

Deborah: *A Distinguished Judge*

Deborah (Heb. “bee”) appears to have been a homemaker at the time she is selected for service to her country. Having no aristocratic lineage, she is identified simply as “the wife of Lapidoth.” Yet Deborah was the only woman in Scripture elevated to high political power by the common consent of her peers. Though her homemaking responsibilities well may have taken a backseat during her service to her country, she described herself as “a mother in Israel” (Judg. 5:7) before she became a judge. Whether this is a reference to her own offspring or an expression of her spiritual motherhood toward every son and daughter of Israel is immaterial.

In spiritually parched Israel, characterized by rejection of God and by a determination among the people for each to do things her own way (Judg. 17:6; 21:25), Deborah was first a counselor, as she displayed her leadership under a large palm tree near her home by discussing and suggesting solutions to people with problems. The civil court system was inept; the military was too weak to defend national borders; the priesthood of what had been a theocracy was impotent and ineffective. Normal life was no longer possible, and thus Deborah became a judge and finally a deliverer of her people in time of war.

In this area the despised King Jabin was harassing the Israelites. Deborah summoned Barak, from the tribe of Naphtali on the northern border, and ordered him to recruit an army of ten thousand men from his own tribe and the neighboring tribe Zebulun.

Barak wavered, insisting that Deborah accompany him for the task (Judg. 4:8). She not only joined the drive to raise an army but also suggested their strategy. God had spoken in the past through His leaders Moses and Joshua, and now He was speaking through Deborah. *Yahweh* came to her aid with a violent thunderstorm (Judg. 5:4). In a mini-replay of the crossing of the Red Sea, the horse-drawn chariots of the enemy floundered.

The destruction of the Canaanite power was immortalized in one of the finest specimens of Hebrew poetry by Deborah and Barak, as they picture in a song of praise the events which led to victory for the people (see Judg. 5). Long before Deborah exercised her uncommon leadership and decision-making skills to save her nation in a time of trouble, she was a homemaker—a wife and mother in Israel. Her compassion had been awakened to the atrocities suffered by her people. She arose to make herself available, and she was victorious as she trusted God herself, then inspired others within her sphere of influence with that same trust.¹

FEMININE LEADERSHIP: *AN AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY*

Jewish culture accepted women in positions of leadership. Though highly valued and given a new dignity by Christ, the roles of women were different from those of

¹Thomas Nelson, I. (1997, c1995). *Woman's study Bible*. (Jdg 4:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

the men Christ selected for leadership positions. No woman was called, commissioned, or named as one of the twelve apostles. Yet women gave to Christ, served Him, fellowshiped with Him, learned from Him, prayed for Him, and testified of Him as the Savior. They provided leadership through their service.

Leadership is an awesome responsibility, demanding spiritual preparation grounded in consistent personal devotional time (Matt. 6:33). Leaders must also seek godly counsel (Prov. 15:22). They must work willingly and energetically (Eccl. 9:10). Essential ingredients in leadership include creativity, encouragement of others (Prov. 15:23; 25:11), inspiration (Prov. 16:24; 17:22), expressions of gratitude (Ps. 13:6; 69:30; Eph. 5:20), and a servant's heart (Prov. 3:27; Matt. 23:11).

Abigail's unique leadership of her household staff included a servant's heart and boldness, which was tempered with restraint and discretion (1 Sam. 25:23–33). Abigail exerted great influence over David when she persuaded him not to kill Nabal. In fact, David later recognized that Abigail changed the direction of his life.

People must consistently be more important than tasks. Self-sacrifice, gentleness, service without reward, patience, kindness, nurturing of relationships, mercy—all these qualities are a part of the Lord's leadership. We see exemplified in the Lord Himself those qualities which are necessary in all godly leaders.²

GOVERNMENT AND CITIZENSHIP: *LAW AND ORDER*

Contrary to the thinking of most people, government is not limited to state and federal rule or even to secular jurisdiction. Government—which is management, oversight, policy-making, and administration—exists on many levels and in virtually all areas of life.

First and foremost, God's people are called to obey God as Judge, Lawgiver, and King (Is. 33:22). Second, people are called to govern themselves—to rule their spirits (Prov. 25:28). This stands in sharp contrast to the self-indulgent spirit of the present age.

The family is the primary arena for governance within a God-fearing society. Husbands are to be the spiritual leaders of their wives and children (Eph. 5:23, 6:1), and parents are to govern their children (Eph. 6:1–4). Schools govern children, and employers govern workers (Col. 3:22). Society provides numerous examples of “cultural government,” including friendships and associations (Prov. 13:20; 1 Cor. 15:33). Finally, civil government exists to enforce good conduct among its citizenry (Rom. 13:1–7).

