

• *Again Israel sinned and again is chastised by God*

• *Barak God's deliverer summoned by the prophetess Deborah*

1. Deborah – a gifted woman who uses her gift wisely and humbly

• *The gift of speaking words given by God - prophecy*

• *Worked with a man as the military leader*

2. Barak a man who works within the limits of his faith

• *By venturing into areas of doubt we become unstable and receive nothing from the Lord*

• *Faith is a measure – a portion*

After the death of Ehud, Israel again fell into sin ^{☞1}. Again they were chastised by God's sending an enemy into their lives^{☞2}. **Jabin** was the ruler of a city-state named Hazor. He had a general named **Sisera**. God gave His people into the hands of these two men and again Israel was forced to cry out in distress for God's intervention ^{☞3}.

The person God raised up to be the deliverer of Israel was Barak, but first of all we are introduced to **Deborah**, She is 'judging' Israel at this time ^{☞1}. She was a married lady and a prophetess. Unlike the previous judges she was not a military leader. Othniel was a judge who went to war ^{☞2}. Ehud made a dagger for himself ^{☞3}. Shamgar used an ox-goad ^{☞4}, but what did Deborah use? She used a man – Barak!

Deborah's gift was skill in giving prophetic advice. Judges 4:6 brings us to **Barak**. Deborah used her prophetic gift to summon Barak and send him to war ^{☞1}.

1. **Deborah is a gifted woman, but one who knows how to use her gift wisely and humbly.** Deborah is often quoted as an example of 'women's ministry' – and rightly so. She is a very unusual character in Israel's history. No other woman was so greatly used in the leadership of Israel. Her gift was the gift of speaking words of prophecy. 'Prophecy' is **speaking for God with words given by God**. The Bible makes it quite clear that women often are given the gift of prophecy and when they have such a gift they should use it. 'Your sons and daughters shall prophesy' said Joel's prophecy quoted in Acts 2:17.1 Corinthians 11:5 speaks of times when women will publicly prophesy. The example of Agabus's daughters is well-known^{☞1}.

Yet there is another side to this matter. It must be noted how well Deborah worked with a man as the **military** leader of Israel. Deborah gave to a man a prophetic word telling him that he should be the military leader in this campaign against Jabin and Sisera ^{☞1}. Later she will sing a duet with Barak celebrating the victory ^{☞2}. She worked well and wisely with a male military leader.

2. **Barak is a man who works within the limits of his faith.** The Bible tells us to use our gifts 'according to measure of faith' ^{☞1}. It is interesting that in Hebrews 11:32 Barak is chosen as the hero of faith in this story. But is important to note how his faith worked out in practice.

A word came to Barak from God through Deborah ^{☞1}. It was a very bold and daring task that he was being called to. Sisera had iron weapons and had ruled over Israel for many years ^{☞2}.

This is an important principle of faith. In the life of faith we do as much as we dare do, and as much as God is calling us to – but we stay within the limits of our faith. This is the point of James 1:6–8. We ask God for what we can ask in total and undoubting faith. When we venture into tasks about which we are doubtful, we are unstable and we receive nothing from the Lord.

It is the principle of Mark 11:22–24. When we ask for God's help in bold and daring ventures we do so within the limits of confident assured faith. 'Believe that what you say will happen' – if you can! If in any particular task you **cannot** speak in this way then realise you have come to a limit in the faith you have. Faith is a 'measure', a 'portion' ^{☞1}.

☞1 4:1
☞2 4:2
☞3 4:3

☞1 4:4
☞2 see 3:10
☞3 see 3:15–21
☞4 see 3:31

☞1 4:6–7

☞1 Acts 21:9

☞1 4:6–7; see also 4:14

☞2 see 5:1

☞1 Romans 12:6; see also Ephesians 4:7

☞1 4:6–7
☞2 see 4:3

☞1 Romans 12:6; Ephesians 4:7

• Barak knew he needed Deborah's encouragement – and he was not afraid to say so!

• Barak was not worried that he would lose some personal glory

3. The combination brings success

• Deborah's word of encouragement fulfilled

• Barak – a hero of faith – working within the limits of assurance

Barak is a good example of this principle. 'If you go with me, I will go', he said to Deborah, 'but if you do not go with me, I won't go' ¹. He was acting within his assurance. He knew he could win this battle if he had Deborah's encouragement. It is sometimes said that behind every great man is a great woman. I don't think this is always true. Jesus was unmarried; Paul was unmarried. They both had women helpers, but nothing is said of any special womanly encouragement in their lives. Job certainly got the wrong sort of encouragement from his wife ²! But Deborah provided womanly encouragement for Barak and Barak knew that he needed it, and was not afraid to say so!

However Deborah gives Barak a word of warning and (as it turns out) a prediction. If he takes Deborah with him, Barak will lose some of the glory for winning this particular victory over Israel's enemies. It will always be said that a woman was the one who brought the victory. But Barak does not worry about who will get the glory. He knows he has only limited faith. He knows he needs Deborah to give him encouragement in the battle. And he insists that she should go with him. This is what happens. Deborah and Barak go together into the battle ¹.

3. This combination of ministries works well; the limited faith of Barak brings success. Heber ¹ is a fifth character in the story. His clan is a section of the Kenite tribe within Israel. They were a non-Israelite tribe, descendants of Moses' in-laws. Heber had a wife named Jael.

Sisera advanced to attack Israel ¹. Deborah gave a powerful word of encouragement to Barak ². It was just what he needed. A great victory followed ³. Sisera fled for his life ⁴. The enemy armies were destroyed ⁵ but Sisera ran to his non-Israelite friend Heber ⁶. But he was killed by Jael's wife ⁷. Deborah's word of prediction came true! Barak had to let the final glory for defeating Sisera go to a woman ⁸. But he was content with that, and soon the Israelites totally freed themselves from Jabin's domination ⁹. The victory was won by faith; Hebrews 11:32 regards Barak as the hero of faith – but it was won by faith working within the limits of assurance.

¹ 4:8
² see Job 2:9

¹ 4:9b–10

¹ 4:11

¹ 4:12–13
² 4:14a
³ 4:14b–15a
⁴ 4:15b
⁵ 4:16
⁶ 4:17
⁷ 4:18–21
⁸ 4:22
⁹ 4:23–24



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