

4. God's enablements

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It was a bright sunny afternoon in Caribbean. A cruise ship was moving very slowly to the port to dock herself in. Many passengers were eager to get on shore and see exciting things and experience exotic culture of Caribbean.

That all came to a screeching halt with a short shriek by a woman and people's screaming, "A man overboard". Of course on-lookers stretched out their necks to see what was going on. Even before the crew members got their gear and got into the water, a brave soul dove into the water near her and grabbed her and started to swim toward a ship side door that was opened by now. The passengers on every deck cheered for this courageous man's quick action.

As the brave man climbed into the ship after her, he was greeted by the Executive Officer from the bridge and he was told that the Captain would like to have him at the his table for a dinner that night.

At the dining hall that night, all the eyes were on this man of valor. The captain asked him how he could react so quickly before his own crew could. The man sheepishly said, "Somebody pushed me over."

I don't know if that man was really pushed over or he jumped in. A difficult situation often demands a quick response. Who-responds-how makes that person to be the leader of the bunch. But God's enablements come in a different way. He is not looking for the most logical person in our eyes, but someone with a loyal heart toward the Lord and willing to obey Him at any cost.

Tonight we are going to see many characters:

Jabin: King of Hazor in Canaan & a tyrant

Deborah: a Jewish judge and a prophetess, a woman of faith and courage

Barak: a reluctant Jewish general

Sisera: captain of Jabin's army

Heber: a Kenite neighbor, at peace with Jabin

Jael: wife of Heber; handy with a hammer

Jehovah God of Israel: in charge of wars, weather, everything and everybody

A. DEBORAH, THE FOURTH JUDGE

Judges 4:1-3 When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. 2 So the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim. 3 And the children of Israel cried out to the Lord; for Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and for twenty years he harshly oppressed the children of Israel.

For eighty years, the Jews had enjoyed rest because of the leadership of Ehud, the longest period of peace recorded in the Book of Judges. But no sooner was this godly judge passed away than the people lapsed back into idolatry, so God had to punish them.

Please remember that the Israel people were reformed during their difficulties under king Eglon's oppression. Reformation temporarily changes outward conduct while revival permanently alters inward character.

Note that the Israel people were under Eglon's oppression for twenty years before they cried out to the Lord. In the beginning, it was eight years, the second time was eighteen years, now for the third time it is twenty years. Actually, they are getting used to it and building their tolerance to the oppression against them. That is like we live under the bondage of satan and not minding about it.

B. DEBORAH, A PROPHETESS AND A JUDGE OF ISRAEL

Judges 4:4-7 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. 5 And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. 6 Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "Has not the Lord God of Israel commanded, 'Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; 7 and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand'?"

God had raised up a courageous woman named Deborah which means "bee", to be the judge in the land. This was an act of grace. But it was also an act of humiliation for the Jews. Because they lived in a male-dominated society that wanted only male leadership. For God to give His people a woman judge was to treat them like little children, which is exactly what they were when it came to spiritual things.

The issue is not whether women can be used greatly by God. Of course they can. The issue is headship, final accountability, and authority - and God has granted these responsibilities to men in both the home and the church. Women can be used greatly by God, but it is to be under the headship of male authority in the church.

The reasons have nothing to do with any notion of male superiority like some male chauvinists would think. They have to do with God's ordained order according to 1 Corinthians 11:3, in light of God's order of creation according to 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 and in light of the nature of the fall according to 1 Timothy 2:14. God is not a male chauvinist.

C. LADY FIRST

Judges 4:8-10 And Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!" 9 So she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.

If there ever was a general who was a sissy, it was Barak whose name means "lightning". He should have been out in the thick of the battle, but here he is hiding behind a woman's skirt. Barak will not go into battle unless Deborah goes along. If this prophetess went with him, he felt he would be successful in battle. No wonder God had to use a woman in that day!

We know that "God's commandments are God's enablements" and that we should obey His will in spite of circumstances, feelings, or consequences. But we don't always do it! Barak's response was an evidence of unbelief.

At this time the Israelites had essentially no weapons to fight with against a technologically advanced army with 900 iron chariots which is like having 900 tanks, and God led them to fight on a plain, putting them at a big disadvantage.