God, the King of kings (Rev. 19:16), commissioned government in its multiple forms to promote order and godliness. Our duty as citizens is to obey and pray for all our leaders (1 Tim. 2:1, 2).³

²Thomas Nelson, I. (1997, c1995). *Woman's study Bible*. (1 Sa 25:27). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³Thomas Nelson, I. (1997, c1995). *Woman's study Bible*. (Ro 13:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

HEROINES: *ROLE MODELS FOR WOMEN*

Nearly all human behavior is the result of imitating others. A woman's role models or "heroines" are a good indication of the character traits that she desires in her own life and is likely to emulate. Fortunately, in Scripture Christian women have examples of many women who exhibited great courage, faithfulness, and achievement—women we might take as personal role models and women we might lift up to our daughters.

Above all, we are to choose for ourselves and our daughters role models who are righteous—those who are in right standing with God and who are seeking to live pure, godly lives. We are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27), and we are expected to reflect the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). While the Bible records some examples of unrighteous lives (Heb. 4:11; 2 Pet. 2:6), it has many more examples of those who lived righteous lives of faith (Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:9). We must make certain always that our role models—and those our children seek to follow—are women and men who give a godly example in word, conduct, love, spirit, faith, and purity (1 Tim. 4:12).

Hebrews 11 records the lives of a number of women and men of faith and gives instruction for modeling godly behavior. These women and men were not always famous or highly exalted by the masses of people in their day (Heb. 11:35–38), but all had a "good testimony" and played a vital role in God's unfolding plan. As a whole, they displayed a good testimony, a righteous witness, useful gifts, godly fear, absolute obedience, unflinching hope, and patient endurance.

Learn from such role models and heroines to model the character of godliness and the quality of giving to others. In so doing, you and your daughters will have the opportunity to become God's role models for those who will one day follow in your own footsteps!⁴

WOMEN'S MINISTRIES: *WOMEN IN EVANGELISM*

Jesus affirmed the ministry of women in evangelism. This was most evident in His interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar (John 4:1–30).

Culturally, Jews and Samaritans did not associate with each other. Moreover, for a rabbi to speak to a woman in public was considered improper. Christ's regard for this woman was therefore truly revolutionary. After their meeting, she returned to her city and presented her witness. Many believed in Him because of her testimony (vv. 28, 39). At that time, women were not considered reliable witnesses; yet Christ chose a woman as His witness.

God chose women as the first witnesses of Christ's resurrection (Matt. 28:1–8), and they were entrusted with Christ's first post-Resurrection message to His disciples (John 20:15–18). The coming of the Spirit reinforced the role of women in evangelism. Women, together with men, were empowered to be witnesses to the

⁴Thomas Nelson, I. (1997, c1995). *Woman's study Bible*. (Heb 11:31). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The establishment of the Philippian church involved women (Acts 16:11–15), and women were also involved in spreading the gospel in Berea (Acts 17:12). New Testament women, along with men, were commissioned to be the “light of the world” and were thus extensively involved in the ministry of evangelism (Matt. 5:14–16).⁵

Miriam: *A Natural Leader*

Miriam, an intelligent child, became, with her brothers Aaron and Moses, a leader of the people of Israel. Her first appearance, babysitting her little brother beside the Nile River, demonstrates her keen mind. She volunteered to find a wetnurse for the baby when the Egyptian princess expressed her intention to adopt the child, thus allowing his mother, Jochebed, to nurture him.

More than eighty years later, God delivered His people from the bondage of Egypt; and after the miracle of crossing the Red Sea on dry land, Miriam led the women in dancing and singing as a celebration to God. She was clearly gifted as a natural leader and was considered the foremost of all the Hebrew women, being also gifted as a poetess, musician, and prophetess (Ex. 15:20). She undoubtedly was included at the council table with her brothers, and Miriam, as his older sister, may even have acted as a surrogate mother to Moses. There is no evidence in the text that she ever married. As a single woman, she committed herself to building the nation of Israel. Her career appears to be outside the home.

During the tumultuous days journeying across the desert, Moses’ wife became a concern to Miriam. Whether this “Ethiopian woman” who had joined the group was Zipporah or a second wife is not known (see Num. 12:1). But her presence was cause for criticism and jealousy from Miriam and Aaron. They were not concerned because of her color but because she was from a foreign land. They apparently discussed their feelings, concluding together that they as leaders were being slighted. Miriam’s mistake was her sarcastic rejection of her brother’s leadership.

In anger the Lord disciplined Miriam with instant leprosy, thus banning her from the camp (Num. 12:10, 14). Because of the fervent prayers of her brothers, God restored her, but there is no evidence that her influence was again blessed of God. She died before reaching the Promised Land (Num. 20:1).

