

Judges 4:1-4:9

Someone once said that "It is important for us to recognize and celebrate our heroes and she-roes!" - Maya Angelou

To that person's mind the term "she-roes" was a unique and eye-catching way to talk about heroines.

And I like that word.

In the Bible there are many heroes, but there aren't that many "she-roes". But of those "she-roes" that are in Scripture, one of the most impressive is this woman we've read about this morning: her name is Deborah.

Now Deborah's only mentioned in these two chapters (Judges 4 and 5) but hers is a powerful story. In these two chapters we're actually told quite a bit about her. And amongst the things we're told is that she's:

- A prophetess - Judges 4:4
- A judge who "used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment." Judges 4:5
- A woman who was used by God - Judges 4:6
- She described herself as "a mother in Israel" - Judges 5:7
- And the entire chapter of Judges 5 is dedicated to a song of praise she sang to honor the power of God in conquering Israel's enemy.

Now, Deborah was an extremely unique judge.

She was different than any of the other judges mentioned in this book about "Judges."

For example, unlike several of the other judges in the book of judges, there's not a single word of condemnation about Deborah. The Bible speaks nothing but praise for her faith and actions in her service of her God.

2ndly, unlike several of the other judges in the book of judges she isn't called by God to go to war as a military commander. I mean, she does go to battle beside Barak, but she wasn't called to lead the army to war. She went as an encouragement to Barak.

And 3rd - she's the only judge in the book of Judges that behaves even close to what we'd call a judge. All the other judges seem to be called to go to war... but not her. She's called a judge because she acts like what we'd think of as a judge. People come to her to have her arbitrate their disagreements with one another.

ILLUS: Now, when you think of a judge, what images come to mind?

A court room.

A judge dressed in black robes.

And there's usually a bailiff or a deputy, who's armed with a gun or Taser, and is charged with keeping order in the court.

Judges in our culture are those who can pass judgment, and have the power to impose penalties, and even to punish people by sending them to prison.

But that's not quite how things worked back then.

In the days of the Old Testament, "judges" were more like "arbitrators". There were no police or prisons to enforce their rulings. Often times the leading men of the city would serve as these arbitrators. And you wouldn't find them in a beautiful court room. Instead, you'd find them down at the city gates. That's where they "held court".

People who needed their disagreements settled would go to the city gates because that was where they'd most likely find the wise men of the community.

Now, by contrast Deborah didn't need to go the gate of the city.

She sat under her own palm tree.

Judges 4:5 tells us "She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment." (ESV)

Deborah was one of the most famous of the judges of her day.

In our culture, many of us couldn't begin to give the name of a judge in their city, but we could give the name of an advice counselor in the local newspaper. In my day it was Ann Landers, and her sister who's by-line was "Dear Abby."

Just as people would flock to Deborah for her advice, people in our day flock to send their letters to the "Dear Abby's" of our culture to have them arbitrate disagreements between them. They serve the same function as the "judges" of the Old Testament.

So Deborah was a judge in Israel.

But she wasn't only a judge... she was also a prophetess.

When you think of a prophet in the Old Testament who do you think of?

Isaiah or Jeremiah or Daniel?

These Old Testament prophets were well-known because of books of prophecy they wrote. Or they were known because they would make declarations of a future event (like Isaiah, who's known as the "Messianic" prophet because of the many futuristic descriptions of the coming of Jesus). Or these prophets were well known because they would give long sermons in which they would declare the judgment of God upon the people of Israel.

But Deborah doesn't do any of that.

She doesn't write a book.

She make no statements about the future.

And she doesn't seem to be into giving long speeches.

So if Deborah didn't do any of those things, what is it that would have qualified her as a "prophetess"?

What did she do that MADE her a prophetess?

Well, there was one thing that she did that was common to some prophets in the Old Testament. We don't commonly think of this as part of a prophet's role because it doesn't

get much press in the Bible. But the Jews of Deborah's day would have understood this action as being something prophets and prophetesses did.

She sang.

The entire 5th chapter of Judges is dedicated to Deborah's song of praise to God. And singing and playing instruments was something prophets did.

The Biblical commentator Adam Clarke noted that "prophesying often implies singing". And a commentary by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown noted that "instrumental music is called 'prophesying'" in I Samuel 10 and I Chronicles 25.

I Samuel 10 tells us about the time Samuel sent Saul on a journey: "...you will go to Gibeah... As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of PROPHETS coming down from the high place with lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying." I Samuel 10:5

1 Chronicles 25:1&5 say "David... set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for the ministry of PROPHECYING, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals. (Jeduthun's) sons: PROPHECIED, using the harp in thanking and praising the LORD."

