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the Christian faith certainly comes from different segments of society, but the principal motif will be the same: witness produces reaction, discipleship calls down persecution, and persecution calls down suffering.

Probably 1 Peter would say to us that suffering is a common point between them and us. Even if the reason and expression of suffering is different, he would assure us that Christian witness produces reaction, discipleship calls down persecution, and persecution, in spite of suffering, is a sign of faithfulness and a reason for joy because it is an opportunity to share Christ's sufferings.

Persecution and suffering are, in fact, symptoms of violence and injustice. However, Christians are not called to flee, but to participate in the world in order to offer a new system of values with a new message. This has to be expressed in the midst of society itself, exercised in the life of the Christian community, as a model and an invitation to be imitated. Thus, the new message will be proclaimed. Jesus Christ, the rejected stone, is the cornerstone to the *hope for the world*. There is hope because of his death and resurrection. There is hope because he will come again. While the Christians are waiting for his coming they are called to plant a seed of hope that may be irrigated with suffering and tears, but will certainly grow, because it was planted in the same soil that first received the blood of Christ. A small plant can be born from that seed, but it will be recognized as God's special bush of hope, as once the Christians in Asia Minor were declared the people of God. Therefore perhaps 1 Peter would say to us that we have to be ready to be small and weak, but strongly rooted in the experience of salvation. The same experience transformed the Christians once in *oikos tou theou*, although they were a persecuted minority.

The reality of being a spiritual house, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, will renew life constantly and challenge the Christian community to go out through the world with the message of Christ, with the hope that everyone in every place will 'offer spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' ([2:5](#)). This would be the real and final fiesta.

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Where are the Deborahs and Baraks?

Donna Strom

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In response to Margaret Malcolm's call to relate biblical teaching to biblical practice in her article, 'The History of Women in the Church' (January 1985 issue of Evangelical Review of Theology) Donna Strom offers us a case study in biblical practice with special reference to the Church in India. Wanted: women theologians and theological educators! Only two of the 42 members of the Theological Commission are women. We need many more.

(Editors)

Balance is an essential principle of God's creation: the balance of day and night, earth and sky, sea and land, summer and winter, plants and animals. World ecosystems involve an incredibly complex balance, which man is only beginning to understand.

In India shopkeepers use balance scales, which we carefully watch lest our purchase not equal the iron weights. Imbalance in any area of life indicates error.

In the beginning God also created a balanced image of Himself—male-female (humankind)—to whom He gave the authority and command to fill, rule over, and subdue the world ([Gen. 1:26–30](#)). God's likeness could not be encompassed in nor His work accomplished by only one sex. There had to be balance.

After the Fall, God did not change His creation command to man and woman to rule the world, as some allege. Instead He repeated and enlarged upon it in [Genesis 9](#), [Psalm 8](#) and similar scriptures. However, sinful disobedience has itself produced a grotesque imbalance in the world. On the one hand, men and women have together overdone the 'increase-in-number' bit, until overpopulation threatens our very existence. On the other hand, women in particular (except for a rare Margaret Thatcher or Indira Gandhi) have generally disregarded the remaining two-thirds of God's command: together with men to rule the earth and subdue its evil. The resultant chaos is not God's plan; He has a better way, illustrated in His Word.

Togetherness

The story of Deborah ([Judges 4](#) and [5](#)) depicts a wife and mother who ruled her nation, and together with Barak (not her husband) delivered it from oppression. Neither she alone nor the man alone could have [p.20](#) done the job, but in a beautiful example of mutual interdependence they worked together according to God's creation plan.

The events of Judges follow a pattern summarized in chapter two. After Joshua's death following the conquest of Canaan, the Israelites turned away from Jehovah to false gods. In punishment God allowed a pagan nation to invade and oppress them until they cried out to Him in repentance. Then God raised up a judge to deliver them, but as soon as the judge died, they returned to idolatry and again were conquered. This process was repeated many times over a period of 200 years.

Deborah, a prophetess, became the fourth judge during the twenty years of oppression by Jabin, king of the neighbouring Canaanites. His army, commanded by Sisera, had 900 chariots—likely with blades protruding from wheel-hubs to cut down foot soldiers—while Israel had only swords. So plunderous were the enemies that farmers feared to till their lands, trade ceased, and the roads were deserted. (Like Cambodia and Lebanon today?)