This gifted woman leaves a caution for every female leader. God alone gives and removes both talent and importance. Miriam incurred God’s displeasure when she allowed herself to challenge the authority which God had given Moses. She allowed jealousy and spitefulness to rob her of fulfillment in her later years.⁶

⁵Thomas Nelson, I. (1997, c1995). *Woman's study Bible*. (Jn 4:46). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶Thomas Nelson, I. (1997, c1995). *Woman's study Bible*. (Ex 15:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

ESTHER: A LEADER OF THE JEWS	
Early Years	Her Hebrew name was Hadassah (lit. “myrtle”), but she was known by her Persian name Esther (lit. “star”). Her family was carried into captivity and chose to remain in Shushan. She was reared by her close relative (possibly cousin) Mordecai in Persia as part of a minority race (Esth. 2:5–7).
Family Status	She was the orphaned daughter of Abihail of the tribe of Benjamin. Her close relative Mordecai was her guardian (Esth. 2:7, 15).
Leadership Training	She possessed inner and outer beauty (Esth. 2:7, 9, 15, 17; 5:2). She was reared in the home of Mordecai, who sat within the king’s gate, having at least an understanding of court life and probably some official responsibilities (Esth. 2:21–23). She disciplined herself to be obedient to authorities in her life (Esth. 2:8, 9, 20).
God’s Call	The words of Mordecai, “...who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this,” presented her call (Esth. 4:13, 14).
God’s Promises	God’s timing was perfect (Esth. 4:14). God’s providence, which uses His people to accomplish His purposes, was certain (Esth. 4:14, 15). God’s provision, including service, was not without cost (Esth. 4:16).
God’s Instruction	Mordecai delivered God’s instruction (Esth. 2:22; 4:8–14).
The People’s Affirmation	Esther’s leadership was followed by palace staff (Esth. 4:5–9). Mordecai respected and responded to Esther (Esth. 4:17).
Esther’s Leadership	She accepted God’s will (Esth. 4:16). She was confident of God’s providence (Esth. 4:17). She was active in mobilizing her staff and others for “fasting”; prayer and fasting were usually done in concert in times of grief or anguish (Esth. 4:15, 16; see also 2 Sam. 12:16, 17; Ezra 8:23). She set an example of fasting herself (Esth. 4:16). She presented herself in humility and obedience (Esth. 5:1–6:14). She used creativity of effort and talent in her task (Esth. 5:3–6:14). She considered timing in her plan (Esth. 6:1–14). Her influence reflected extraordinary power and authority for a woman in Esther’s historical setting; it traveled far and wide; it continued unto the generations after her death (Esth. 9:32). She wrote a decree that was entered in official records with full authority (Esth. 9:29, 32).
Observations	She was courageous and self-sacrificing (Esth. 4:14, 16). She was clever (Esth. 5:3, 4; 8:3). She was used of God to save her people.

⁷Thomas Nelson, I. (1997, c1995). *Woman's study Bible*. (Es 5:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<i>SPIRITUAL GIFTS OF WOMEN IN THE BIBLE</i>				
Spiritual Gift	Scripture Reference	Function	How to Recognize	Gifted Woman
Prophecy	Luke 2:36–38	Proclamation in order to edify	Ability to address audiences with inspired message	Anna
Serving (Ministry, Helps)	Luke 4:38, 39	Service	Joy in doing for others and meeting needs	Peter's Mother-in-Law
Teaching	Acts 18:24–28	Instruction that is understood	Understanding difficult matters; Ability to deliver instruction effectively	Priscilla
Exhortation	John 4:28–30	Persuasion and encouragement	Ability to inspire and persuade	Samaritan Woman
Giving	Luke 21:2–4	Undergirding and supporting	Joy in giving, expecting nothing in return	Widow with Two Mites
Leading (Administration)	Judg. 4:4–14	Administration	Organized; inspires cooperation and teamwork	Deborah
Mercy	Acts 9:36–42	Tender sensitivity	Concern for those who are hurting	Dorcas
Wisdom	Luke 1:46–56	Application of truth	Ability to apply knowledge and understanding to life situations	Mary of Nazareth
Knowledge	1 Sam. 2:1–10	Insight and perception	Understanding of facts and situations	Hannah
Faith	Matt. 15:21–28	Optimism and confidence	Confidence in the Lord and ability to inspire others	Syro-Phoenician Woman
Discernment	1 Sam. 25:2–42	Ability to make judgments	Ability to determine good or evil and see beyond surface	Abigail
Evangelism	Acts 21:9	Ability to witness in any situation	Loves people; talks easily; rejoices to share Christ	Daughters of Philip
Hospitality	John 12:1, 2	Assistance and service	Unselfish desire to meet the needs of others	Martha
Speaking	Ex. 15:20, 21	Talks easily and inspires others	Likes to talk; interested in others	Miriam
Celibacy	Acts 16:11–15	Devotion	Content to remain single	Lydia (possibly single)