

BUT WHAT ABOUT DEBORAH?

Women in Combat: A Biblical Worldview: Part 4

Deborah was a judge and prophetess. To this, many Christian women quickly add, “Deborah was also a courageous military leader in battle.” But, what does God’s Word tell us?

LET’S THINK ABOUT IT

Deborah was a prophetess. A prophet or prophetess speaks on behalf of another but not as a public speaker for God during a congregational gathering. A prophetess might give counsel, settle disputes, or offer thankfulness and praise to God. Deborah was also a judge. **What was the condition of Israel in the years prior to her leadership? Read Judges 2:13, 16-17; 3:7, 13; 4:1-4.**

Martin Luther took note of the service of Deborah and other women as rulers. He said that they “have been very good at management.” He suggested that women’s leadership in other areas of life might motivate men to properly fulfill their responsibility. It is important to note that Deborah became a judge after the people of Israel repeatedly “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” Evil, in every way, opposes God’s created order for men, women, and the benefit of a thriving society.

We may think that Deborah was sent by God into combat against Israel’s enemy. But, is this the case? **Carefully read Judges 4:4-15. Did God ask Deborah to carry the sword in combat... or did He ask Barak through Deborah?** Victory was promised to Barak if only he would obey, but he chose not to. Barak said he would do the Lord’s bidding only if Deborah went with him into battle. **Read Judges 4:9. Why wouldn’t the glory in battle go to Barak?** The woman Deborah refers to in this verse is not herself, but Jael.

Dr. Vogel explains: “Deborah accompanied Barak to Mount Tabor, but no further. Consistent with Deuteronomy, she donned no battle gear nor engaged in the conflict. Barak (unaccompanied by Deborah) led 10,000 men into the valley to a resounding victory. The rebuke for Barak’s recalcitrance was rendered when a heroic woman, Jael, was given the opportunity to slay the fleeing enemy commander, Sisera. She did this in her own tent, with household equipment [a tent peg], not as a warrior on a battlefield.” (*“Women in Combat: Two Views,” The Lutheran Witness, May 2003, p. 16-20*)

Deborah served as a judge and prophetess. She counseled Barak as the leader of Israel’s troops. **Yet, how did she sum up her role in Judges 5:7?** Deborah was praised for her leadership, yet she does not sing about being raised up as a warrior. She sings of being a “mother in Israel.” Though no biological children of Deborah are mentioned, she is an encourager and helper for her people. In this way, she is practicing the vocation given to all women.

Read Genesis 2:18. Many women do not like being called a “helper.” **Why might this be?** The role of “helper” is not inferior, but is consistent with God’s order of creation.

The Triune God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All are equal, yet each has a distinct role to play. Jesus is God, yet He submitted to the Father for the sake of our salvation. The Hebrew word for “helper” is *ezer* which has a sense of “assistant” or even “ally.” **Now read John 14:16; 15:26 and 16:7. How is the Holy Spirit described in this passage? What might a woman think about this? How does this elevate her vocation of “helper?”**

Is there a problem with women in the military? No, but as in any workplace, there will certainly be a changed environment and cautions to heed. A woman, by nature of her created purpose, will always be a helper. The question is: Will she help to the good... or the bad? Built up... or tear down? **In what ways might a woman help her country without donning battle gear or compromising the service of men?**

THE BEARERS AND NURTURERS OF LIFE

Specialist Hollie Vallence, quoted in Part 1 of this series, was asked by her country to sacrifice home and family. In doing so, she explained that she had to build an “ice wall around her heart” in regard to her husband and child. **Is this consistent with God’s design? What are the consequences for women, men, and children if a mother hardens her heart?** Luther noted that a woman is merciful by nature because she is born to show mercy and to cherish just as a man is born to protect. This is why, Luther says, no living creature has more mercy than a woman, particularly in respect for her infant.

It is often observed that men tend to focus on one project, putting all others aside, until it is finished. In times of war, wives of soldiers see their men bucking up for duty even in the face of leaving home and family for extended periods of time. **Is it fair to say that men always feel brave and fearless? Where do they find wisdom and strength?** In His faithfulness, God equips men for their vocation of steward and protector. He gives to men what is necessary so that they might do what they need to do for wives, sons and daughters; indeed, for future generations. It is not so much that men want to go into battle, but they are equipped for battle and can leave home and family knowing that their children are in the capable and loving care of mothers. **How is the woman partnering with her husband to serve her country?** She is guarding hearth and home while he is doing battle with the enemy of that home.

In war, as in work, men understand other men. When a country is serious about winning victory over its enemy, it brings well-trained men together, with no distractions, to focus on the job at hand. These men may return home “changed,” but most can resume life as usual. Mothers, as explained by Hollie Vallence, are not programmed to put distance between themselves and young children. Small tribes and great countries who honor the human rule of chivalry understand that great sacrifice may be necessary in order to protect mothers of children for they are a people’s future.

Dr. Vogel offers wisdom: “If God is indifferent to the woman-warrior concept and a woman chooses to serve in a *noncombatant* role, God is not offended. If, however, God is not indifferent to the woman warrior concept, and a woman seeks service as a

combatant, does she not become a victim of her own will and disobedient to that of God?" (Vogel, The Lutheran Witness)

Will God bless a people or a nation that sends daughters and wives to the front lines of battle? Will He bless the men who send the bearers of life to meet the enemy? Should women be shot at, brutalized, or sacrificed in the name of "equality" or "rights?" God was not pleased with the man who used Deborah as a kind of "human shield." That is because the Groom of the Church does not stand behind his Bride. He stands in front of her.

WHAT IS THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER?

It is not that God wants men to die, but that He entrusts to them the noble role of protector and defender. As the Man of Sacrifice, Jesus led the way into battle. He did not send others. Jesus faced the greatest weapon of mass destruction – the anger of God upon sinful people. He did not stand behind "human shields," letting you and me die so that He might avoid pain and death. In the battle for the life of His Bride, Jesus "took the bullet." He died so that we might live.

Jesus is our Savior. He is also a model for men and women. He wants us to follow Him and imitate His behavior. Sinful as we are, we will want to test the boundaries. We will put ourselves in God's place, but such pride can put others at risk. Is all hopeless? No! The One who faced our enemy – and won the eternal victory – reaches to us with nail-pierced hands, saying: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that you may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (14:6).

Dear Lord and Savior, without Your Word for life we are a confused and desperate people. We seek to determine right and wrong according to our whims and pleasures, but we are filled with vanity and puffed up with pride. Have mercy on our country, dear Lord. Raise up brave men and women to serve nation and family in ways that honor You and resist all enemies. Bless the chaplains who serve in difficult circumstances. Help us to live this life in anticipation of Your coming, that we might be found faithful. AMEN.

This four-part study written by Linda Bartlett is adapted from a larger collection of studies entitled *Men, Women, and Relationships* first published in 1999 and revised in 2004 (www.lutheransforlife.org)