

# *This Time...I will Lead*

## #2 Deborah (Judges 4-5)

### I. The biblical context – The Period of Judges

With the absence of an earthly king or central government, the tribes of Israel were ruled by gifted leaders raised up by God to meet a particular crisis in their region.

From Othniel to Samson, there were twelve judges during a period of seven oppressors. After each period of apostasy, God would exact judgment at the hands of an oppressor. The children of Israel would repent, God would hear their cries and restore their peace. As “each man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Joshua 21:25) the cycle continued for 410 non-consecutive years.

When Ehud (the left handed judge) died, the Canaanite, King Jabin and his general Sisera opposed the tribes in the North for 20 years and then God raised up Deborah...

### II. God raised up an unlikely choice for a deliverer – Deborah

- A. She was unlikely because of the restraints normally placed on Hebrew women
- B. She was unlikely because of her personal situation:
  - 1. Her name means “bee” which was an Egyptian symbol of regal power. The Greeks used the same term for poets.
  - 2. She was married to Lapidoth (whose name means “firebrand”)
  - 3. She lived between Ramah and Bethel on Mt. Ephraim
  - 4. She “held court” under a special palm tree (these were rare in Palestine so it was a well known land mark).
- C. She was unlikely because of her job description:
  - 1. Prophetess (Judges 4:4)
    - a. She was “aware of the movements of God’s spirit”
    - b. Two others in the Old Testament have this title: Miriam (Ex. 15:20) and Huldah – wife of Shallum (2 Kings 22:14)
    - c. None of the other judges were specifically described as being inspired by God

- d. Remember, in the Old Testament, the spirit came upon people but did not indwell people
2. Judge (Judges 4:4-5)
    - a. A temporary authority to deliver the people from a specific pressing enemy. Jabin, the Canaanite King “mightily oppressed the children of Israel.”
    - b. A judge “rule” in a defined geographical area and some were probably contemporaries of each other
    - c. The noun and verb of “judging” used in reference to Deborah uniquely indicate that she was also given the job of arbitrator or giver of final judicial decisions (Deut. 17:8)
  3. Deliverer – protector of the people (Judges 4:6-24)
    - a. She selects the warrior Barak (“Lightning Flashes”) to lead her army (who promise to do the job only if she goes with him)
    - b. She rallies 10,000 men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun
    - c. She has a well thought out battle plan (that uses herself as “bait”):
      - 1) Phase One: Hide the men on Mt. Tabor
      - 2) Phase Two: Draw Sisera (Jabin’s general)toward the men of Ephraim encamped by the swampy River Kishon in the Jezreel Valley
      - 3) Phase Three: Attack Sisera’s army (100,000 men and 900 chariots) during a violent rain and hail storm
    - d. She reminded Barak that “the Lord had gone ahead of him” (Judges 4:14). This is the technical term used of a King marching in front of his army.
  4. Poetess (Judges 5:1-31)
    - a. Deborah seems to have the “gift of song”
    - b. Compare this song with Miriam’s (Ex. 15) and Mary’s (Luke 1)
    - c. The song might be outlined around two themes:
      - 1) The spiritual focus – gratitude toward Yahweh
      - 2) The political focus – celebration of the zeal of the army and censure for the apathy of those who stayed home
    - d. The song divides itself:
      - 1) Vs. 2: A summons to praise the Lord
      - 2) Vs. 3-11: Section one – the significance of the victory
      - 3) Vs. 12: A summons to praise the Lord
      - 4) Vs. 13-21: Section two – the picture of the conflict

5) Vs. 22-31: Section three – the detail of the victory

5. “Mother of Israel” – a national maternal figure (Judges 5:7). Perhaps Deborah never actually experienced motherhood but her spiritual motherhood is seen in her piety. Her trust in the Lord overshadowed all her attributes and is reflected in her high and lofty title as “Mother of Israel.”

“As she sat under her palm tree to rule in righteousness and translated the revelation of God, her heart was filled with that grace divine which diffused itself like a sweet smelling savor over the whole land” (Women of the Bible, p. 42)

6. Bottom line: Deborah “got it” – she chose to lead. She became a woman of enormous influence!

### **III. God honored an unlikely choice such as Deborah, and He will honor unlikely choices like us!**

1 Cor. 1:27-29 “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”

#### A. God’s call is for unlikely candidates to lead (for His Glory)

1. Some of the Judges were unusual:
  - a. Othniel was a stranger or foreigner
  - b. Shamgar was armed only with an ox goad
  - c. Gideon was the “least” of a poor family from Manasseh
2. Some of the Old Testament prophets were unlikely:
  - a. Amos was a “fig picker”
  - b. Habakkuk may have been a singer in the temple

#### 3. Some of our biblical heroes were scarred:

Moses and David were murderers. Abraham and Peter were major liars. The brothers and sisters of Jesus didn’t “get it” until after the resurrection.

#### B. God’s strength is always displayed in weakness (Heb. 11:33-34)

God delights in using weak (or small things) in order to accomplish great things:

A Rod (Ex. 4:2), a jaw bone (Judges 15:15), five stones (1 Sam. 17:40), a little meal and oil (1 Kings 17:12) and five barley loaves (John 6:9)

2 Cor. 12:9-10 “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so

that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

- C. God's requirement is not strength of personality, mental agility, physical skills or personal attributes...it's always faithfulness to Him. (Examples: The workmen under Jehoiada – 2 Kings 12:15, the workmen under Hilkiah – 2 Chron. 34:11, Nehemiah's treasurers – Neh. 13:13, Daniel – Dan. 6:4)

1 Cor. 4:2 "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."

- D. Where does God want you to exercise some leadership?

### Discussion Questions:

1. Would you be an unlikely candidate to lead something for the Lord? Why?
2. If His Grace is sufficient (and it is!), will you agree and be stretched?