

Deborah and Barak

Summer Quarter: God's Urgent Call

Unit 1: Called to be Strong

Sunday school lesson for the week of June 4, 2017

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Lesson Scripture: Judges 4:1-10

Purpose: To consider how we can accomplish great things when we work together to carry out any mission God gives us.

Judges 4:8-10

Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go."

"Certainly I will go with you," said Deborah. "But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.

Called to be Strong! The "Adult Bible Studies" lesson provides an excellent introduction to the Book of Judges and today's text in Judges 4:1-10.

Most of the people referred to in scripture who served as judges between the time of Joshua and the monarchical period were not judges in the modern sense. Their main task was not to hear complaints, make legal decisions, or rule on points of law ... The primary role for these biblical judges was to serve as military leaders.

The scripture today (Judges 4:1-10) offers the reader a unique perspective on the call of several leaders Deborah, Barak, and later Jael whose purpose and destiny were tied together. Deborah was unique as a she represents the only female judge named in the Book of Judges. Also, Deborah's roles were unique as she was not a military leader but a judge in a traditional sense of hearing complaints and addressing disputes among the Israelites.

As a leader, one aspect of Deborah's character in the text invites the reader to consider the call that God places on our lives. One of my favorite books, "Hearing God's Call – Ways of Discerning for Laity and Clergy," addresses the matter of discerning God's call for laity and clergy:

God has always called human beings to share in the divine mission in the world – and He still does. God calls women and men to ordained ministry in the church and he calls other followers of Christ to special ministries both in the church and outside it ... One of the

persistent questions in the minds of both serious clergy and seeking laity can be stated simply, “Is God calling me to do this ministry?”

The author of “Hearing God’s Call – Discerning for Laity and Clergy,” Ben Campbell Johnson, further explains, “A call from God has the power of a conviction that is not our work alone but is something both intended and empowered by God.”

As we embrace the reading, let us acknowledge the main character in scripture is always God. Therefore, we are invited to begin the first four summer Bible lessons by framing our reflection around the following questions – *What is God doing? Who are the secondary characters in the text? What is the relationship between those characters and God? How does this text inform or impact my relationship with God?*

What is God doing?

To understand more clearly, let us go back to Judges 4:1-3 as it helps the reader understand the context of today’s biblical reflection. We will engage the text using the Message version of the Bible:

The People of Israel kept right on doing evil in God’s sight. With Ehud dead, God sold them off to Jabin king of Canaan who ruled from Hazor. Sisera, who lived in Harosheth Haggoyim, was the commander of his army. The People of Israel cried out to God because he had cruelly oppressed them with his nine hundred iron chariots for twenty years. (Judges 4:1-3, The Message)

As the main character in the text, God is involved with his beloved children, the Israelites. Once again, the Israelites have chosen to turn away from God and engage in acts of evil. God then allows the Israelites to receive the consequences of their actions, they cry out for mercy and God sends deliverance.

The interesting thing to note here is that deliverance begins with repentance of the Israelites and it involves more than one deliverer. The deliverance involves a group of leaders trusting one another and depending on one another as they are led by God to complete the mission and ministry set before them. (Now that can truly preach!)

Who are the secondary characters in the text?

The Israelites, Deborah, and Barak serve as secondary characters in Judges 4:1-10. As you read the lesson consider exploring each character and how the call of God appears in the text?

Now consider the following questions:

What is the relationship between those characters and God?

How does this text inform or impact my relationship with God?