

Deborah: A Mother in Israel

Judges 5:1-31, Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 2:9, Judges 4:1-24

Slide 1

One Sunday in 2018, Ben and Jackee Belnap noticed that an envelope containing \$1,060 had mysteriously disappeared.

For the previous year, University of Utah football fans had been saving money to pay back Ben's parents for season tickets, and that money was in the envelope.

Ben and Jackee started tearing the house apart searching for the cash. *"I'm digging through the trash,"* Ben Belnap said, *"and Jackee hollers, 'I found it.'"* It was in the shredder in a thousand tiny pieces.

Immediately they knew Leo, their 2-year-old, was the culprit since he had been helping Jackee shred junk mail and documents. Apparently, he thought he was being helpful.

First, his mother cried. Then, she laughed. She said, *"As devastated and as sick as we were, this was one of those moments where you just have to laugh."*

Later, Ben contacted the Treasury Department's, Mutilated Currency Division. They redeem burned, rodent-chewed, or deteriorated money as a free service to the public.

After Ben explained what had happened, they told him to send the shredded money to Washington in Ziploc bags and they would replace it.

Needless to say, Jackee didn't let Leo use the shredder anymore, making the comment that *"this will make a great wedding story one day."*

On this Mother's Day, you have to appreciate Jackee's response to her son's mishap, but you have to cry when you think about how much our culture has shredded the values we hold dear.

Thankfully, redemption is possible through Jesus, Who delights in redeeming mutilated lives, families, and whole cultures.

He can redeem your shredded life and use you to bring redemption to our shredded culture. The question is How? How can God use the likes of you and me to put a broken world back together?

Turn to Judges 4. In this chapter, we see how God used "*a mother in Israel*" to restore her nation during one of the darkest periods of Israel's history.

Judges 4:1-3, "*Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, now that Ehud was dead. So the LORD sold them into the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. Sisera, the commander of his army, was based in Haro-sheth Hag-goyim. Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the LORD for help.*"

After 80 years of peace, Israel was in trouble again because they had turned against the Lord. They faced a powerful enemy, who had cruelly oppressed them for over 20 years.

Judges 4:4-5, "*Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided.*"

Notice two aspects about Deborah's role in Israel. She was a prophetess and a judge. She declared God's Word and then applied that Word to the disputes people brought to her.

She proclaimed the Word of God, and that's what we must do if we want God to use us to put a broken world back together.

Slide 2

That's why we mustn't tell people what we think, but what GOD says. We must share God's Word with those who come to us for advice. Why? Because the power is in God's Word, not ours.

Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

In the book, *More Jesus, Less Religion*, Steve Arterburn writes: "Some time ago, I read about the work of a Wycliffe Bible translator in a remote village in Pa-pu-a, New Guinea.

When the opening chapters of Genesis were first translated into the native language, the attitude toward women in the tribe changed overnight. They had not realized or understood that the woman had been specially formed out of the side of the man.

Without even hearing this concept developed, these people immediately grasped the ideas of equality between the sexes and began adjusting their behavior. The people heard. They believed. They obeyed. They changed. Just like that.

That change doesn't mean everyone in the tribe immediately came to faith in Christ, however.

While they immediately recognized the respect God has for both men and women, the members of this tribe had their own hard-to-abandon gods and superstitions.

One of their practices was to spit on the wounds of the sick. Their medicine men were known as the spitters, and they did not want someone like Jesus to take away their status in the village.

However, the attitude changed as more of the Bible was translated into the tribe's dialect. When translators read the passage where Jesus cured a blind man in a most unusual way, the medicine men pricked up their ears.

The Master spit on the ground, made a paste of mud, put it on the man's eyelids, told him to wash it off—and the man was healed. When these tribesmen heard this story in their own language, they saw that Jesus was not against them, but for them.

They found one of their own, a Savior who was also a spitter! And they came to the Lord because of this connection.”

That's the power of God's Word. You don't have to explain it or defend it. Just share it whenever God gives you an opportunity. He'll use it to change lives and whole cultures.

Of course, that means you have to know it and apply it to your own life.

