

September 27th, 2015 by Samir Massouh

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Preacher: Samir Massouh

[0:00] It really is. We will never be a mega church. We're not near I-94 and we don't have a parking lot. So, you have to make yourself available so that people can get to you.

Where is that in the Old Testament? The city gate. The city gate is where everybody went in and out. That was the busiest place. That's where the markets are.

That's where people sat to gossip. That's where people visited. And yet, if she wants business, she should be in the city gate or near the city gate.

But where did she pitch her tent? Where did she minister from? Verse 5. She held court under the palm of Deborah between Wama and Bethel.

She was in the middle of nowhere. Not easily accessible. There isn't a lot of traffic. There isn't roads that would go there.

[1:06] She was in the middle of nowhere. And yet, that's where she held her court. And I would have thought the business will die in no time. But now, people came and wanted to have her settle their disputes.

She was going to decide their disputes. The next thing you should notice is this. I'm trying to show you how odd a woman she is.

The next thing that you should notice is that of the judge, Othniel, it says the spirit came upon him. Of Gideon, it says the spirit of the Lord came upon him.

Of Samson, the spirit of the Lord came upon him. Jephthah, the spirit of the Lord came upon him. Interestingly enough, nothing is said about the spirit of the Lord coming on either Ehud or on Deborah.

I would have seen that pattern that judge after judge after judge after judge. Their ministry began with the spirit of the Lord coming upon them.

[2:22] But here, nothing is said. On the other hand, she's the only prophetess. And you assume that the spirit of the Lord came upon her because she's a prophetess.

But perhaps in a different way. Not to be a military leader. Not to lead the army. This is not John Dark, you know, leading the French, you know, the woman of Orleans.

That's not that. This is a woman. And nothing is said about military might, skills, being ambidextrous, you know, one of the knights of the round tables.

None of that. So what was her power? Why would anybody come to her and seek her? Let me ask you a related question.

One of the things that saddened me this week is this. I felt sad this week. Maybe you'll sympathize with me. I have been a naturalized citizen in this country for almost 50 years.

[3:35] Not quite. I was a naturalized citizen for almost 50 years. 45 to be exact.

The Congress has never invited me to speak in Washington, D.C. I am waiting for Boehner. Well, now he's gone.

I'm waiting for somebody else to say, Massouh, would you like to address the Congress? They obviously don't think worth anything of my opinions.

So the Pope comes from Italy and guess what? First visit. He hasn't been here 50 years, has he? And he gets a visit? And I've been living here 50 years and I get nothing?

Why would they invite him and not invite me? What is it that the Pope has?

[4:37] It can't be military might. We're not worried about him the same way we are thinking about Iran or perhaps North Korea.

If you go to the Vatican, you see soldiers with archaic weapons, dressing uniforms that were presumably designed by Michelangelo.

And all the soldiers look like, I mean, they're great for photography and postcards, but they couldn't find Mickey Mouse. You know? So we're not exactly afraid of the Vatican army.

They're not going to invade us. What are we worried about? Their economy? Well, most of their economy is tourism. This is not China. You know, the president of China shows up in Seattle and all the company chairmen go visit him.

So it's not the economy. What is it? Is it great universities? There are great, good universities in Rome, but not in the Vatican.

[5:56] So what is the power that he has? Why is he an important person? Why is it that when he speaks, the cathedral fills completely?

And you have to assign tickets for people to sit? It's his moral character. He is seen as an honest man, as a godly man, as a spokesman for God.

He certainly is seen like that by the Catholic Church. Why is Deborah sought after? Because she is a prophetess.

She is a prophetess. Not because her high IQ, not because she graduated summa cum laude from Harvard, not because she speaks 12 languages, but because she is a prophetess.

But prophetism is a tricky business. I became a Christian in California during the 60s.

[7:13] 60s was a tumultuous decade. It really was wonderful. I wish it would come back. You know, I really do. But, you know, there was the war in Vietnam.

There was the Equal Rights Amendment. Kennedy was assassinated. Then his brother Robert was assassinated. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X. It was a tumultuous decade.

And in the middle of all of that chaos, there was a huge Jesus movement. There was a huge Jesus movement. And I met, after I became a Christian, I met several people who were in this Jesus movement.

