

March 18

Judges 4 and 5 (Chapter 3 is continued from March 17)

Hello again, this is Alex Ehly, bringing you the March 18<sup>th</sup> edition of Project 4:4. Today we read the fourth and fifth chapters of Judges.

From the day's reading, I feel like the most important thing for us to realize today is that God's first priority in times of spiritual decline is to raise up godly leaders. Every time Israel cried out, God raised up a leader. In the song of Deborah in chapter 5, the theme of leadership keeps recurring. I can't tell you how significant this is, because when we look around the world and compare places where the church is thriving -- places like China, South Korea, and Brazil-- we find strong godly leadership. That is what makes the difference. You would be hard pressed to find a church that is more godly, faith-filled, committed or spiritually alive than its leaders. A church may have less faith, less vision, less commitment, or less holiness than its leaders, but it will never have mor

And where do these leaders come from? Did you notice yesterday the explanation given for Othniel's success? It says, "The spirit of the Lord came upon him." God chose the one who would be the leader -- He always does. None of these judges chose themselves. No leader ever does. Spiritual leaders are always chosen by God. I have been trying to understand why God chose Deborah. Maybe there were no men available, it's possible that she was the most godly person around. It could have been God's way of underscoring the origin of the victory. It is entirely possible that Israel gave too much credit to Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar because they were mighty warriors, and too little credit to God. Maybe choosing a woman was God's way of totally humiliating the armies of Jabin and Sisera -- the heroes of the battle were two women, Deborah and Jael. Maybe it was to demonstrate the positive role that women can play in the Kingdom of God. We don't know why God chose Deborah, but the bottom line is this: God chose her. God chose her; God chooses the leaders.

God makes leaders, but I don't want to simply leave it there, because it is possible from that fifth chapter and the song that Deborah sings, to identify several characteristics of her leadership that are always present in the men and women who make a difference for Him.

The first thing that I see there is - that godly leaders are people who want to influence others by the power of the lives they live. Someone has once defined leadership in just one word, "influence." Dwight Eisenhower defined a leader as 'a person who can get other people to do what he wants done in such a way that they think they are doing what they want done.' I'm not sure that is a totally Biblical definition, but it does underscore the concept of leaders influencing people. Leaders want to influence people. They want to make a difference in other people's lives and Deborah was like that. God had put it in her heart to influence people, and to make a difference. That is why she made herself available to all the people who came for advice. It seems to me today that I see a lot of Christians who don't

want to make a difference, who don't want to influence others, who say things like, "Well, they have their religion, who am I to change them?" They want to be followers instead of leaders. God's leaders always influence people, and they always do it by the power of their own lives -- they lead by example.

Barak came to Deborah and he said, "I'm not going to lead the troops into battle unless you come." That request was no problem for her -- she led them into battle. As a husband and Lord willing one day as father, I am supposed to lead my family -- not tell them what to do, but to show them -- show them how to do it by the power of my example. That is what real leaders do.

There is a very frightening verse in one of Paul's letters, I Corinthians 11:1 -- frightening to me at least sometimes. It says, "Follow me while I follow Christ." Leaders lead by the power of the example of their lives. Deborah didn't just say, 'Go do this.' She said, 'Come, follow me.'

Another thing about godly leaders is that they have a passion for the glory of God. Over and over again it comes through in the Song of Deborah, there in chapter 5, "Give the glory to God." 'We didn't win this battle, God won it. We didn't defeat 900 iron chariots and tens of thousands of men. We only had 10,000 soldiers and they weren't properly equipped. But God sent the rain, God won the battle.'

Deborah is very careful in her song to make sure that God gets the credit for the victory. The victory is the victory of the Lord. Spiritual leaders are always identifiable by their concern that 'God gets the glory.' We see a lot of television preachers, read a lot of books, and listen to a lot of sermons and one very quick test that we can use to sort the good ones from the bad ones, is to ask a real simple question, "Who is getting the glory here?" Spiritual leaders want to give the glory to God.

Another characteristic I see in this song of Deborah of spiritual leaders, is that they are willing to take great risks, because first of all they have understood the mind of God, and because, secondly, they know that God will act on behalf of His people. Remember Joshua standing there in the Valley of Aijalon saying, "O Lord, make the sun stand still.' What a risk! Ehud took a risk. Shamgar took risks. Deborah was willing to take a tremendous risk; they were vastly undermanned. With a woman at the lead, would Israel follow? They didn't have any adequate weapons, not compared to the army of Sisera, but you see, Deborah knew the mind of God. She knew what God wanted to do and she believed that God would act to meet the needs of His people. That is what leadership is all about.

If God ever chooses you to be a leader, and I know that already He has chosen many of you, you need to do three things: You need to get to know what God's plan for you and your church is.

You need to believe that God will do it.

Then you need to risk whatever you have to in order to act on the promise of God.

I am sure that as we continue to look at the Book of Judges, we are going to find some other characteristics as well of spiritual leaders. Maybe you will want to keep a list of them. But I am sure about these characteristics -- and I am very sure that the key to changing our community for Christ is in the development of God-chosen leaders -- men and women who don't care what it costs, but are ready to risk everything to give God the glory and trust Him for the victory they know He will bring.

Today as I close, I want us all to ask ourselves this question:

Am I leading, or am I following?

Once again this is Alex Ehly, praying that the Lord blesses you as you recognize His plan for you life, take great risks, and believe He is faithful and able to accomplish it.