

“A Woman’s Woman”
Text: Judges 4 & 5
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Introduction

Mother’s Day is a special day for special people. One writer tells us that the average mother has 105,823 tasks demanding her daily attention. I haven’t seen the list, but I’m sure many Moms would agree. Certainly Moms at times wish they had more hands to juggle all their tasks.

Being a Mom is not easy. Many of you do it so well, even though you may not think so. A woman from the tough Harlem area of NYC was honored for her years of taking children into her home. Many of them were literally right off the streets—abandoned, kicked out, parents in jail or strung out on drugs. As she held the plaque she said, “I’ve had over 500 children in my little shack, and they tell me that they are different because of it. As long as I can get to the door, I will answer any knock.” Now, there is *A Mother’s Mother*, “*A Woman’s Woman*.”

This morning we are going to think about “A Woman’s Woman,” about mothers, but also all women. If we did a survey asking women to describe their picture of “A Woman’s Woman” I’m sure we would see many similarities and contrasts. We are zeroing in on the Bible’s portrait of Deborah in Judges 4 & 5. To interpret this sketch of her accurately we have to understand something about her background and times.

Deborah’s Brief Biography.

Let’s begin with the times in which she lived. Her public life covered the period of about 1240–1200 B.C. This was about 200 years after Moses led Israel out of Egypt and about 200 years before Saul became Israel’s first king.

In spiritual terms, this period of the Judges was up and down, with more downs than ups. Turn back to chapter 2. Beginning in verse 11 we see this description of the times,

“Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger. So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroath. The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed. Then the LORD raised up

judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do as their fathers. When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways.” (2:11-19)

The book of Judges flows with seven cycles of this. When they left God and went into sin they were oppressed. When they cried out to God, God gave them a judge to free them from their oppressors.

Deborah was one of the 13 judges God used in this period. The judges had multi-faceted roles.

- They were civil leaders, providing direction and settling disputes.
- They were military leaders, leading the people into battle against their enemies.
- They were spiritual leaders who called the people to God, who taught and disciplined them in God’s truth.

With that background, we are ready to note a few highlights from the story of her life and ministry. We meet her first as chapter 4 opens,

“Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud [a judge who served for 80 years] died. And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. The sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years. Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. 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.” (4:1-5)

In this cycle when they turned back to God, He graciously once again raised up a *judge* to deliver them. But this time God provided the *usual* remedy in an *unusual* way—the judge was a woman who was a wife and mother.

Let’s briefly survey her public life. God gave her directions. She followed them, called on

General Barak, and gave him God's marching orders to gather 10,000 men at Mt. Tabor, which was about 100 km north of her home base of operations. God's plan was "You go and be ready. I'll draw the enemy forces out into the open and give you the victory."

How did the general respond? Go to verse 8, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go." What do you make of that? Deborah's response to her general helps us. Verse 9, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman." Because the general was reluctant, God made sure he would not get credit for the victory.

So they proceeded, following God's plan. When God drew the opposing General Sisera and his army out, Deborah told her general it was time to act. Let's pick it up at verse 14,

"Arise! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the LORD has gone out before you.' So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. The LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot."

And then God's word through Deborah comes about. General Sisera finds refuge in the tent of people who were his allies. Jael [Ya`el], the lady of the home/tent, offered him refuge. Then, after he fell asleep, she killed him by driving a tent stake through his head. The hero is Jael, not General Barak. In the victory song of praise in chapter 5 Deborah and Barak sing, "Most blessed of women is Jael..." (5:24)

After the battle, victory and celebration the record closes with "... the land was undisturbed for forty years." (5:31)

With this background, let's move to look at five qualities of character in Deborah, five qualities of "*A Woman's Woman*."

Deborah's Beautiful Character.

The first quality is that she kept in touch with God. Deborah was a judge but also, as verse 4 tells us, a prophet. Most of a prophet's work was teaching God's truth. The smaller part, which is the one which generally gets most of our attention, was being used by God to declare things to come in the future.

It could be easy to say, "God told me that He will give you victory over your enemies in the battle tomorrow." This would get people's attention and encourage them. But God's test of a prophet in those days was 100% accuracy—no ifs, ands, or buts.

Go to 4:6 to see one of the prophecies God gave her.

"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. 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.'”

And, as verses 14-16 tell us, her statement was fulfilled.

Have you wondered about how all that worked? Why her? Why not others? How did she know God was speaking? It was a serious matter to say you were speaking for God. And, we know too that the penalty for anything short of 100% accuracy was death. The prophecy did not come to her from God out of the blue, or just because she had become a judge. It came by God's choice through her ongoing relationship with him. “*She kept in touch with God.*”

This is true of all the leaders and spokesmen of God— such as Moses and David, Peter and Paul. Because they kept in touch with God they were given the privilege of speaking for God.

A real “*Woman's Woman*” keeps in touch with God. This goes far beyond the area of speaking for God. It touches every aspect of who you are and what you do. An old chorus says, “I keep in touch with Jesus and He keeps touch with me, and so we walk together in perfect harmony.” The specific method we use is secondary to the reality of being in touch with God in our thoughts, through prayer and His Word each day.

Secondly, Deborah had faith to act when God spoke. How did she respond when God called her to be a judge?

- “Sorry, God. I know you must want my husband, but he's not here now. He's out working.”
- Or, to herself, “Come on Deb! Snap out of it! This is not the time to be daydreaming!”
- Or, protesting to God, “But it just isn't done that way!”

No, she did not respond in any of these ways. We don't have a record of her thoughts and words when God called her, but we know she stepped out in faith and did what God told her to do—by faith she obeyed God.

