

## **“DEBORAH THE PROPHETESS.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Text for the Sermon: Judges 4:1-10**

### **Introduction.**

If you have been paying attention over the past thirty or forty years you have noticed a trend in how women are depicted in movies and TV and video games.

From animated and Disney movies to drama and crime mysteries to superhero themes, women are cast less frequently as the damsel in distress, and more often as the physically powerful rescuer come to save the day with guns blazing.

Ex. Terminator, Mad Max, Wonder Woman, Black Widow, Mulan, She-Ra, Captain Marvel.

It is harder and harder to find a good show where men are men and women are women, where there is an honest reflection of the realistic differences between men and women, where the feminist agenda of men and women as totally interchangeable isn't being promoted.

Think about what models and examples are being portrayed in movies today and how much better it would be for young women to see less empowered warrior women acting like men, who could kill a dozen bad guys and jujitsu their way out of any danger, and didn't need any man to protect them.

Movies today mostly lie to us about how God has created women and who He has created them to be, life-givers, nurturers, helpers, wives and mothers. They reverse the roles of men created with bodies and minds crafted for war, to be peacekeepers, protectors and if necessary bloodshedders, faithful husbands and father.

Movies today deaden our spiritual and Biblical sensitivities and sensibilities about the differences between men and women. “Feminism is the new normal, which is to say abnormal is the new normal” (Nathan Alberson).

**Colossians 2:8-9** See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

Stories from the Bible give us a far truer picture of women in real life. Some are godly, some are not. There are women worthy to be imitated, like Abraham's wife, Sarah, Ruth, Esther, Abigail, and Mary. And there are women not to be imitated, like Ahab's wife, Jezebel.

Of all the judges God gave to Israel, he gave one who was a woman, and she wasn't only a judge, but also a prophetess. Her name was Deborah.

### **Profiting from the Prophetesses.**

During the month of November we are considering the lives of the four named good prophetesses in Scripture, Miriam, Deborah and Huldah in the OT and Anna in the NT.

The story of the second named good prophetess is found in the book of Judges. Judges is a book that many Christians find distasteful. In fact they would be more than happy if it was just taken out. It offends our modern, western, 21<sup>st</sup> century sensitivities. It is just too violent, too primitive. It is frankly embarrassing for us if we have to try to explain it to enquiring minds. I am sure that some parts of it were skipped over in family devotions.

Yet the book of Judges may be one of the most relevant books in the Bible. The book is about sin, forgiveness and salvation. And then more sin, forgiveness and salvation. Rinse, spin, repeat.

### **What is a judge?**

Forget your paneled courtroom with gowns and gavels, recording secretaries and juries. The judges in the book of Judges were not the ordinary leaders of the people, but people raised up by the providence of God for this specific purpose and time. They were qualified by the coming of the Holy Spirit on them for a time, season, purpose.

When God made a woman to rule over Israel as a judge, it is a possible sign of his judgment of Israel who did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. The prophet Isaiah describes the judgment upon Judah this way: "Infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them" (Isaiah 3:12).

We see in our text that God doubles down on this theme of judgment when Barak is cowardly, so God says He will use another woman, Jael, to deal the fatal blow to Israel's enemy. A female judge suggests that something has gone wrong in Israel, as a female victor over an army general is a sign something is wrong with Barak.

### **Deborah the prophetess**

Deborah was a prophetess who acted as a judge in the civil affairs of Israel. But she was not a judge in the same sense as the other judges who were deliverers or saviors. That was Barak.

She is a woman, and she is faithful to her sex. She judges different than her male counterparts. She sits under a palm tree rather than a city gate where the elders sat. The people come to her, rather than her going out and riding a circuit like Samuel. Her role is exercised in a more private setting than in a public setting.

Furthermore, she doesn't lead Israel into battle, she is not a warrior judge. She goes with Barak but she goes with him to his shame. She honors God by honoring her sex, and the way God created her.

Finally, when she refers to herself in her song, she calls herself a mother in Israel.

Deborah is a godly woman called by God to the role of prophetess and judge. She is God centered, a bearer of the Word of God. Notice several things worthy of our attention and imitation.

### **She points us to God.**

All the stories about people in the Bible aren't about the people, but about what God does through those people. We see this especially in the judges. They are raised up by God in response to the cry of the people. They are called, and sent by God and told what to do.