And some were charismatic and some were not. And so some of my friends who were charismatic wanted me to come and worship with them. And I was more than happy to do that.

And so I was a young believer. I couldn't tell what was going on. I certainly couldn't pass judgment about anything.

[8:17] So somebody would stand up and give a word of prophecy. And somebody else would get up and give a word of prophecy.

And somebody else would get up. And some of them sounded just like verses. You know, somebody is quoting a passage and saying it's a prophecy from God. Others were saying silly things like, let's have dinner with McDonald's.

You know, you don't need to give a prophecy to go to McDonald's. And some of them were, you know, as a young believer, I couldn't really tell whether was that really God or not.

Hopefully I can now. But it is something to think about. So, this woman, who is a prophetess, goes to a leader by the name of Barak and look at verse 6.

She sent for Barak, son of Avinuum, from Qadesh in Naphtali and said to him, the Lord, the God of Israel, commands you, go take with you 10,000 men of Naphtali and Zebulon and lead the way to Mount Tabor.

[9:35] I was trying to make a decision when I was in my 20s. Do I stay with philosophy and get a PhD in philosophy and teach philosophy, or do I go into Christian ministry?

What made that decision easy is that I was single. And so I thought to myself, if I made the wrong decision, it doesn't matter. You know.

I only have to feed my own mouth. But if I had a family, for example, with four children, I would look at it in a totally different way.

I have to feed my wife, I have to take care of my children, I have to take care of myself. So, to make a decision for a family is harder than making a decision for a single person.

Barak now has to make a decision for 10,000 people, 10,000 soldiers. What if he's wrong?

[10:44] What if he's wrong? Is he willing to accept the massacre of 10,000 persons on himself?

How can you tell whether she's telling the truth or not? Maybe she's just being patriotic. Maybe she's moved by hate for the Canaanites. Or maybe she is bringing a word from God. But things like that are difficult to know how to deal with. I remember this.

I mean, this is one of the turning points in my life. I came to Trinity for one year because I had studied philosophy and was going to finish my doctoral dissertation and knew a whole lot about philosophy.

And I was a very young believer and knew practically nothing about Christianity. So one of my professors says, take a sabbatical, go to Trinity, learn as much as you can, and then come back.

[11:47] And this way, at least, you will satisfy both desires, both academic desires, philosophy and scriptures. So here I am at Trinity and the dean, Dr. Kenneth Konser, says to me, I really, really believe God wants you to teach Old Testament rather than philosophy.

And I said, yes, but I've spent seven years, I've paid seven years of tuition for philosophy and now you want me to go into Old Testament?

He said, I am so sure of that that I will give you a job the day you graduate. So here, here it is. The person that I admire most, that I respect most, is telling me, change your career. Drop philosophy, go into Old Testament.

Do I believe him? Maybe he's saying, get out of love for me rather than because it's a word from God. So here, this woman comes to Barak, whose name, by the way, is Lightning, and says to him, take these 10,000 soldiers and go to battle.

[13:07] Is she patriotic? Is she excitable? Why should she do anything? Why should she tell him that? Why should he do anything?

And he has to make a decision. So, I mean, it would help if God gives him a sign. You know, the sun stands still.

Or, you know, 10 plagues, or something like that. I mean, that would help. So, he says to her, in verse 8, Barak said to her, if you go with me, I will go.

But if you don't go with me, I won't go. How should we take that passage? There are various ways of reading it. One way, the way that most people take it, and it probably is true, is, I'm afraid.

I don't want to go alone. But if you come with me, I'll go. I remember something very similar when I was in seminary, taking a course in evangelism.

[14:23] I needed to evangelize. I needed to witness to people. And I wasn't sure where to do that. And one of my friends says, let's go to this area in Chicago.

And so, I looked it up to see what area it is. And it was a fairly dangerous area in Chicago. And he said, let's go witness there. So, I said to him, if you go with me, I'll go.

But if you're just sending me alone, I'm not going. I was afraid. I was afraid. However, let's try this one.

There is a, there used to be a professor at Trinity who was a millionaire. He made his first million when he was 27.