What are these guys doing?

They're singing.

They're playing instruments and offering up music to God.

That's what these prophets did AS PROPHETS of God.

And their singing didn't have to be instructive or futuristic in its declaration.

It could simply be inspired praise as it was here Judges 5 with Deborah.

God often used singing as a way to declare His majesty.

In fact, that's what God did through Miriam (the sister of Moses/Aaron) in Exodus 15:20-21 "Then Miriam the PROPHETESS, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.""

Miriam's song of prophecy was exactly like Deborah's song in its declaration of God's power and in its declaration that it was God who triumphed over the enemies of Israel.

(Pause)

So Deborah was a judge and she was a prophetess.

And the Bible wants us to clearly understand that she was a very WISE woman.

But that wasn't why she was a SHE-RO of the Old Testament.

Her being a judge and a prophetess and her being wise were not the reasons Deborah was listed in the book of Judges. Deborah is listed in Judges because she allowed God to use her for something special. She's in the book of Judges because there was a crisis and she was used by God to help solve that crisis.

STORY: Israel has fallen back into their old ways of worshiping false gods and their idolatry and rebellion had angered God much that we're told "the LORD sold them into the hands of Jabin, a king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera..." Judges 4:2

Now, Israel had an army of 10,000 men under the leadership of a man named Barak but they were no match of Sisera and the army of Canaan. The reason? Sisera had 900 iron chariots... and Israel didn't. Pitting Israel's army of 10,000 against Canaan's 900 chariots would have been like sending an army of riflemen against 900 armored tanks. They'd have been massacred.

But God has Deborah tell Barak it was time to go war and she went with Barak as he led his army into what seemed like a hopeless battle with a superior enemy.

But the story in Judges tells us that Barak had an edge in this fight.

God had promised His people that if they obeyed Him: "You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you." Leviticus 26:7-8

With God on his side, Barak couldn't lose.

But there is an odd thing about what we're told here.

How many soldiers does Barak have to go to war with? 10,000.

That's a pretty good sized army.

But a few Sundays back we read about Gideon and we're told that he had 10,000 soldiers too. But what did God tell Gideon do with his 10,000 men?

God told Gideon to send most of them home. God explained: "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'" Judges 7:2 (ESV)

So, why were 10,000 soldiers too many for Gideon and just enough for Barak and Deborah?

Well, in this case, God was using Barak's army as "bait." In fact, that's what God said was His intention "I will LURE Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands." Judges 4:7

I'm convinced that God intended to use Barak's 10,000 soldiers as a way to lure Sisera chariots into the field of battle. Sisera wouldn't have committed his heavy armament for only 300 men in the field (as Gideon had under his command). Israel's army had to be force big enough for Sisera to feel it worth his trouble. But once ALL Sisera's chariots were committed and in the field... God destroyed them.

When Deborah sang her song of praise she declared "O LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the land of Edom, the earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water. The mountains quaked before the LORD, the One of Sinai, before the LORD, the God of Israel. Judges 5:4-5

You know what happened?

When Sisera was committed, God brought a storm out of the south and... it began to rain. And it rained and it rained and it rained.

ILLUS: I enjoy watching war documentaries on YouTube. And I was particularly intrigued by one of the common explanations of why Nazi Germany lost in their battle for Russia. You see, the power of the German war machine was wrapped up primarily in its tanks. These tanks were the best military machines of their time. They had the been the key to Hitler's annihilation of the Allied forces in France. But these tanks were designed for war in on the Eastern front... not the Western one.

What defeated Hitler's tanks was not so much the military might of Russia... it was Russia's land. When that land got wet it got really muddy and the German tanks often bogged down in that mud and were unable to move. When that happened the German panzers became little more than huge pieces of metal that were at the mercy of the Russian forces.

And that's essentially what happened to Sisera's forces. The rain came down... and the IRON chariots got stuck in the mud. They could still move, but they had limited mobility.

Then, in addition to the mud, God threw in an earthquake.

Faced with the obvious reality that Israel's God had entered the battle - and Barak's forces weren't far behind - Sisera's forces panicked and began to run away.

And so did Sisera.

Sisera ran away to the north into the mountains and hid in what he thought was the tent of friends. The woman there fed him and gave him milk and made him comfortable. But after he fell asleep (this is kinda gory) she took a mallet and drove a tent peg through his forehead.

And he died.

