



Gender and Calling: A Content Analysis of Deborah's Call to Lead Israel, Judges 4:4–16 and 5:1–31

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INTRODUCTION

Women of the Bible led in all aspects of life—in relationships within the home, community, and organizations. They were young, old, elderly, grandmothers, mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, aunts, and widows (American, 2014; Deen, 1955; McQuade, 2007). They were domestic, civic-minded, political, entrepreneurs, innovators, and royalty in their various roles in ancient society. These women of antiquity were pioneers in society, and their stories offer the companionship of personal friends, teachers, and leaders to modern culture (American, 2014; Deen, 1955; McQuade, 2007). The women of the Bible are women of our shared humanity. The life and roles of the women of the Bible reveal the power

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of their influence on society then and now (American, 2014; Deen, 1955; McQuade, 2007). They were women in both the foreground and background—named and unnamed. A review of these phenomena is credible and valuable as an ancestry leadership model for women in today’s society (American, 2014; Deen, 1955; McQuade, 2007). The current research offers a phenomenological approach to a leadership model from the life of Deborah, a woman of the Bible, from the book of Judges. It proposes effective leadership lessons for women in response to gender and calling. The Bible is a relevant and timeless counsel for humanity, and Biblical principles relate to all needs and aspects of life for the believer or humankind (Osborne, 2006; Robbins, 1996; Vanhoozer, 1998). According to Robbins (1996), culture, as recognized in the Bible, is “a system of patterned values, meanings, and beliefs that give cognitive structure to the world” (p. 2). Culture offers a foundation for directing personal, relational exchanges, values, and beliefs and represents a connection as the processes convey through many generations (Robbins, 1996; Schein, 2010). A content analysis of this woman’s experiences of the Bible offers women a tool and resource for their leadership cache and as they distinguish their purposeful callings in life (Deen, 1955; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Harvard Business Review, 2019; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Woolfe, 2002).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research aims to offer a leadership model regarding calling and gender from the examples of Deborah, a woman of the Bible, and offer timeless leadership lessons that are operative for exceptional leadership. Women need an effective model that addresses the various occurrences, styles, and leadership attributes unique to women’s experiences (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Harvard Business Review, 2019; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Northouse, 2019). The succeeding literature review is relevant to the purpose of this study, prevailing insight into, and framed around theoretical concepts of (a) gender and leadership, (b) calling, and (c) Deborah, a prominent woman leader of the Bible.

Gender and Leadership

Leadership is one of the most studied and controversial topics of all time (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Northouse, 2010; Yukl, 2013). Inside

the plethora of ideas and topics that surround leadership is the content and inquiry of whether a woman should lead; whether she can lead; what challenges women face, such as biases, choices, and balance; and what determines the leadership success of women (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Northouse, 2010; Yukl, 2013). Leadership is diverse because it overlays many social aspects. One learns that leaders can emerge from the most probable to the most unlikely and hidden places; leadership can develop out of obscurity (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2004; Yukl, 2013). The opportunity for leadership arises daily—in the home, communities, businesses, organizations, and political and governmental arenas (Adams, 1997; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Every day, the necessity and prevalence to engage in leadership present opportunities to raise relevant inquiries, speak to one's core values, expand one's consciousness, and makes a difference in the lives of others (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Underwood, 2003). According to Heifetz and Linsky (2002), to lead is to live dangerously because effective leadership leads to significant change, and it will constantly challenge the status quo of those involved and all-around (p. 2). Heifetz and Linsky (2002) purport that effective leadership makes society more meaningful and purposeful. Leadership is unique in that it involves the gifts of every human life as one senses calling and a greater good for humanity within communities and organizations. Leadership crosses all boundaries and includes all humanity because all can offer something unique (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 3). Men and women have equal capacity to lead within organizations (Adams, 1999; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Northouse, 2019; Yukl, 2013). The goals, outcomes, and reach of leadership are too immense and weighty to command a distinct gender, and its scope is all-encompassing of the knowledge, experiences, values, presence, heart, and wisdom of all (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 3). The inclusion of women's lives in the word of God makes them a phenomenon. Therefore, a leadership model offers women insight and assists them with understanding calling and purpose, the long-term influence on community and society, as it also assists with charting policies for effective leadership while breaking the status quo of gender in the call to leadership (American, 2014; Deen, 1955; Macarthur, 2005; McQuade, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Richards & Richards, 2003)

