

“Deborah’s Leadership”
Judges 4-5
(Preached at Trinity, February 1, 2015)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we begin **Chapter 4** we come to the fourth judge, Deborah, and the great deliverance God accomplished through her and Barak. This account is unusual because it is told twice, once in **Chapter 4** and again in **Chapter 5**. **Chapter 4** records the events from the prospective of a historian while **Chapter 5** records the events from the prospective of a poet.
2. Our focus will be upon **Chapter 4** while drawing some highlights from **Chapter 5**.
3. This passage opens with the now familiar pattern. If it was only suggested with Shamgar it is clearly stated here: "Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD"
4. We find that God has delivered Israel over to Jabin, king of Canaan dwelling in Hazor. We shouldn’t miss the fact that if Israel had believed and obeyed God this wouldn’t even be an issue; King Jabin would not have existed.
 - A. Joshua 11 tells us that Hazor was defeated and burned by Joshua almost a century before but not occupied. This suggests that the city had been rebuilt
Joshua 11:10-11 NAU - " Then Joshua turned back at that time, and captured Hazor and struck its king with the sword; for Hazor formerly was the head of all these kingdoms. ¹¹ They struck every person who was in it with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying *them*; there was no one left who breathed. And he burned Hazor with fire."
 - B. When God brought Israel out of Egypt He warned them that they were to remain separate and if they did not the nations would be a snare to them.
Exodus 23:31-33 NAU - "I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you. ³² "You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. ³³ "They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for *if* you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."
 - C. We find at the beginning of the Book of Judges that Israel did not heed God’s warning.
Judges 2:1-3 NAU - "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you, ² and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? ³ "Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they will become *as thorns* in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you."
 - D. Jabin’s existence was testimony to their sin.

5. Jabin's general was Sisera who had at his disposal 900 chariots of iron. These chariots were a great display of their modern technology, a formative weapon on the battlefield and greatly feared by foot soldiers. We've already seen their effect in **Chapter 1 Judges 1:19 NAU** - "Now the LORD was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots."
6. Jabin oppressed Israel for 20 years until Israel finally cried out to God. Thus Deborah enters the scene.
 - A. Deborah is described as a prophet. As a prophet she received and declared the Word of God. We find this in **Verse 6 Judges 4:6 NAU** - "Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded, 'Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun.'"
 - B. God also blessed her with the wisdom to serve as a true judge. As we've seen, the judges that we find in the Book of Judges were more like military leaders than judicial counselors. Deborah is an exception. She was a judge after the pattern established by Moses at the counsel of Jethro.
 Exodus 18:21-22 NAU - "you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place *these* over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. ²² "Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear *the burden* with you."
7. One characteristic we find with many of the judges was that of strong leadership. Without giving us much information Israel tended to remain faithful to God as long as the judge was alive. But after the judge died Israel would return to what they did by nature. **Judges 4:1 NAU** - "Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died."
8. Unlike the other judges, however, Deborah led through wisdom and discernment more than might. In terms of her leadership she was one of the greatest of the judges.
9. Deborah demonstrated several of the essential qualities of a true leader. We can't escape the fact that she was a woman. Next time I'll address this issue. But we also can't ignore her leadership. What are these qualities that she possessed that made her a great leader?
 - I. A love for people
 - II. A proven credibility
 - III. A great sense of purpose and conviction
 - IV. A heart for God
 - V. Excellent leaders raise up other leaders
- I. A love for people
 - A. Leadership demands a true concern for the wellbeing of those you lead
 1. Deborah sat as Israel's judge
 Judges 4:5 NAU - "She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment."
 2. What was her motivation for sitting long hours while people came to her for judgment? It was because she cared for them.

3. She saw herself as a mother to Israel
Judges 5:7 NAU - "The peasantry ceased, they ceased in Israel, Until I, Deborah, arose, Until I arose, a mother in Israel."

B. Compare Deborah with Moses

1. He also sat in judgment of God's people
Exodus 18:13-16 NAU - "It came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. ¹⁴ Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit *as judge* and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" ¹⁵ Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. ¹⁶ "When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws."
2. Why did Moses give such devotion to caring for the people? Because he loved them.
Deuteronomy 9:18-19 NAU - "I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you had committed in doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke Him to anger. ¹⁹ "For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was wrathful against you in order to destroy you, but the LORD listened to me that time also."

C. This is the nature of every effective leader – they must love and serve the people they lead

1. One of the qualifications for pastor is "hospitable" which is from the word φιλόξενος which literally means "a lover of strangers."
2. The one who seeks to lead people without caring for them is doomed to failure.

II. A proven credibility

A. Deborah was a woman of wisdom

1. We find in **Verse 4** that she was both a prophet and a judge
2. Others recognized her wisdom – she was well respected
3. True leaders don't have to press their authority. People naturally follow them.
4. It's hard to get a reading on Barak. Was he as coward? Barak was a military general. We have to assume he was no coward. He was also a man of faith. He is listed in the Chapter dedicated to people of faith.
Hebrews 11:32-34 NAS - "And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of righteousness*, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight."

