

It was not good that the man should be alone (3)

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The third part of this study completes a review of Old Testament teaching on leadership with a consideration of female leaders in Israel. The focus then moves to the situation under the New Covenant for the "Israel of God".

UNDER THE MONARCHY, leadership was confined to the male line. The only example of a female monarch was the usurper Athaliah. All the judges other than Deborah were male. The apparent anomaly in Deborah's case and the details provided in the record are designed to make a point. The record implies there was a leadership vacuum in Israel: "The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel" (Judg. 5:7). The point is made that, even as she stepped in to fill the vacuum, Deborah remained faithful to her maternal role in Israel. It is also apparent that she encouraged Barak to assume a leadership role in spite of his reluctance, even to the point of ridiculing that reluctance (4:6-9).

There is a remarkable emphasis on females in the story of Deborah:

- Jael played a key role in killing Sisera (v. 21)
- Sisera's mother drew attention to the way in which the Canaanites oppressed the Israelite women (5:28-30).

Brother Harry Whittaker makes an intriguing (and somewhat disturbing) suggestion as to why women feature so prominently in this record: "But more serious still are the indications that the brunt of this oppression fell upon the women. Only here in all the Old Testament is deliverance wrought by the hand of women—Deborah, 'a mother in Israel' (5:7), and Jael, in her own tent".¹ The language in the Song of Deborah and Barak about Jael indicates that these matters point forward to the deliverance God would effect through the son of Mary: "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife

of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent" (v. 24)—sentiments that find an echo in Gabriel's words to Mary in Luke 1:28.

Leadership in the new Israel

The Old Testament presents a Divine hierarchy that applies to mankind in the days of our probation. Established at Creation, under this Divine hierarchy men were to exercise spiritual leadership in the ecclesia, and they were to be supported in that task by the complementary service of women, without whose support they would be unable to discharge their Divinely ordained tasks.

In Eden God declared that it was not good that man should be alone. This is a principle that finds its most sublime expression in the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ gave his life for the sake of his bride, with whom he will be united when he returns. This is only as we might expect, because the Lord Jesus Christ is right at the heart of the purpose of God and is the focus of the creation; all that we see in creation must be interpreted in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the light of the world, the Son of God and Son of man.

So it was that, "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). Jesus was sent to fulfil the Law and to open the way of life for those who all their lifetime were subject to bondage under the law of sin of death. Our Lord was something of a radical in the ecclesia of his day. He did not hesitate to challenge the smug self-righteousness of the ecclesial leaders, but he never questioned the will of God as revealed in the Old Testament (Mt. 23:2,3). When challenged on the question of divorce, the Lord cited the

1. Brother H. A. Whittaker, *Judges and Ruth*, p. 29.

Genesis record of Creation: "Have ye not read, that He Which made them at the beginning made them male and female . . ." (19:4), confirming his respect for Genesis as the infallible Word of God, and also his endorsement of the complementary nature of men and women.

Our Lord did not take a wife (celibacy was highly unusual in that society), although a spouse has been ordained for him by God in the age to come. Notwithstanding his single status, Jesus had the highest regard for women, as for example Martha and Mary of Bethany. Several women are recorded as being among his closest followers and supporters. When, however, the Lord chose disciples to go forth to preach the gospel to his countrymen (10:5-7) he selected twelve men. This was consistent with the Divine model in the Old Testament of leaders and teachers of the community of believers being male.

Following his death and resurrection, and prior to his ascension, Jesus commissioned his disciples to teach his message as widely as they could (28:19). They were faithful to this mission, and, in time, ecclesias were established throughout the civilised world. This is described in detail in the Acts of the Apostles.

All one in Christ Jesus

Just as both women and men had equal opportunity for forgiveness and fellowship with God under the Law of Moses, so in Christ salvation was available to all, regardless of gender. In the context of the need for deliverance from sin and death, Paul reminded the Galatians that "as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:27,28). The context of this statement is the universal need for deliverance from sin and death (v. 22), and this is only available through baptism, whereby we become "all one in Christ Jesus".

Baptism does not change our ethnic origin; if we were a Jew or a Gentile to start with we remain one after baptism. It does not change our social status; slaves cannot just walk free merely because they have been baptized. And baptism does not alter our gender. So the oneness of which verse 28 speaks is far from absolute; it applies in the sense of the context, which is deliverance from sin and death. Men and women without exception or distinction have access to salvation through

faith in Christ Jesus; and the preaching of the apostles reflected this ethos, and it is worked out in a manner consistent with the model established in Eden.

Acts describes the operation of the ecclesia and the preaching of the gospel. Throughout the book we find incidental confirmation of the Divine model revealed in the Old Testament. In Acts 1:14 the faithful, both male and female, are united in one community. At that time the ecclesia was required to choose a replacement for Judas. In spite of the fact that the record makes reference to faithful women as members of the community, the choice was restricted to men who had faithfully accompanied Jesus (vv. 21,22).

Ecclesial leadership

Whenever there is reference to ecclesial leadership in Acts, the record speaks only of brothers as exercising that leadership. We see it:

- in relation to Peter's interrogation of Ananias and Sapphira (5:3-9)
- when the apostles, realising the importance of their teaching role in relation to God's Word, decided to appoint deacons to assist in the administration of the ecclesia; seven men were appointed (6:2-6)
- when Peter reported to the ecclesial elders in Jerusalem about the conversion of Cornelius; it was "the apostles and brethren" to whom he reported (11:1)
- when Paul and Barnabas were consecrated to undertake missionary work; a group of male believers in Antioch were the vehicles God used for that purpose (13:1-3)
- in the record of the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15, which refers only to contributions by the male elders of the community.

Acts shows that ecclesial leadership and teaching was restricted to men. When God's Word was preached, however, it was preached to both men and women. Representatives of both sexes heeded the call of the gospel (5:14; 8:12). At Philippi Paul preached to what appears to have been an exclusively female audience (16:13), among which was Lydia; while in both Thessalonica and Berea the record specifically notes that women were among those who heeded Paul's message (17:4,12). Sadly, 'equality of opportunity' did not cease there, and when believers were persecuted their opponents did not spare female believers (8:3; 9:2).

[\(To be continued\)](#)