Through Deborah God told Israel to revolt under the leadership of Barak. As they drew Sisera's forces to battle in the Kishon valley, God sent a storm of rain and hail to flood the river and mire the chariots in mud. Barak and his 10,000 soldiers destroyed the entire Canaanite army, and Israel had peace for forty years. During that time the incredible Deborah filled a three-fold role of prophetess, judge, and wife.

Prophetess

According to the *Davis Bible Dictionary* a prophet/prophetess is 'an authoritative and infallible teacher of God's will'. The person is chosen by God from among believers to speak His words to the people, who are then obligated to obey the commands as from God Himself ([Deut. 18:18–19](#)). The prophet/prophetess is a predictor, interpreter, and proclaimer of God's truth as taught by the Holy Spirit, and is a messenger and shepherd.

These servants of God are both men and women ([Joel 2:28](#); [Acts 2:17](#)). Many women in Scripture besides Deborah proclaimed and taught God's Word: Miriam ([Exod. 15:20](#)), Hannah ([1 Sam. 2:1–10](#)), Huldah ([2 Kings 22:12–20](#)), Lemuel's mother ([Prov. 31](#)), the

virgin Mary ([Luke 1:46-55](#)), Anna ([Luke 2:38](#)), Philip's four daughters ([Acts 21:8-9](#)), Priscilla ([Acts 19:26](#)), Lois and Eunice ([2 Tim. 1:5](#); [3:15](#)), Phoebe and others ([Rom. 16](#)).

In the early 1900s, when headhunting animistic Mizos of northeast India first embraced Christianity, previously subjugated women, learning of these many scriptural examples, began to preach and teach [p. 21](#) alongside the men. Thus the Gospel spread like fire through the bamboo jungles, until today the half-million-strong tribe is almost completely Christianized.

According to [Joel 2:28](#), [Acts 2:17](#), [Romans 12](#), and [1 Corinthians 12](#) and [14](#), prophecy is one of the gifts distributed among *all* believers, male and female. Deborah's work clearly illustrates the use of this gift.

First, she received messages directly from God (as did all prophets until completion of the written canon). Deborah said to Barak: 'Behold, the Lord, the God of Israel has commanded ... the Lord will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman ... the Lord has gone out before you' ([Judges 4:6, 9, 14](#)).

Second, Deborah commanded men through God's messages. Summoning Barak as general of the army, she told him where to go, how many soldiers to take, and where to get them. Without hesitation Barak did exactly as she said.

Third, Deborah understood and interpreted God's purposes, recording her own and Barak's leadership roles in His work, recognizing the importance of helpers, and rebuking shirkers ([5:7-24](#)).

Fourth, knowing God's Word, Deborah confidently predicted the future: the gathering place of the Canaanite army, their vulnerability, the crucial battle day, and the enemy's defeat. In all this she spurred Barak to action, but noting his hesitancy, she foresaw that the honour of final victory would go to another ([4:9, 14](#)).

Acknowledging God's sovereignty and power in the battle, Deborah and Barak gave Him the glory in a great song of praise (chap. [5](#)) similar to that of Moses and Miriam in [Exodus 15](#).

How wonderful to see men and women working together with God without thought of sex differences! Barak and 10,000 men respected Deborah as God's mouthpiece and obeyed her, even requesting her physical presence. Otherwise a whole generation would have continued in slavery.

About a century ago in India Pandita Ramabai at Kedgaon and Amy Carmichael at Dohnavur, with the help of a few concerned men (and against strong opposition of others), began to rescue enslaved temple prostitutes (called 'servants of god'), child widows, and abandoned girl babies, setting up homes and teaching them of Christ. Today thousands of such women, liberated from living death, are serving the Lord throughout the land.

In our generation how many millions remain slaves to sin because few Deborahs interpret, proclaim, and act upon God's Word? Certainly Deborah was an exceptional person, just as Abraham, Moses, Daniel, and all biblical leaders. But Scripture exhorts [p. 22](#) Christians to follow the example of the prophets/prophetesses ([Heb. 6:12](#); [13:7](#); [James 5:10](#)).

Many of the greatest theological truths of Scripture were given directly by God to women to convey to the world: the Incarnation ([Luke 1:30-55](#)), the essence of God ([John 4:23-24](#)), Christ's Messiahship ([John 4:25](#)), eternal life ([John 11:25](#)), the Resurrection ([Matt. 28:5-7](#)), and others. Godly women of Scripture should be models for Christians today, who have in their hands God's holy Word—His direct message—to apply and pass on to this generation and culture. But where are the prophetesses? Is the evangelical Church ignoring or suppressing the gifts of half its members?

