

DECEMBER 2021 – Arise like Deborah

*“In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, In the days of Jael,
The highways were deserted, And the travelers walked along the byways.
7 Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, Until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel.”*

Judges 5:6-7 (NKJV)

Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for your wonderful response to my November newsletter – let us not get complacent and forget about God’s heart for children globally!

It might have been differently in North America and Europe, but when I was a child and young adult, having a female leader in government or in the church was unheard of in most parts of the world. With the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994, there was only one female judge on the High Court bench in our country. The last cabinet of the then President F W de Klerk also had only a single woman minister. Today, 27 years later, 50% of our cabinet ministers are females. Similarly, the number of female judges in South Africa has drastically increased.

My generation of women have accordingly been met with leadership opportunities like no other generation before us. For obvious reasons, there were very few women that went before us on whose leadership we could model ours. We were faced with the choice that we could either imitate male leaders hoping that we would do a better job or explore the possibility that God wanted us to lead in a different unique fashion.

In scripture we do not have to many examples of female leaders. Deborah is the first one we read about. Following the death of Joshua, the book of Judges demonstrates the following cycle of leadership six and a half times: (a) Israel turns away from the Lord and worships idols; (b) Then God hands them over to oppressors; (c) The people repent and call out to God for salvation; and (d) God raises up a deliverer (a judge) who militarily defeats the oppressors, restoring freedom and peace for a period.

In the third of these cycles, and following the death of Ehud, the Lord hands Israel over to the Canaanites under the leadership of Sisera who oppresses Israel for twenty years before God raises up Deborah.

The first thing we learn about Deborah is that she is a prophetess - one who receives and communicates words directly from God. We read that she was the wife of Lappidoth. No further details are given about Deborah's husband or marriage. She held court under her palm tree and the Israelites came to her to settle their disputes. Clearly Deborah was not providing military leadership like the judges before her who were military commanders.

Barak is the commander of the army and Deborah sends for him and tells him that he must gather ten thousand warriors to fight Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite army, who had nine hundred iron chariots and had oppressed the Israelites ruthlessly for twenty years.

Barak says to Deborah: “I will go, but only if you go with me” Deborah agrees to march with them, but she warns Barak **that because of his fear** he will receive no honor for the Lord’s victory over Sisera. She does not for one moment doubt that God will give them victory.

After Barak and his ten thousand warriors attack the Canaanite army, they flee. Barak and his men chase them and kill every single one of the Canaanite warriors. It is only Sisera who escapes but is then killed by Jael when she drives the tent peg through his temple while he is asleep. After

that Israel succeeds in destroying King Jabin of Canaan and scriptures tell us that for forty years **there was peace in Israel.**

In Judges 5 Deborah and Barak's song of victory is recorded. The sad and desperate distressed state of Israel is described :6 *"In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, and in the days of Jael, people avoided the main roads, and travelers stayed on winding pathways / on the back road where they would not be noticed :7 Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel"*

A picture of national distress is described - travel, commerce, community life had ceased to exist. The Canaanite robbers robbed all they met with on the highway, they entered the villages and unwalled towns, broke into houses and plundered them; so that the inhabitants of them were obliged to quit their dwellings, and go into the fortified cities for security. The villages were left empty, and in time fell to ruin.

But then Deborah says: **"until I, Deborah arose, I arose a mother in Israel."** She doesn't say that I arose as a prophetess, or as a judge or as a military commander or as the head of state. She says she arose as a **mother!** A nursing mother to Israel, to teach and instruct them in the mind and will of God, to administer justice to them, to protect and defend them, and in all which she discovered a **maternal affection** for them.

I believe that Deborah's model of leadership has value for all leaders, not just female leaders. So often we are paralyzed by fear and intimidation instead of having a Deborah mentality - being informed by God and not by politics or contemporary value systems. Seeking God's face to know what He wants for our nations and courageously acting on that knowledge.

In so many countries leaders seek **what they can gain** from their positions rather than **what they can give** while being in the position. Imagine how different the world would be if leaders, like good mothers, care about their people instead of first caring about themselves. What if leaders' hearts would break when they learn of the plight of the poor, the vulnerable and the disenfranchised.

My dream for Advocates International's leaders across the globe is that we will arise like mothers with affectionate hearts for our people – I have no doubt that God will in turn honor us and bless us exceedingly in our leadership.

Warmly in Christ



Teresa Conradie
President and CEO, Advocates International

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