During the Civil War, Harriet Tubman demonstrated raw, calm courage which could only come from God. Born into slavery in the 1820s, Harriet was nearly killed when her master hurled a metal object at her.

She staged a daring escape in 1849, then spent years rescuing hundreds out of slavery and leading them to safety. Her code name was Moses because she never lost a single escapee.

She also became a secret agent for the Union Army working behind enemy lines to scout out the territory. Despite a bounty on her head, she always managed to evade capture.

A devout follower of Christ, Tubman spent much time learning, memorizing, and meditating on various verses in the Bible. Her favorite was Isaiah 16:3b, *“Hide the fugitives, do not betray the refugees.”*

As she pondered various passages, she turned them into prayers, and in prayer she learned to practice God's presence.

“I prayed all the time,” she told her biographer, *“I was always talking to the Lord. When I went to the horse trough to wash my face and took up the water in my hands,”* I said, *‘Oh, Lord, wash me, make me clean.’*

When I took up the towel to wipe my face and hands, I cried, *‘Oh, Lord, for Jesus' sake, wipe away all my sins!’*

When I took up the broom and began to sweep, I groaned, *‘Oh, Lord, whatsoever sin there be in my heart, sweep it out, Lord, clear and clean.’”*

Harriet Tubman saturated herself with God's Word, building a mind-set that transcended her background and transformed her life.

Not only that, God used her to transform an entire culture, which in her day treated her people as less than human.

So, if you want God to use you to put a broken world back together, first, Proclaim His Word. Then...

Slide 3

Incite people to believe in God's Word. Rouse them to rely on God's promises and obey God's commands.

That's what Deborah did. Her name means “honeybee;” and like a honeybee, she provided the sweet nectar of God's Word, but she also had a stinger. She could needle people into action.

Judges 4:6-7, *“She sent for Barak son of A-bin-o-am from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.””*

The Israelites and the Canaanites lived together in the land. The Canaanites controlled the valleys while the Israelites controlled the hill country.

That’s why God told General Barak to gather 10,000 Israelite troops on Mount Tabor.

Now, the region around Mount Tabor was relatively accessible to chariots, so the presence of 10,000 Israelites on the mountain would more than suffice to “lure” Sisera to the region.

That was God’s battle plan, but Barak was afraid of Sisera’s 900 iron chariots. Then Deborah reminded Barak of what God said. So, how does Barak respond?

Judges 4:8-9, *“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.”*

Barak, Israel’s general, needed a woman to hold his hand. This was a disgrace, because now the credit for winning the battle will go to a woman.

Judges 4:10-11, *“There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.”*

Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Za-a-nan-nim near Kedesh."

Kadesh was near the field of battle and Heber's wife will play a key role in the upcoming battle.

Judges 4:12-16, "When they told Sisera that Barak son of A-bin-o-am had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera summoned from Har-o-sheth Hag-go-yim to the Kishon River all his men and his nine hundred chariots fitted with iron. Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?" So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him. At Barak's advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot. Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Har-o-sheth Hag-go-yim, and all Sisera's troops fell by the sword; not a man was left."

God kept His Word and gave Barak complete victory! Through Deborah's prodding, Barak gained the faith to act on God's Word and God acted on his behalf. Even so, Barak got no credit for the victory.

Judges 4:17, "Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite."

The Kenites were allies with the Canaanites. They were under a treaty of peace with each other, so Sisera felt safe taking refuge with this Kenite family.

Judges 4:18-21, "Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid." So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket. "I'm thirsty," he said. "Please give me some water."

She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up. “Stand in the doorway of the tent,” he told her. “If someone comes by and asks you, ‘Is anyone in there?’ say ‘No.’” But Jael, Heber’s wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.”

Bedouin women had the task of pitching the tents, so she was an expert with a tent peg, which she used to kill Sisera.

Judges 4:22, “Just then Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. “Come,” she said, “I will show you the man you’re looking for.” So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple—dead.”

Normally, the winning general would slay the losing general and get the glory, but now Jael gets that honor regardless that she slew him with a simple household utensil.