Since Israel was a theocratic society governed by direct divine guidance, the religious leader often ruled as chief executive. The Israelites placed highest confidence in Deborah as God's representative and brought before her their chief problems. In the hill country north of what is now Jerusalem Deborah held office under a palm tree. To this central place all Israel resorted, as to a supreme court ([Judges 4:4-5](#)).

In 1981 Americans considered highly innovative and newsworthy the appointment of a woman, Sandra Day O'Connor, as a Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. But Deborah was Chief Justice over 3000 years ago!

Deborah was a confident decision-maker. She not only settled disputes between Israelites, but also made momentous decisions of national and international import. Requiring great physical and emotional stamina to lead her nation in war and peace, she prayed: 'O my soul, march on with strength' ([5:21](#)).

Some people belittle 'emotional women leaders—as if feeling has no place in important decisions. But Christ Himself displayed womanly compassion and emotion. So did Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Dwight Eisenhower, and other great leaders. Right decisions cannot be made from coldly objective attitudes, such as those of Hitler and Stalin. Deborah cultivated that balance of tenderness and strength which characterizes godly leaders.

Deborah was no 'arm-chair' leader. She left the comforts of home to help enlist and train an army. She accompanied them the long distance up to Mount Tabor, risking her own safety to lead them to the battlefield. But does this mean that women should go to war? God no doubt expects people to use their common sense and send those best qualified for a particular need. Women have long been in our defence [p. 23](#) services in medical and other capacities. Deborah did not go into battle, but supported the foot soldiers as far as possible. In these days of nuclear, germ, and gas warfare no one will escape involvement.

What Deborah's example obviously teaches is that women should not be excluded from any levels of decision-making, religious or political. God's creation pattern established balance, and without the feminine perspective representing half of humankind, organizations and nations can neither fully discern nor fulfil God's purposes.

Wife

Deborah was also a wife and mother ([Judges 4:4](#); [5:7](#)). Whether or not she had children of her own, she was a mother to Israel. How blessed for a nation to have a leader with the heart of a godly mother!

Like most mothers Deborah had a sensitive nature, shown in her ballad of [Judges 5](#). She was saddened to see her oppressed people unable to farm and trade. Her heart went out to the leaders who had tried unsuccessfully to throw off the heavy yoke ([5:9](#)).

But like a good mother, Deborah was not blind to the faults of her family. She exposed the real reason for their problem: the sin of idolatry ([5:8](#)). She rebuked publicly the indifference of selfish, lazy tribes. She did not condemn the oppressors, but put the blame where it belonged—at home.

Today too many leaders try to blame others for their problems. Much emotional talk about world poverty, for instance, blames richer nations and multinationals, ignoring the local causes of exploitation by the wealthy and powerful, widespread corruption, class discrimination, waste, and indifference to the poor and handicapped. Let us get to the root of the problem—sin in the human heart—which only Christ can solve.

In a similar example, many preach and write against the evil of abortion, but rarely do they mention the root cause: the sin of promiscuous or irresponsible conception of new life in the first place. Abortion, like cancer, will never be eradicated until its cause is.

Christian men and women together could accomplish far more by attacking this horrendous sin at its *root*.

Deborah not only preached and prayed; she spent long days judging, counselling, and serving her people. Though a wife and mother, she widely taught God's righteousness to her nation, which thus reaped peace and prosperity.

Some time ago in a seminar an influential preacher was exhorting women to stay at home and tend children. One asked, 'What about women who have no children or whose children are grown?' The [p. 24](#) reply: 'They can decorate their homes'! Yes, too many women decorate themselves and their homes—while teenagers go on drugs, millions starve, and the world sinks further into crime and war. Why not, like Deborah, obey God's command to counteract evil in neighbourhood and nation?

Deborah's husband, Lapidoth ([Judges 4:4](#)), must also have been a very godly, unselfish partner. Obviously, he did not expect his wife to be a decorative mistress-cum-servant. Rather, he must have seriously shouldered his responsibility as head of their home, enabling her to carry out her prophetic ministry.

According to Scripture, if a woman chooses to marry, she defers to her husband ([1 Pet. 3:5](#)), just as anyone joining an organization places himself under its leader. The wife is not to take over the authority of 'a man' (singular—her husband—[1 Tim. 2:12](#)), but nowhere does the Bible teach that women as a class are to be ruled by men as a class. Deborah undoubtedly followed the pattern of 'holy women of the past' ([1 Pet. 3:5](#)), but this did not prevent her from being God's mouthpiece and making top-level decisions.