And we were good friends. And so, I asked him one day, how do I make my first million?

[15:28] And he said, invest in this company. So, I said to him, have you invested in this company? And he said, no. Barak may be saying to her, if you are willing to risk your life, I'm willing to risk my life.

But I'm not willing to risk my life all by myself. So, in any case, he decides to go to battle.

The battle is not easy. because if we go to the beginning of this passage, verse 3, chapter 4, verse 3, because the enemy had 900 iron chariots.

900 iron chariots. If I have a sword and they have a chariot, who's going to win?

And iron chariots, not just wooden chariots like the Egyptians, but iron chariots. The one who has the superior weapon almost always wins.

[16:49] I remember a famous case, the siege of Vienna. The Ottomans had invented these very, very heavy guns, and they were going to use it to smash the city walls of Vienna and conquer the city.

But they didn't. Why? I'll tell you in just a minute. Because it's the same situation here. If you are my generation, or if the word Indiana Jones mean anything to you, there's that famous scene.

one of the guys who's going to kill Indiana Jones has his sword, and he is doing all these things with the sword, and he's, you know, and we're thinking, boy, he's going to make him a barbecue chicken, and Indiana takes out his revolver, boop, and he drops.

Superior weapon, superior, easier victory. So to go to war is risky. The enemy has superior weapon.

And so we have this problem. How is God going to deal with this problem? God has to deal with Barak's hesitation. Now he has to deal with the inferiority of the Hebrew army.

[18:12] So he led them to Mount Tabor, and they were on the slopes of Mount Tabor, and the chariots were underneath them. There on top, the chariots at the bottom.

In Western movies, who do you want to be on top, and who do you want to be on the bottom? Who's easier to shoot at? Shooting up or shooting down?

So they had them. They had them. But the reason that the enemy did not pursue them, because if you start to go up a slope, you can't maneuver. But if it's a plane, if it's a plane, flat plane, you can maneuver all you want to.

You can run in every which direction. And what happened is that these heavy, mighty chariots were caught in a flood.

It rained and rained and rained and it turned completely mud. What happened at Vienna was the same thing. It rained for a month, and these heavy guns couldn't be pushed.

[19:24] So they had to abandon them so the score was even. You may be interested to know that in 1799, Napoleon's army, the French army, and the Ottoman army were at the same spot facing each other and guess what happened?

It rained and rained and rained and the Ottoman army was neutralized and Napoleon won. The very same spot. So, what does God do to neutralize the enemies?

God uses nature. Does he ever use nature before? How about at the Red Sea? here come the chariots, the sea parts, the sea closes and there's your Egyptian army.

What about at Jericho? They march around the city, they don't even attack and the walls collapse. Maybe God knows how to overcome obstacles.

And in this case, flood. It rained and they were caught in the mud. And once they were caught in the mud, so, look at verse 17.

[20:52] Sisera, the commander, Sisera, however, fled on foot to the tent of Jael. The reason he fled on the foot and he left the chariots behind because he couldn't use the chariots anymore.

They were caught in mud. And so, he on foot seeks refuge. He went to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber.

Heber means ally. And Jael means goat, little goat. So, Sisera, however, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the tent of the little goat, the wife of Heber, the Kenite, because there was friendly relations between Jabin, king of Hazor, and the clan of Heber, the Kenites.

So, he says, we have a good relationship. I can seek refuge. I can hide there. They won't catch me. And so, she will give me shelter. And so, he is seeking shelter in a tent of an ally.

But the question, of course, is ally of whom? Whose ally is she? So, verse 19, mothers understand this very well.

[22:13] I don't even have to explain it. Verse 19, I am thirsty, he said, please give me some water. She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up, either to conceal him or to make him warm.

And he says to her, stand in the doorway of the tent, he told her. If someone comes by and asks you, is anyone here? Say no. First of all, she gave him milk.

What milk do we drink in the Middle East? Not, not cows, not, you know, we don't have cowboys, you know, we have either goats or sheep.

It is not sheep, it is goats. The milk that you drink in the Middle East is from goats. So, a woman whose name is goat, little goat, gives him milk.