A woman gets credit for the win just as Deborah had predicted. In fact, two women get credit for the win: Deborah, who instigated the battle; and Jael, who finished it.

Judges 4:23-24, “On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him.”

God delivered Israel from Canaanite oppression, and He used two women to do it!

In describing Deborah’s role, Walter Elwell says, *“She speaks with God’s voice and authority to a major military leader. At her instigation, tribes which would otherwise quickly fade into insignificance mount a major attack against the Canaanites.”*

God used Deborah to put her broken world back together. All she did was proclaim God's Word and provoke trust in that Word.

If you want God to use you to put your broken world back together, do what Deborah did... proclaim His Word, provoke trust in that Word, and finally...

Slide 4

Give God all the glory for any victory you experience. Give credit to where credit is due, not to your own ingenuity and strength, but to the Lord, Who is powerful to save all who put their trust in Him.

We must point people to Him. That's what Deborah did in Judges 5. The whole chapter is her hymn of praise, giving God all the glory!

Even though she was a prophetess and a judge, she described herself simply as "*a mother in Israel.*" She diminished her role and magnified God's part in the victory.

In verses 1-11, Deborah issued a call to praise. In verses 12-18, Deborah puts together a catalogue of people who joined her in battle, and those who didn't.

Then in verses 19-31, Deborah described the conquest in its particulars. And through it all, she pointed people to the Lord, to whom she credited the victory.

If we want God to use us to restore our world, point people to Him, praise Him, and magnify His Name.

John Piper puts it this way: "*There are two kinds of magnifying: microscope magnifying and telescope magnifying. One makes a small thing look bigger than it is. The other makes a big thing look as big as it really is.*"

Piper continues, *“We are not called to be microscopes. We are called to be telescopes. Christians are not called to be con men who magnify their product out of all proportion to reality, when they know the competitor’s product is far superior.”*

There’s nothing and nobody superior to God. So, the calling of those who love God is to make His greatness look as great as it really is. That’s why we exist. That’s why we were saved.

As Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9, *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”*

The whole duty of the Christian is summed up in this: feel, think, and act in a way that will make God look as great as He really is. Be a telescope for the world of the infinite starry wealth of God’s glory.

Slide 5

Conclusion

In March 2020, Dr. Francis Collins, Director of the National Institute of Health, described his journey from atheism to faith in Christ.

As a medical student, Collins found himself moving from agnostic to atheist. He said, *“I would have challenged anybody who wanted to have some discussion about God.”*

I would have asserted they were basically stuck in some past era of supernaturalism that is no longer necessary because science has eliminated the need for it.”

But the time came, as a third-year medical student, when he found himself sitting at the bedside of people who had terrible illnesses that physicians were unable to help.

Dr. Collins said, *“While watching those individuals who were at the end of their lives, I tried to imagine what I would do in that same circumstance.*

Many of these people were deeply committed to faith. I was unsettled to see how they approached the end of life. This was something that I personally was pretty terrified about. They had peace, and even a sort of sense of joyfulness that there was something beyond.”

Collins described one patient he had gotten attached to: *“She suffered from advanced cardiac disease, which included episodes of daily crushing chest pain. And yet she came through this with remarkable peace and was very comfortable sharing the reason for that with me, namely her faith in Jesus.*

One day she looked at me in a quizzical way and said, ‘You know, doctor, you’ve listened to me talk about my faith, but you’ve never said anything. What do you believe?’ A very direct, simple question, but it was like a thunderclap.”

Collins says, *“That was the most important question I’ve ever been asked.”* Now, he’s in a place of world-wide influence as he directs the research into the Coronavirus.

Dr. Anthony Fauci works for him. God has given Dr. Collins a huge platform from which to share his faith, and it all started with a woman in severe pain, suffering from advance cardiac disease.

She praised God in her pain and pointed her doctor to Jesus. That’s why we should praise God, even in our pain, and point people to Jesus every chance we get.

If you want God to use you to restore your broken world, proclaim His Word; provoke trust in that Word; and praise the Lord.

You don't have to be polished or famous. You might just be "*a mother in America,*" but God can use you to change your world for the better.

Commit your life to Him and let Him do it through you!