D. GOD vs. BAAL

Judges 4:10-16 And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; he went up with ten thousand men under his command, and Deborah went up with him. 11 Now Heber the Kenite, of the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, had separated himself from the Kenites and pitched his tent near the terebinth tree at Zaanaim, which is beside Kedesh. 12 And they reported to Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. 13 So Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth Hagoyim to the River Kishon. 14 Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the Lord gone out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. 15 And 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. 16 But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth Hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.

The Lord was the One who actually fought against Sisera's army for the Israelites. He not only controlled the enemy army and brought it into the trap, but He also controlled the weather and used a storm to defeat Sisera's troops.

The Canaanites depended on their 900 iron chariots to give them the advantage they needed as they met the Jewish army. What they didn't know was that the Lord would send a fierce rainstorm that would make the Kishon River overflow and turn the battlefield into a sea of mud according to 5:20-22. The water and mud would severely impede the mobility of the Canaanite chariots and horses, and this situation would make it easy for the Israelite soldiers to attack and slaughter the enemy. The trap worked, and the enemy army was wiped out.

Along with the storm from the heavens and the flood from the swollen river, God sent confusion in the minds of the enemy troops. The word translated "routed" means "confused, thrown into panic."

When you remember that the Canaanite god Baal was the god of storms, you can see how the sudden change of weather could have affected the superstitious Canaanites. Obviously, the God of Israel is stronger than the idol of Canaan.

E. THE GENERAL WHO WAS NAILED BY A WOMAN

Judges 4:17-23 However, Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between Jabin king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. 18 And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear." And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a blanket. 19 Then he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him. 20 And he said to her, "Stand at the door of the tent, and if any man comes and inquires of you, and says, 'Is there any man here?' you shall say, 'No.'" 21 Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died. 22 And then, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said to him, "Come, I will show you the man whom you seek." And when he went into her tent, there lay Sisera,

dead with the peg in his temple. 23 So on that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan in the presence of the children of Israel. 24 And the hand of the children of Israel grew stronger and stronger against Jabin king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

Remember a man named Heber from v11-12? He reported the Israel army's movement to Sisera. Since Sisera knew that Heber and his people were friendly toward Jabin, this settlement seemed a good place to stop, hide and rest. When Heber's wife, Jael, came out to meet Sisera and invited him into her tent, the Canaanite general was sure that he was at last safe. After all, in that culture nobody would dare enter a wife's tent except her husband.

Having a glass of warm milk and blanket over his head, his weary body didn't take a long time to fall asleep with his own self-assurance that this family would not do any harm against him.

However, Sisera made a mistake of telling Jael to lie if anyone asked whether he was there. Being a wise woman, she concluded that Sisera was fleeing the battlefield, which meant that the Jews had won the battle and the Canaanite grip on the land was broken. If she protected Sisera, she'd be in trouble with the Jews. No doubt somebody was chasing Sisera, and whoever it was wouldn't be satisfied until the general was dead.

What Sisera didn't know was that God had promised that a woman would take his life according to the prophecy by Deborah in v9.

In the Eastern nomadic tribes, it was the women who put up and took down the tents, while the guys sit around a campfire and eat beef jerkies. So Jael knew how to use a hammer. She nailed him good and Sisera was having a splitting headache.

Deborah's prophecy had been fulfilled. For a general to flee from a battle was embarrassing. For him to be killed while fleeing was humiliating. But to be killed by a woman was the most disgraceful thing of all in that time.

According to the ancient Middle East custom, the Jael's family is supposed to protect their guests at any cost. But she killed Sisera. Should we bless or blame her for what she did? Let's see what Deborah says about it in chapter 5:

Judges 5:24 "Most blessed among women is Jael, The wife of Heber the Kenite; Blessed is she among women in tents.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) We always have a choice to obey God's will in spite of the circumstances around us.

If we do, God will reward us with His goodness beyond our imagination. But if we don't, we will never find out what kind of blessing of obedience to His will and goodness we missed.

2) We either love Christ and walk in the light, or we are His enemy and perish in the darkness.