Calling

Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called him. 7:24 So brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God (1 Corinthians 7:20). English Standard Version

Calling and vocations in our lives are not separate from God; instead meant to be an opportunity for co-creation with God at His request. “We respond to the call to heed to and imitate God by creating works that show our honor and adoration by which we experience a thrilling sense of participation in God’s beauty” (Oster, 2011). Calling requires obedience, relationship, and knowing. Calling is a retort to knowing the caller and having a relationship with the creator and the caller of one’s gifts, abilities, skills, knowledge, and wisdom, beginning with sovereignty, surrender, submission, salvation then serving (Benner, 2015). The relationship perpetuates purpose, a divine plan, dreams, gifts, abilities, ergo, and calling. Calling defines the special summons to service that all Christians receive as a part of their salvation experience. The Christian calling and desire to innovate and intentionally live and work prolifically for the kingdom of God are essential (Benner, 2015; Oster, 2011).

Oster (2011) posits that “Christian innovation and [calling] require us to reframe our relationships with others, appreciating them with dignity and love. In this effort, we celebrate the remarkable God-given differences within humanity and welcome our global family members as co-creators and co-developers, also [called] as we have a shared obligation to use our talents to appropriately develop and employ them in the service of our neighbors and all humanity.”

Vocation is a calling based on God’s purpose and grace (Benner, 2015; Neafsey, 2006). In the Holy Bible, 2 Timothy 1:9 states, “...who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (English Standard Version). Calling is innate and is upon one to walk out respectively for God’s Kingdom and not the world alone. God intentionally created and gifted humanity with his divine will to collaborate with his divine purpose (Benner, 2015; Oster, 2011). Calling is providential and is more significant than one’s life when

walked out submissively in followership with God and a relationship with others (Benner, 2015; Neafsey, 2006; Oster, 2011). Deborah's leadership reveals her understanding of this concept. Imoukhuede (2020) posits that when one embraces followership, it directly impacts their ministries' effectiveness and abilities to fulfill their calling.

Deborah; Judge and Prophetess; Called to Lead

Historical background. The book of Judges is assumed to be written by Samuel (Alexander & Alexander, 1973; Halley, 2000; Zodhiates, 2008). Judges is the Hebrew term used to refer to those God raised to lead His people during the conquest of Canaan and the monarchy. There were 13 judges during this time; the book of Judges mentions 11 of them in approximately 350 years (Alexander & Alexander, 1973; Halley, 2000; Zodhiates, 2008). These judges significantly impacted the nation of Israel, and some worked simultaneously in different areas of the country. Judges represent a time and cycle when the Israelites continuously renounced and abandoned their belief in the one true God to serve the gods of the Canaanites whom they lived among (Alexander & Alexander, 1973; Halley, 2000; Zodhiates, 2008). It was common during this time for men to do whatever they thought was right in their own eyes (Alexander & Alexander, 1973; Halley, 2000; Zodhiates, 2008). Deborah's name means Devora, *bee*, or *honeybee* (Deen, 1955; Patterson & Kelley, 2014; Spangler & Syswerda, 2000). Deborah was a prophetess, the fourth of pre-monarchic Israel; she was the only woman judge mentioned in the Bible and was a judge for 40 years (Halley, 2000; Zodhiates, 2008). According to Alexander and Alexander (1973), the timeframe for the book of judges is roughly 1220 to 1050 B.C.