Then think about God's plan to deliver Israel. She could have said, “Who, me? *I* am supposed to call General Barak and give *him* orders?” And then when the General insisted that she go with him, she could have said, “Sorry General, but...

- “You are the military leader, you do it.”
- Or, “It's not my role, nor is it proper for a woman to go with the troops into battle.”
- Or, “Don't be superstitious. You can do the job without me. After all, God has promised to give you victory!”
- Or, “I've got disputes to settle, people to teach, not to mention cooking, cleaning, and looking after my children.”

And when God told her it was time to begin the battle, she again believed Him and told General Barak to attack.

“*A Woman’s Woman*” displays this kind of character—having faith to act when God speaks. Is this part of your character? When God gives you new insights from the Bible, when the Holy Spirit convicts you of something that is not as it should be or prompts you to do something, do you act on that trusting Him? When you obey God in faith you bring joy to His heart, and also to believers around you. The apostle John in the fourth verse of his third letter wrote, “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children *walking* in the truth.”

The third aspect of character is that Deborah was understanding and compassionate. One incident pictures this so clearly. Deborah told General Barak God’s plan and to prepare for battle. Let’s go back to Barak’s response in 4:8 again, “If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” As I noted earlier, the General was reluctant. It is clear that her commanding General lacked confidence, faith. She could have tried to...

- *guilt him* into going;
- or tear a few strips off him;
- to give him the ultimatum, “Do it or I will replace you!”
- or even replace him on the spot.

Her response shows both understanding and compassion. Look at verse 9 again, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman.”

She displayed *understanding*. She understood Barak really didn’t have faith in God’s word about this. And she also understood that because of this, God was going to withhold the honor of victory from him.

She also displayed *compassion*. The combination of understanding and compassion is much like the combination of truth and love. Deborah, like everyone in Israel, knew they had not been able to defeat Jabin’s forces. She knew the General was reluctant to go without her. She chose to have compassion.

Do we display this essential and beautiful combination of understanding and compassion? Sometimes we talk about *heart* and *head* people—those who respond mainly from their hearts or feelings and those who respond mainly from their understanding or analytical abilities. While the balance of these qualities varies in our natural makeup, all of us need to live out both, to live with understanding and compassion.

The next part of Deborah’s beautiful character was that she gave praise to God. Chapter 5 is often referred to as *The Song of Deborah*. It is a song of praise to God that, 5:1 tells us, Deborah and Barak sang. We did not read it earlier this morning, so let’s note some highlights.

First, it was primarily a song of praise to God for His victory. We see this at the beginning, 5:2-5,

“That the leaders led in Israel, that the people volunteered, Bless the LORD! Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers! I—to the LORD, I will sing, I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel. LORD, when You went out from Seir, when You marched from the field of Edom, the earth quaked, the heavens also dripped, even the clouds dripped water. The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD, this Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel.”

And we see it at the end, 5:31a, “Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD; but let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might.”

It was also a song of praise to God for the people and leaders volunteering and doing their part. Look at the opening verses again,

“Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying, ‘That the leaders led in Israel, that the people volunteered, bless the LORD!’” (5:1-2)

Now go to 5:9, “My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel, the volunteers among the people; bless the LORD!”

Then there was praise to God for Jael’s role in the victory, 5:24, “Most blessed of women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; most blessed is she of women in the tent.”

And, yes, there was also praise to God for Deborah and Barak’s roles,

- 5:7, “The peasantry ceased, they ceased in Israel, Until I, Deborah, arose, until I arose, a mother in Israel.”
- 5:12, “Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, Barak, and take away your captives, O son of Abinoam.”

“*A Woman’s Woman*” gives praise to God. To be sure, few things in our lives seem as dramatic as the events of Judges 4. But God showers all of us with blessings of provision and protection, of guidance and correction, of beauty and joy each and every day of our lives. Are you filled and overflowing with praise?

Finally, Deborah was an instrument of peace. Think about Deborah as we see her here. Part of her ministry as a judge was to listen to complaints, problems, conflicts and disputes. As with judges today, she had to determine who was right and wrong and issue whatever remedies were appropriate. To uphold justice.

But more than that, her purpose was also to restore peace and unity. Day after day, week after week for her 40 years as a judge, she began with people who disagreed with each other, did not like or respect each other, and she worked to bring about peace. Remember, peace in the Old Testament referred to wholeness, health, and well-being.

Being a peacemaker never has been easy. I am sure that many times everyone on all sides was upset with her. And yet she persisted. Being an instrument of peace was part of her character.

The account closes by telling us “And the land was undisturbed for forty years.” The main point is that Canaanite and other groups no longer dominated or harassed Israel. But it also points to the internal dynamics of the people being at peace with each other.

Are we instruments of God’s peace?

- Yes, we know Jesus has told us, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).
- Yes, we know that Paul wrote that we are to be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).
- And yes, we know that God also directed Paul to write that “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men” (Romans 12:18).

Deborah is a good model for all of us. She was an instrument of God’s peace.

Conclusion.

Deborah was “*A Woman’s Woman.*”

- She kept in touch with God.
- She had faith to act when God spoke.
- She was understanding and compassionate.
- She gave praise to God.
- She was an instrument of peace.

Being a Mom is a tough assignment. I came across a column titled “The musings of a juggling mother.” Subtitled, “Rants and raves about life as a woman today, juggling work, home, kids, family, life, the universe and everything.” Perhaps you feel that way and that the last thing you need is another set of responsibilities to juggle. “*A Woman’s Woman,*” (and a *Man’s Man,* for that matter) is not one who can successfully juggle 105,823 tasks, but one who has good, godly character.

In the next few moments all of us, mothers, women, and men, Thank God for your mother. Look at your character for places to grow in the qualities we have seen in Deborah. Determine to keep growing.

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