The judges are a part of a much bigger story of what God is doing redemptively in history. Deborah is a beautiful part of that story.

### **She speaks God's Word.**

In verse 6 she summons Barak saying, "Has not the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you?" (Judges 4:6). In verse 9 she issues God's judgment on his sin. In verse 14 she declares God's promise of victory. Every time Deborah speaks, it is God's Word that is on her lips.

Scripture speaks of women being the weaker sex, not meaning inferior, but more physically and emotionally vulnerable than men. But they may be the wiser sex and the more spiritually attuned and spiritually sensitive sex.

**Proverbs 31:26** She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

Deborah's mouth overflows with God's Word and wisdom. She leads the people, primarily, by her wisdom.

### **She obeys God's Word.**

She is a true prophetess, she does what God says to do and say, not what she wants.

### **She challenges others to obey God's Word.**

She rebukes a spiritually weak man of little faith who is cowardly and abdicating his role, she doesn't usurp his role, she isn't seeking the reigns of leadership, she tells him to man up.

### **Barak.**

Barak's sin was not in asking Deborah to go with him, but in refusing to go unless she went, and not trusting the Word and promise of God. God appointed and commanded Barak to go, God said gather an army, God said He would draw Sisera out and give him into Barak's hand.

The command and promise of God should have been enough, all he needed, but he wavered, he hesitated. He was fearful.

The weaker vessel had the stronger faith, and isn't that how it sometimes is. Wives with more faith than their husbands, often have to encourage them along to their shame.

Deborah's role was to speak God's truth. The power was in the promise, not in the prophet, but Barak trusted in the prophet not in promise. His confidence was in her, not God's Word. He gave the messenger more glory than the message. Because he robbed God of the glory due Him, God took away Barak's glory (vs. 9) and gave it to another woman.

But Barak is like us. We put our trust in people, in leaders, in politicians more than in God. We turn people into idols. We look up to our heroes and want to be like them rather than like God. Idolizing leaders is folly, building on sand.

**Psalm 146:3-5** Put not your trust in princes, ... in whom there is no salvation.

4 When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.

5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.

Barak is following worldly wisdom and worldly ways, trusting in man more than God. This is superstition, Deborah is good luck, or has a better connection to God. He attached conditions to obeying God.

Barak was a man of faith, just weak faith. He faithfully obeyed God's Word and went into battle. But he placed too much faith in a person rather than God.

Deborah doesn't replace him; rather, she helps him. She goes with him, but she is also clear to give God's judgment on Barak's weakness. The final victory will not be Barak's but given to another woman, Jael.

Do we not all hesitate in our faith like Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, Jonah? Reluctance takes many forms, but in the end it is disobedience, lack of faith. Don't attach conditions to obeying God.

## **Jael**

Let me make just one observation about this other strong woman in the story, Jael. Like Deborah she honors her sex and achieves her victory over Sisera in a distinctly feminine way. She doesn't go out on the battle field with swords flashing in open combat and jujitsu her way to victory. She deceives Sisera, and invites him into her tent and shows him hospitality, making him believe he is safe. Then when he falls asleep she drives a tent peg through his temple.

Don't cry over him. He received the just judgment of God. He was not an innocent victim, he had committed terrible war crimes against Israel for twenty years.

## **Implications and applications.**

TV and movies are not good ways to educate our kids as to role models and who God created us to live out our sexuality.

God delights in strong women, but women who are strong in a way that honors their sex, in a feminine way, not a masculine way.

Secular feminism promotes an egalitarianism, which says men and women are the same, anything he can do she can do, and to resist this is offensive.

Equality is not the same as sameness. We are not interchangeable, we are complementary. Being different doesn't mean superiority and inferiority.

If I set the sun beside the moon,  
And if I set the land beside the sea,  
And if I set the flower beside the fruit  
And if I set the town beside the country  
And if I set the man beside the woman  
I suppose some fool would talk  
About one being better. (G.K. Chesterton)

Deborah was a prophetess who gave divine guidance to Israel.

Deborah didn't put herself forward, but was sought out.

Deborah affirms and supports and honors the role and headship of men.

Deborah is not a warrior judge who leads in battles and delivers in victory.

Deborah describes herself as a mother in Israel, not judge, savior, father.

Most of all Deborah should be honored and given the praise she deserves. She, like many women like her, played a key role in God's redemptive history.

**Proverbs 31:30-31** Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,  
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

31 Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.