Implications for the Church

Barak, Deborah, Lapidoth, and 10,000 soldiers furnish an exemplary pattern of men and women using their gifts together to accomplish God's purposes. God distributes His gifts 'individually just as He wills' ([1 Cor. 12:11](#)), and not according to physical differences, whether of colour or shape.

When God said it was not good for man to be alone ([Gen. 2:18](#)), He did not refer only to the marriage relationship; He spoke in the context of working and ruling in the world. The Apostle Paul highly praised his female co-workers ([Rom. 16](#)), while at the same time citing the advantages of singleness for both men and women ([1 Cor. 7](#)). The teaching of some that man's work is to rule and woman's to replenish is an obvious fallacy, since both are needed for reproduction. Women are equally responsible to control the world and subdue the evil around them, and God will hold them equally accountable.

Neither Deborah alone nor Barak alone could have delivered their nation from idolatry and slavery. With billions in the world today still slaves to sin, the Church desperately needs the help of all its women and men in all phases of its outreach. Let us not merely envy the Mizos for the rapid and total Christianization of their tribe in this century. Let us follow their example: they enlisted, trained, and used all Christian potential, male and female, doubling outreach through the Church and producing strong Christian homes. [p. 25](#)

The Bible espouses neither feminism nor 'masculinism', but a togetherness that is largely lacking in Christianity today. Thus this appeal is not primarily to women but to present Church leaders. How much money, energy, time, or even thought does your church/denomination give to training women, who could reach for the Lord at least half of any given population? How many women do you involve in your seminars, workshops, conferences, and consultations on evangelism and church growth? Are your boards, committees, and assemblies one-armed, one-legged bodies? If you do not develop and use the spiritual gifts of Christian women, you are cutting in half the potential assets for the church growth you profess to seek. If you ignore or bury the talent of half your people, will God judge you like His unprofitable servant in [Matthew 25](#)?

Many have asked, 'Where are the Deborahs?' But a more relevant question today is: where are the Baraks, Lapidoths, and 10,000 men who will allow God to use His Deborahs? Male-only (like female-only) administrations limit themselves to half the available wisdom, perception, and creative thinking of God's own image and likeness: humankind. Christians are obligated, not to perpetuate sin-caused distortions in society, but to restore as far as possible God's creation balance.

A QUESTION FOR INDIA

Several have recently asked, 'What should women do in the Church?' India has an increasing number of educated and gifted Christian women. What are they doing?

First, I looked around the churches. A few help with music, Sunday Schools and women's meetings. Large numbers work full time in schools, hospitals, orphanages, leprosariums and homes for the poor. Next I searched through Christian magazines and books. Most are by men and for men; seminars and conferences picture mainly males; a few articles feature women in the home.

Then I scanned Indian Church History—and a heartening fact emerged. Christian women changed the face of India in their lifetimes. Women introduced education for girls. Isabella Thoburn founded at Lucknow the first college for women in Asia. Dr. Clara Swain founded at Bareilly the first hospital for women and children in Asia. Dr. Edith Brown in Ludhiana and Dr. Ida Scudder in Vellore started the first medical colleges for women in Asia, and today women comprise nearly 20% of India's doctors. I have already referred to Pandita Ramabai and Amy Carmichael's pioneering of homes for orphan girls, [p. 26](#) widows and *devidasi*-s. Countless unsung heroines manage our social institutions.

But what should women do in the church? 750 million other religionists can also do social work; only believing Christians can preach the Gospel. Paul Yonggi Cho, pastor of the world's largest church in Seoul, Korea, attributes its growth to an emphasis on small groups and cells. He says, 'We tried to get leading men to start meetings in their homes. We found this was not workable. Many in business got home late at night. They did not have the energy to accept another responsibility. Then God showed me that we should use women as cell leaders.' (*Christianity Today*, May 1984)

If in Korea's male-oriented society women could be chosen, trained and recognised by the church, could this not also be done in India? Only twice in 35 years have I seen a woman lead worship and another read Scripture, while men preached and gave the benediction. How lovely, I thought, that men and women can serve together according to God's creation pattern. ([Genesis 1:26-28](#))

As Indian and other Asian Christians lead the way towards a biblical theology increasingly relevant to Asia, could they not include definitive biblical teaching on the dignity, equality, and mutual responsibility of both sexes? Restored balance could make immeasurable impact, not only on church growth but on society as a whole.

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