Secondly, why doesn't she give him water? milk do to somebody who is tired that water does not? Makes him sleepy. So, she wanted him to go to sleep.

[23:35] Why? Is she that concerned about his health? Apparently not. and so, verse 21, Gail, Khabar's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he was fast asleep, exhausted.

She drove the peg through his temple into the ground and he died. the verb to drive the peg through his temple is the same verb as Ehud stabbing Eglon with a knife.

It's the same verb. Taqaa. And so, she killed him. Look at this. How does Ehud kill the king?

They are privately together. Nobody is there. and the king trusts him that he has a message from God. How does she kill their private together in the tent and he trusts her?

It is interesting that just as nothing is said about the Holy Spirit of Deborah, nothing is said about the Holy Spirit of Ehud. So, maybe they're supposed to go together as a pair to be seen as a study in comparing and contrasting of how one way that God works.

[25:16] So, the enemy is killed. Three things I want you to notice. Back in the beginning, look at verse 8.

Barak said to Deborah, 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.

If I stopped here in the story and you asked me, who is that woman? I could swear on a stack of Bibles, it's Deborah. That's the only woman in the story so far.

So, I'm thinking, who's going to do it? Deborah. I'm looking forward for her to do it. And it's not Deborah, it's Jael.

[26:26] We think we know who God is going to use and maybe God decides to use somebody else. I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings.

I really don't. I'm not trying. But we think we need a secretary for the church, so guess whom we ask to serve as a secretary? Someone whose job is a secretary.

Why? It makes sense. We need a treasurer, so guess who do we ask? Somebody who's a treasurer. We need Sunday school teachers, guess who do we ask? Elementary school teachers. It never occurs to us that God may want to do something different. Maybe God isn't as predictable as we are. Maybe we want him to use Deborah and he wants to use Jael.

So, because of the way he was going about this, prove, help me, rather than here is my opportunity, let me go wholehearted, he does not get the glory.

[27:30] The second thing, the next thing I want you to notice is in all of the book of Judges, on all the occasions that God delivered them, only Deborah has a song celebrating that.

There is no celebration anywhere. Did they celebrate? They probably did, I would expect them to. Is anything written about the celebration? Nothing.

As far as the reader is concerned, only Deborah celebrates God's victory. That is interesting. that is interesting. It is argument by omission, but it is at least worth noticing, even if one doesn't conclude too much out of it.

And, the next point, it is interesting that the book of Judges usually says, and so and so, you know, this judge ruled so many years and then he died and Israel had peace during his time, and then they rebelled and then God raised the other judge, you know, et cetera, et cetera.

[28:45] Nothing is said about Deborah dying. Nothing is said about Deborah dying. That does not lead me, it does not lead me to think that there is a really old woman in Jerusalem who is about 2,000 years old and, you know, but it's her makeup that makes her look like she's 80.

you know, that's not what's going on. That's not what's going on. The point that is going on is that perhaps the judges were influential as long as they were alive.

Once they died, people went back to the old ways. Perhaps by not mentioning that she had died, he is marveling about her influence.

I don't know if that's what he's doing, but it might be he's saying the same way as, you know, when the two brothers, when Cain and Abel, and one kills the other and God says, his blood is shouting to me.

Well, he was dead. So how could he be shouting? What is the point? God doesn't always use the people we expect.

[30:07] God doesn't always do it the way we expect. God's got lots of options, lots of people, lots of choices, but it is clearly God who does it.

It is clearly God who does it. God is sovereign, and God is versatile in how he works. Let's not put God in a box and say he can only work this way.

Let's have a word of prayer. Lord, thank you for a lesson from the Old Testament, a lesson that speaks to all of us.

We thank you because you are much more clever than we are. we thank you because you can think of things that we would never even imagine. We thank you for women like Jael, who is willing to take a risk and kill an evil leader.

We thank you for women like Deborah, who are willing to confront cowardly leaders and say, come on, let's go to battle. we are reminded, Father, that we are in spiritual warfare, not the same as Canaanites, but we are in a warfare.

[31:38] We recognize that the victory is yours, Lord, so we ask you, give us the victory, Father, and help us to serve you as faithfully as we can. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Amen.