5. In spite of being a man of faith Barak felt the weight of what Deborah had placed before him. He understood the strength of Sisera's army. I can appreciate a quote by Arthur Cundall – "A great man realizes his own inadequacy when called by the Lord to some great task."
 6. Barak had high respect for the wisdom of Deborah. He questioned the chances of his success without her presence.
- B. Deborah was well known by all
1. She had a proven character
 2. She was trusted and her wisdom was sought
Judges 4:5 NAU - "She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment."
 3. True leadership has to be earned. A leader proves himself or herself worthy of being followed. He leads according to example
Philippians 3:17 NAU - "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us."
 4. Matthew Henry makes the observation regarding Deborah's name: "Her name signifies a *bee*; and she answered her name by her industry, sagacity, and great usefulness to the public, her sweetness to her friends and sharpness to her enemies."
- C. This qualification is of great importance for church leaders
1. We find this as a qualification for pastors. They too must be of a proven character.
1 Timothy 3:2 NAU - "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable"
 2. At Trinity we have tried to maintain a high standard.
This is why all of our teachers must demonstrate faithfulness in attendance, in giving, in godly living, in serving. It would be ridiculous to have a person teaching others who fails to demonstrate consistency in his or her own life.
 3. A church shall never be any stronger than its leadership
- III. A great sense of purpose and conviction
- A. Deborah was a prophetess – She knew she spoke from God
Judges 4:6-7 NAU - "Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded, 'Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. ⁷ 'I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his many *troops* to the river Kishon, and I will give him into your hand.'"
1. Her words were "Thus saith the Lord."
 2. There was no hesitation in her actions
 3. Her purpose was clear. The Philistines must be fought and defeated. God's people must be delivered.

- B. The nature of leaders is to have a clear purpose with a confidence that will encourage others to follow
1. A good leader is a clear communicator
 2. Notice Deborah spoke clearly the direction Barak was to follow
Judges 4:6 NAU - "Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded,"
Judges 4:14 NAU - "Arise! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the LORD has gone out before you."
 3. Such confident leadership commands attention and encourages faithful followers
- C. How we are in need of such leadership today
1. We live in a day when many of our leaders have their finger in the air to see which way the wind of public opinion is blowing.
 2. There are few today who are people of principle, people of conviction that march forth with confidence and clarity of purpose
 3. How we need such leaders today in politics, in families, and in the church

IV. A heart for God

- A. Deborah had a single-minded heart for God
1. She made it clear that she was the spokesperson for God
Judges 4:6 NAU - "Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded,"
 2. She understood the source of Israel's victory
Judges 4:14 NAU - "behold, the LORD has gone out before you."
 3. Her heart was filled with the praises of God
Judges 5:3 ESV - "Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the LORD I will sing; I will make melody to the LORD, the God of Israel."
Judges 5:31 NAU - "Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD; But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might."
- B. The greatest leaders understand the source of their authority
Romans 13:1 NAU - "For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."
1. With God as their authority they seek to honor Him
 2. We need Godly leaders
 - a. A godly leader has set holiness as his chief pursuit
 - b. He disciplines his life
 Discipline demands setting standards that will not be broken
 Discipline demands setting priorities
 3. Only this type of leader is worthy of being followed
 He might not be the most educated, the most articulate, or the most physically appealing – but if he lives with his eye upon pleasing God alone he is more valuable than most who consider themselves leaders.
Augustine: "A wooden key is not as beautiful as a gold one, but if it can open the door when the gold one cannot, it is far more useful."
 Only those who strive for holiness are useful to God.

- C. Great leaders have God's Word as their authority and guide
1. Notice Deborah's focus -
Judges 4:6 NAU - "Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded"
 2. This is true in civil government, in the home, and in the church
A godly leader strives to know what the Bible says – he studies it, he meditates upon it, he works through its implications and applications. He then uses it as his authority in leadership.
- V. Excellent leaders raise up other leaders
- A. We don't know for sure why Barak was hesitant
1. Deborah encouraged him and then went with him
Judges 4:9 NAU - "Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh."
 2. Barak was encouraged and he gathered his army to war
Judges 4:10 NAU - "Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him."
- B. It has always been the case – great leaders create great leaders
1. Alexander's four generals ruled four nations after his death
 2. Paul was a mentor to Timothy, teaching him diligently
Timothy then went forth and taught as Paul had taught.
Paul told the Corinthians
1 Corinthians 4:17 NAU - "For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church."
 3. This has always been the pattern for the church:
2 Timothy 2:1-2 NAU - "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."
- C. Our goal at Trinity is to train each member so that you might train others; to develop godly leaders.
1. As we grow as a church we are going to need more and more godly leaders.
We are going to need more teachers. We are going to need more deacons.
 2. Most important, we want to see every member so mature and godly that others will naturally follow their example.