A friend of mine observed that "this is why I never sleep in a tent with a woman who has a mallet and a tent peg... just in case" (Jb Skaggs)

There was no mistaking the fact that God had won the victory over Sisera that day, and Judges chapter 5 is totally dedicated to singing God's praises and it was written down a Psalm of Thanksgiving to God.

But now... there's odd twist to this story.

Before any of this fighting happens.

Before Barak leads his men out to battle.

Before the army is even assembled to fight - God has Deborah tell Barak he needs to go to battle. But Barak isn't excited about the concept.

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

'Very well,' Deborah said, 'I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman.'" Judges 4:8-9

What's THIS all about?

Well, what this is all about is – men and women.

It's all about the difference between men and women.

You do realize that there's a difference between men and women don't you?

How many of you realize there's a difference between men and women?

- Men are bigger and stronger and more aggressive.
- Women tend to be more spiritual and religious.
- Men want to fix problems.
- Women want to listen to people and sympathize with their problems.
- And men, because they are bigger/stronger/aggressive, tend to dominate and mistreat women.
- And women, because they are generally smaller/ weaker than men strive for security and protection.

This all creates a conflict between the sexes.

And often, men – because they are bigger and stronger than women – win that conflict. And when that happens in a society, we call that a "male dominated" society

That's not healthy. And it's not Biblical.

When men DOMINATE women it proves they've taken God's place.

Such men view themselves as being "in charge"... not God.

And thus women become their servants.

In that kind of atmosphere women are abused, misused and mistreated.

Men who create that kind environment have no place in their lives for SHE-ROS. There is no room for women to shine.

But in Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus said "the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

God hates it when His people dominate and enslave others to their will.

God hates a male DOMINATED society.

And the Bible does not teach it.

But because so many men (including supposedly "Christian" men) do dominate women, godly people react badly to what the Bible actually does teach... which is male-LED society. The Bible consistently teaches that men were created to lead and have a position of responsibility.

That's why the Bible says that women should not teach or have authority of adult men.

Teaching and having the responsibility of making decisions for the church is the job God designed men to do. When MEN do that job, the church is stronger and better protected. When they don't step up and do their job... the church suffers.

And wise women in the church won't let that happen.
Wise women will always challenge their men to step up and lead.

And that's kind of what's happening here with Barak.
Deborah understands that going to war to protect the nation is a man's responsibility. That's Barak's job. It's his job to lead men into battle. But he doesn't really want to do it. He wants to lean on Deborah/ he wants her to help him lead the army.
He's ducking out on his job... and Deborah won't let him do it.

She'll go with him, but I suspect she kept challenging him to MAN UP and LEAD.

ILLUS: Years ago, my sister attended a Sunday School that was filled with new believers. Nobody knew very much about the Bible... but my sister did. She'd been raised all of her life in church, and knew the Bible very well.

So guess who they wanted to have teach their class?

That's right – my sister.

That troubled her because she KNEW she knew more than anyone else in class. But she also knew that men should have been doing the teaching in that class. There just were no men who knew enough or were confident enough to step up.

So she went home and put the matter into prayer. The next Sunday she offered the class a deal. She said she would teach for a while, but ONLY if two of them men she saw as promising teachers would be her understudies. Over the next few weeks, she took those men aside taught them how to study their Bibles, and look things up in commentaries. And she taught them how to do word studies and other kinds of research.

After a while, she began to shoehorn those men into teaching the class and ultimately they took over the class as the official teachers there. Eventually they became leaders in that congregation.

They became the men they should have been, because my sister challenged them to do so. My sister was just like Deborah. She showed great wisdom and she worked to build up men who were leaders.

CLOSE: And that's kind of the way Godly women have always been. Godly women (and Godly men) have always been more concerned with being servants of God and of others than they ever have of having positions of authority and influence. When Jesus said the greatest among you will be those who are the servants of all I think He may have been thinking about women like Deborah.

Someone once pointed out that women were instrumental in much of Jesus' ministry.

- It was a woman (His mother Mary) who prompted Jesus to perform His first miracle
- It was women (Mary & Martha) who ministered to Christ during His public ministry.
- It was woman (Mary) who anointed the body of Jesus before He was crucified.

- It was the women (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome) who stayed with Jesus throughout his trial and crucifixion.
- It was women (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others) who were the first witnesses to the resurrected Savior.
- And in today's churches - it is women who make up the majority of the population of most congregations.

In our congregation there are many Deborah's who are known for their wisdom and insight
In our church there are many great women of God
In our midst there are many She-ros of faith.
And we would be much weaker and poorer without them.

Do I hear an "amen?"