

The Woman Called to Deliver a Nation

Because she trusted God fully, Deborah was able to lead Israel to victory.

In the church today Christians debate many issues, but perhaps none stir more controversy than the role of women in leadership. Can women be leaders? Can they hold positions of authority over men?

I believe the life of Deborah, as recorded in the fourth chapter of the book of Judges, gives us answers to these questions and many more. In this fascinating historical account we learn how one woman who obeyed the Spirit of God not only led a nation but also became a deliverer for God's people.

Deborah's story unfolds during a time when the people of Israel were in bondage to the Canaanites. Jabin, the king of Canaan, severely oppressed Israel for 20 years.

In this period, Deborah sat as judge over Israel, settling their disputes—the first of two people in Israel's history called both judge *and* prophet (the second was Samuel). Her name gives us a key to the role God had called her to.

"Deborah" means "bee," indicating "systematic instincts and orderly motions" as well as "industry and community oversight." She was one who knew where to go to get honey. She also knew how to rule.

Yet Deborah was a married woman! Her husband was Lappidoth,

whose name means “light” and “shine forth.” Clearly, her example demonstrates that a married woman can function in leadership without violating God’s law. Her husband complemented her calling.

As a woman in leadership, Deborah had a divine *mandate* from God. She also had a divine *message*, a divine *motive* and a divine *method*. Let’s look at each of these, for they have application for women in ministry today.

1. Deborah’s Mandate

It is important to note that Deborah was functioning in leadership over Israel while the nation was in captivity. That means that her authority was established by God; she was not given this position because of what she had accomplished politically for the nation.

Clearly, she was God’s appointed leader for that time. She had received a divine *mandate*—an assigned task that was divinely predestined.

Like Queen Esther, Deborah had come to the kingdom “for such a time as this” (Esth. 4:14, NKJV). Along with Ruth, who was brought from Moab to be a part of the lineage of Christ, these women demonstrated that God does not function according to gender but according to anointing. It is the anointing that breaks the yoke of bondage of the enemy (see Is. 10:27).

Those who question the validity of women carrying the good news of the gospel should consider the woman at the well who ran and told an entire city, bringing many to Jesus. A woman anointed Jesus for His burial, having revelation of His death that even the disciples did not understand.

And women were the first to announce the good news of the resurrection as well. Jesus commanded them, “Go and tell my disciples” (see Matt. 28:10).

Unfortunately, some women in ministry have left bad tracks for

others to follow. Their haughtiness and masculine ways and their willingness to fight and argue their opinions or defend their callings have turned many men off to the messenger as well as to the message. We do not need to defend our callings; the anointing speaks for itself.

2. Deborah's Message

Deborah received a message from God for Barak, the commander of Israel's army, charging him to go to war against their oppressor, Jabin. Barak was to go to Mount Tabor with 10,000 men prepared for war. From there God promised to draw out the enemy's chariots and troops and give them into his hand.

Deborah's message was a clear command, full of direction, counsel and promise, and its source was clear. She said to Barak, "Has not the Lord God of Israel commanded?" (Judg. 4:6-7).

Barak was not to labor under any false conception that this message was her desire or notion. God had spoken, and Barak would have to obey or disobey on that basis.

3. Deborah's Motive

Nor could Barak question her motive. Deborah's life reflected the fact that she loved the people of Israel and desired their deliverance from the enemy.

She wasn't looking to make a name for herself or build her own reputation as a mighty minister of God. She had been sitting under a palm tree ministering faithfully for 20 years (see Judg. 4:4-5). Now the moment had come for which God had predestined her.

4. Deborah's Method

In giving the command, it was not Deborah's intention to lord it over Barak. She was not self-assertive or aggressive.

She did not sit in a place of competition with men or usurp the place of a man. Barak confirmed this fact when he 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" (Judg. 4:8).

His confidence in her word evoked immediate obedience; his confidence in who she was in God caused him to desire her presence with him. Barak knew that God was with Deborah. Perhaps he felt he would need her counsel and further direction from the Lord in the ensuing battle.

Deborah consented to go but let Barak know that he would not be able to take credit for the victory. The ultimate result of Deborah's leadership was the end of captivity and suffering for Israel and the beginning of 40 years of peace.