Scriptural references. Judges 4:4-16 and 5:1-31. English Standard Version

Narrative background of the text. Judges 4:4-16 says, English Standard Version

4 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. 5 She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment. 6 Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, "Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded, 'Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. 7 I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander

of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river Kishon, and I will give him into your hand." 8 Then Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go." 9 She said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. 10 Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him. 11 Now Heber the Kenite had separated himself from the Kenites, from the sons of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh. 12 Then they told Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. 13 Sisera called together all his chariots, nine hundred iron chariots, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon. 14 And then Deborah said to Barak, "Arise! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the LORD has gone out before you." So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. 15 The LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. 16 But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not even one was left.

Deborah's song of war is the other narrative that depicts the victory of Barak and Deborah, found in the Holy Bible in the book of Judges 5:1–31. Songs of war are poetic commemorations of worship in remembrance of the relationship between God and His people and their dependence on him to function in their lives (Robbins, 1996).

PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the problems and significance of Deborah's life as a woman responding to calling in the patriarchal society of Israel and how gender [women] in leadership can affect leadership responses and outcomes past and present. Women have encountered many leadership opportunities in recent years—more than ever before in history (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Northouse, 2019). Kellerman and Rhode (2007) posit that the leadership opportunities include the onset of more women who are millionaires, entrepreneurs, and business owners to date, and the pursuit and horizon of a women-led economy resonate with

women succeeding and making progress (Jackson, 2013; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). These roles include government, education, Fortune 500 companies, non-profits, small businesses, and entrepreneurial efforts (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Northouse, 2019; O'Connor, 2010). However, leadership roles among women are not at a desired level in the United States or abroad (Northouse, 2019; O'Connor, 2010). Although the numbers are increasing, women represent a small percentage of leadership positions globally (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Northouse, 2019). Women's roles in leadership are still far less than their male counterparts, presenting a gap in leadership between men and women in society (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). According to Yukl (2013), a clearly defined reason for the lack of high-level executive roles for women in leadership is widespread gender discrimination within organizations. The preferential treatment for men occupying executive leadership roles rather than women fulfilling high-level leadership roles is gender bias (Northouse, 2010; Yukl, 2013). Some other possible reasons are that women have fewer opportunities to gain experience and visibility in types of positions that would lead to advancement and a lack of opportunities for effective mentoring and empowerment (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Northouse, 2019; Yukl, 2013). Eagly and Carli (2007) inferred that women experience a leadership journey riddled with obstacles and challenges. However, despite many of the obstacles encountered on the leadership journey, women have prevailed, setting precedents worldwide in leadership, positions occupying more than 50% of the workforce today, but the common positions held are informal, organizing, facilitating, or domestic responsibilities (Harvard Business Review, 2019; Jackson, 2013; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Northouse, 2019; Yukl, 2013). A content analysis of Deborah, a woman of the Bible, provides a substantial leadership model for women in modern-day leadership to respond to calling to transfer their brilliance successfully in complex work environments. Successful leadership models are essential and indispensable for women's empowerment and imminence in leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Giber et al., 2009; Hesselbien & Goldsmith, 2006; Sandberg, 2013; Shollen, 2015).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This phenomenological study utilizes the research technique of content analysis of a purposefully selected woman from the Old Testament of the Bible. Content analysis allows the researcher to find, organize, the content of a narrative text and categorize (Patton, 2015, p. 551). Content analysis is a research technique used for constructing replicable and valid inferences from text or other meaningful matter to the context of their use (Krippendorff, 2019). Content analysis provides new understandings, strengthens a researcher's comprehension of a phenomenon, or advises reasonable actions. Forms of data that are inclusive for the content analysis method include literature, art, images, maps, symbols, and numerated records if they speak to someone about phenomena outside of what can be distinguished or experiential (Krippendorff, 2019). The vital distinction of content analysis is that the data is significant and has meaning to someone and is produced by someone to have connotation for someone else, and therefore must not be ignored or disturb the originally intended implication of why the text exists in the first place (Krippendorff, 2019). Preservation of the data must remain the same, and this supports reliability and validity and prevents the researcher from selecting content in support of expectations rather than those that challenge the outlooks (Krippendorff, 2019). Krippendorff (2019) contends that six features are relevant to the definitions of content analysis: (a) the text does not have reader-independent qualities; (b) texts do not have a single meaning; instead, it can be read from numerous perspectives; (c) the meaning and consensus invoked by texts need not be shared; (d) meanings and context speak to something other than the given texts, even where convention suggests that the messages contain different messages; instead texts inform the reader; (e) text has meaning relative to contexts, discourses, or purposes, allowing the data to be informative and relevant to particular problems; and (e) the nature of the text demands that content analysis draw specific inferences from a body of text to their chosen content (Loc 1053 of 1187). Content analysis infers answers to research questions from their text. In this regard, the text never speaks for itself; instead, it informs someone, narrowing the range of possible interpretations (Krippendorff, 2019). Analyzing the content analysis data required the researcher to interpret the data and look for patterns, insights, or concepts that emerged from the data that were promising to the research. The data were analyzed using exploratory coding that involves eclectic,

