

Disclaimer: This talk carries a warning of flashing images and violence.

Continuing in our series of Women of the Old Testament, tonight our focus is on Deborah the only female judge whose story is told in the book of Judges. Deborah was both a judge and a prophetess. She was well respected and people came from afar to let her adjudicate their disputes under the “palm of Deborah”.

At the time of Deborah’s leadership, the people of Israel were oppressed by Jabin, the King of Canaan. The Israelites followed a pattern of falling into sin in the eyes of the Lord, being punished for their evil ways, then repenting and crying out to Him for salvation, and finally being delivered, only to repeat it all again. The plight of the people stirred Deborah and she called upon Barak, commander and warrior, to fight for the Israelite’s freedom. She told him, “Go! The Lord, God of Israel, commands you to take 10 thousand men and lead the way to Mount Tabor”. But Barak, although later referred to as a Hero of Faith in Hebrews, did not have Deborah’s faith in the Lord and said he would only go if she went with him. She went, and it was under her leadership that the tribes of Israel united and were able to rise up against their oppressors. She prophesied that because of Barak’s lack of courage, he would not enjoy the acknowledgement for the defeat of Sisera, the commander of King Jabin’s army, but that this honour would go to a woman instead. One would think she was foretelling of her own greatness, but she was not.

The Lord did not disappoint. He directed the armies of Sisera into a trap where Barak’s men swooped down on them like lightning, slaying every one of them. Sisera escaped on foot, and finally found himself outside the tent of Jael. She lulled him into a false sense of security, and invited him into her tent to hide. He felt safe enough to fall asleep. The glory for the slaying of Sisera went to Jael, who, while he slept, drove a tent peg through his temple. After this victory against their oppressors came a time of peace for the people of Israel for a period of forty years.

Deborah was fearless. She was respected and her authority transcended the tribal divisions in the Israelites. She was a spokesman of the Lord. As a prophetess, she heard from God and spoke prophecies. As a leader, she spoke decisive commands, and she backed up her words with faith filled actions. She won the day and the people of Israel were delivered and lived in peace for at least a generation thereafter. Did she do these things, say these things, and lead these powerful men in her own strength? Rather, she spoke the words she heard from God, gave commands that were God’s commands, and acted with utmost faith that He would always be there with her, as long as she acted for His glory.

At the moment, we all possibly feel like we are under the house arrest of some evil oppressor. We don’t have the freedom to do the things we want to do, go where we want to go and be with and hug the people we want to see. We may not be able to trap this invisible enemy to slay it, or drive a tent peg through its temple. We may feel helpless and frustrated and that we cannot go on anymore. And alone, that might be true. Only we are not alone. And we don’t have to face any of our struggles in our own strength. Like Deborah, we can rely on the strength of the Lord. We can reach out to Him in prayer, listen to Him as He speaks to us through His word and unite together in fellowship with one another. We can let His strength uplift us and have faith that with His strength we can make it through for as long as it takes, until we are delivered to His peace on the other side.