizes the fact that *women* (Deborah & another lady named Jael – her story is also a fascinating one!) gained the glory in this victory
- this should not particularly surprise us – the Bible highlights the significance of women in many of its stories
- ...and God still gifts & uses women in very significant ways in the modern church

[B. **DEBORAH'S LEADERSHIP QUALITIES**]

- now we turn to Deborah's Leadership Qualities

1. She had **GOOD EYES** – she saw a **need**

Judg 5:6-7

In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath,
 In the days of Jael,
 The highways were deserted,
 And the travelers walked along the byways.
 7 Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel,
 Until I, Deborah, arose,
 Arose a mother in Israel.

- she was *critically realistic*
- John Gardner said that “Our 20th century institutions are caught in a crossfire between uncritical lovers and unloving critics”
 - **love** without criticism brings **stagnation**
 - **criticism** without love brings **destruction**
 - ...we need a *loving criticism* of our churches, organizations, and even families
- the difference between “harsh criticism” and “honest realism” is **MOTIVE** -- our motive must be one of *love*, a desire to help & build up; not tear down)

2. Deborah's 2nd leadership quality was that she had a **STRONG WILL** – she was **committed** to DO something about it

- the miserable state of affairs in Israel continued “until I, Deborah, *arose.*” (vs. 7)
- Henri Frederic Amiel said, “For purposes of action nothing is more useful than **narrowness of thought** combined with **energy of will.**”
- ...that's Deborah!
- she set a *goal* ...she made a commitment— in her case, political liberty for her people

- how strong is OUR commitment? -- do we have Deborah's quality here? ...when we see a need do we follow through with a commitment to **do** something?
 - there are many needs in our *world* crying out for strong commitment... and surely there must be a multitude of needs & opportunities in your *church* life too
- I like Larry Crabb's insight at this point: "The core problem is not that we are *too passionate* about **bad** things, but that we are *not passionate enough* about **good** things."

3. Her 3rd leadership quality was that she had **OPEN HANDS** – she **enlisted help**

Judg 4:6-7

6 Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali...

- she recognized her own limitations, and Barak's strengths (his name, by the way, means "lightning bolt")
- in doing so, she realized the value of a **team** (and what a great team they turned out to be! – the "Honeybee" & the "Lightning Bolt"!)
- someone said, "**Leadership is action, not position.**"
 - ...Deborah was interested in **action**, in results; she was not at all concerned about **position**; this meant she was willing to share responsibilities & share the credit
- no one individual has ALL the gifts & talents needed in a local church
 - that's why God puts us **together**, combining our gifts & skills & personalities; we need each other; we keep our hands "open" to receive help from brothers & sisters in God's family, and to give help to others

– **Why** did Deborah have such great leadership qualities? (good eyes, strong will, open hands)

- **she was **in touch** with **God**, and in touch with **people**
- note once again 4:4-5...

4 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. 5 And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

...this picture of Deborah under the palm tree (vs. 5) is graphic & significant

- the tall palm tree, stretching up toward the sky – a symbol of her relationship with God
 - and then under that palm tree, the gathering of all kinds of people who came to her for help
 - she was in touch with people
- ...it's a valuable picture for ALL Christians; we are all called to the "ministry of reconciliation" (as Paul put it in 2 Cor. 5:18) — and this requires that we, like Deborah, must be in touch with **God** and in touch with **people**

C. BARAK'S LEADERSHIP QUALITY

- let's turn our attention now to Barak, the other leader in this story
- Barak was a priest from one of the Levitical cities of refuge
 - therefore he was already a designated guardian of Israel; but he did not take up his role until summoned by Deborah
- what was **his** leadership quality? ... I would suggest it is FAITH

- one reason for saying this is because Barak (not Deborah) is the one named in Heb. 11:32 as having faith
- it is a **weak faith** in the beginning, for sure, as we read in **4:8-9**
 - ⁸ And Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!"
 - ⁹ So she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.
- God rebukes this weakness, but mildly; it was not an occasion for maximum punishment
- perhaps we need to keep in mind the words of Bishop W.C. Magee: "The man who makes no mistakes does not usually make *anything*."
- but even at this stage, Barak shows at least a couple of elements of faith—
 - a) it takes great faith to have a **realistic appraisal of oneself**
 - Barak knew he couldn't do it without Deborah at his side
 - being available to God involves, among other things: recognizing our gifts **AND** limitations
 - b) he **never wanted personal glory** in the first place
 - therefore, Deborah's warning about the glory going to a woman did not threaten him
 - "The way to get things done is not to mind who gets the credit of doing them."
(Benjamin Jowett)
 - he had a godly desire to see victory for Israel over Sisera
- ...and his later faith was truly terrific, making him very eligible for the Heb.11 "Faith Hall of Fame"
- here is a leader with a growing faith, marked by realism & humility, and later marked by stepping out in faith against tremendous odds

[D. **LEADERS MOTIVATE OTHERS]**

- now note another principle about leadership: **Leaders motivate others**
- "A good leader inspires other men with confidence in **him**;
a **great** leader inspires them with confidence in **themselves**."
...by this def., when we look at Barak we have to say Deborah was a *great* leader
- at the beginning of the story, Barak has very little confidence; but as the drama progresses, he gains courage from Deborah
- so we could say that Deborah's special contribution was **motivating** Barak, who in turn mobilized thousands
 - Thomas Bailey Aldrich said, "The ability to have our own way, and at the same time convince others that they are having their own way, is rare among men. Among women it is as common as eyebrows."
- there are lots of differences between men & women; but the one Aldrich points out here is not so commonly recognized — *women* often have great motivational power; they can inspire & encourage men to do all kinds of things, either bad or good
 - when this ability is used for *good*, it can be tremendously powerful

- Barak was fearful, & needed to be motivated -- & Deborah does a wonderful job of it

a) in chap. 4:6 she confronted him with **God's command** (“Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded...”)

b) in verse 7 she strengthened him with **God's promise** (“I will deliver him into your hand”)

c) in verse 9 she encouraged him with **her presence** (“I will surely go with you”)

- and he needed to be motivated, not just at the initial summons, but again at the moment of battle; and Deborah patiently exercises this ability once more

Judg 4:14

Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this *is* the day in which the Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the Lord gone out before you?"

- Deborah is an outstanding model of leadership in Scripture

- but of course it must be recognized that **without followers, no one is a leader!**

...which leads me to notice the 2nd line in the song of Deborah & Barak:

“when the **people willingly offer themselves**...wow! bless the Lord!”

- the song of Deborah & Barak expresses this important truth:

- it takes **leadership plus motivated followers** to get significant jobs done

- God used the leadership of Deborah & Barak to mobilize a little army of motivated followers who fought against the mighty Canaanite army and, with God's help, WON!

“When leaders lead, when the people willingly offer themselves, wow! bless the Lord!”