I believe God is raising up "Deborahs" today. Women are being called into leadership in the kingdom in a greater way than ever before—"for such a time as this." They are not being summoned to lead by dictatorship or to be aggressive or masculine.

Like Deborah, they are being called to leadership with a divine *mandate*, a divine *message*, a divine *motive* and a divine *method* to help set God's people free and bring in the harvest. And they will not do it alone but will walk with the "Baraks" who are anointed to lead into battle, with neither one caring who gets the credit for taking the head of the enemy.

Coming to Faith

God has been working for some time now to change wrong mentalities in the church world. During my years of ministry, I've seen Him tearing down walls of tradition and prejudice, denominationalism, custom and culture.

When I began to preach 50 years ago, there were no women's conferences, no Women's Aglow meetings, no women-in-leadership seminars. There were very few husband-and-wife teams in ministry. But God has brought sweeping change as He has found "Deborahs" and "Baraks" who are willing to walk together against the common foe.

The apostle Paul declared: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). He prefaced this declaration with the statement: "But now that faith has come..." (v. 25, NRSV).

Only as faith comes to our hearts, removing us from the tutorship of the law, will we walk in liberty from the prejudice of class distinction or gender. Thankfully, I see this happening today; faith is coming to the church, and truth is being restored.

Let me be quick to add that I am not a "women's lib" advocate—I don't believe in it. It is satanic rebellion. I am not a feminist; I am feminine.

And I firmly believe in God's plan for the husband's authority in the home. A husband *is* head of the home, and that involves more than just being "boss."

When we teach men their divine responsibility as *head* of the *home*, they are amazed. But the unfolding of God's predestined plan for men and women is greater than issues of authority.

Restoration to God

The book of Genesis declares: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'" (Gen. 1:26, NKJV). The image of God is revealed in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. All three members of the Godhead are unique, and mankind was made in "their" likeness—a plural term.

We must understand that when God used the word "man" He did not refer to the masculine gender, but to *mankind*. That means that mankind—male and female together—are created in the image of God. God did not want the man to be alone; He wanted the world to see His image—and it takes both male and female to reflect that.

God never intended for His presence to be locked into a tabernacle behind a veil, as it was in Old Testament Israel. But after the entrance of sin at the fall, that was the only way He could come to man.

God's original intent was for our inner man to be a sanctuary into which He could pour His presence—His wisdom, His righteousness, His holiness. He wanted to pour Himself into mankind, man *and* woman.

Man alone could not reflect all that He is. Some aspects of His revelation could be seen through the woman—His gentleness, His compassion, His mercy, His mothering heart. I believe it is time for the world to see this other “face” of God!

It takes both genders to reveal His whole image. That's why, in our present day, God is bringing the church—men and women—into unity. He desires to reveal Himself to the world in fullness.

Still, many in the church have questions. When mankind chose to disobey God and thereby lost His presence in their lives, God decreed to the woman: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen. 3:16). Some Christians have misunderstood this to be a *command* of God that men are to rule over women, making it church doctrine.

The Hebrew is better translated “because of the turning of your heart *to* your husband [and, by implication, *from* God], he shall rule over you.” It was actually a *consequence* of the woman's turning *to* man and *away from* God.

This “fallen” doctrine that has become divine order for the church has to be cleansed from our hearts. Both men and women must turn their hearts back to Christ, who is the head of His body.

The more restoration to God men and women enjoy, the less “ruling” over each other there is. Instead they receive the

servant's heart of their Lord.

The husband becomes the protector, provider, comforter and leader who lays down his life as the Scriptures teach (see Eph. 5:25). And the wife who has turned her heart to God is free to obey the Lord as she serves with her husband in building the kingdom of God. God intended for husbands and wives to be leaders together, having dominion over the earth.

I'm convinced we are living in an hour that was prophesied on the day of Pentecost almost 2,000 years ago. Peter declared, "'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and *they shall prophesy*'" (Acts 2:17-18, emphasis added).

A more accurate translation is, "in the last of the last days." As I observe the church today, I see this prophecy coming to pass. God is raising up men and women together and pouring out His Spirit upon them, and they are prophesying.

Men and women are moving together in God, and revival is breaking out. In these last of the last days, the church will take the head of the enemy—because "Deborah" and "Barak" are going together.

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