holistic, and analytical memos (Saldana, 2016). The study involved a rigorous, methodical pattern beginning with a thorough literature review, literal replication of the data, thoughtful research objectives, formal and explicit procedures for the research, protecting the study's validity, and maintaining a flow of evidence and interpretation (Yin, 2014).

The literature provides parameters for the topic and scope of gender, calling Deborah, a prominent woman leader of the Bible, and the research inquiry in consideration of the following research questions.

RQ₁: What are significant leadership lessons learned from Deborah's response to calling as a woman of the Bible?

RQ₂: What significance do the challenges of women in the Bible relate to the challenges of modern-day women in leadership?

CODING AND CATEGORIZATION OF LITERAL REPLICATION OF NARRATIVE OF DEBORAH

Categories. Categorie findings from the narrative of calling, team effort, gender, collaboration, courage, communication, influence, innovation, trust, respect, forerunner, and legendary leadership.

Themes. The themes found in Deborah's narrative are calling, purpose, courage, justice, confidence, influence, inspiration, and bravery.

Conceptual leadership lessons. Conceptual leadership lessons found in the narrative of Deborah were unique because Deborah's narrative presented exceptional circumstances for ancient and modern-day women. Deborah was a prophetess and judge appointed by God with an innate calling and gift, and her leadership forte and skills are apparent in both capacities. Her story resonates that God called women into elite leadership roles in ancient times, just as necessary for society today. The leadership lessons denoted in this narrative are (a) be a pioneer, (b) be strong and lead courageously, (c) be a just leader, (d) be confident and forthright, (e) recognize the value of your leadership power and influence, and (f) inspire others, compel others to be brave, (g) honor the calling on your life.

SUMMARY OF LITERAL REPLICATION OF THE NARRATIVE OF DEBORAH

According to the Hebrew Scriptures, Deborah was a woman, a wife, a prophetess, and a judge (Judg. 4:4). She was the only woman mentioned in the Bible who held the position of a judge (Alexander & Alexander, 1973; Halley, 2000; Zodhiates, 2008). Deborah was a leader and a woman who held an esteemed position in society as a judge in times that were very adverse because of humankind's sinful behaviors and choices as they acted against God (Judg. 4:5; Alexander & Alexander, 1973; Halley, 2000). Deborah was a woman who was qualified to lead because of her innate, appointed calling and gifts given by God as a prophetess and judge in a patriarchal society (Judg. 4:4). Deborah's appointed calling by God offers the insight that God calls both men and women to fulfill the divine purpose, specifically leadership roles. Therefore, calling and one's response to calling are gender-friendly and uniquely chosen by God, as denoted in Deborah's narrative. Those familiar with Deborah revered her as courageous, serious-minded, intense, and righteous (Judg. 4:5). Deborah's reputation preceded her; she recognized her strengths as a leader, and others recognized her as a leader because she was confident and forthright in her actions (Judg. 4:8). Based on Deborah's narrative, she took ownership of her call and role as a leader, she valued her calling, and she did not shirk back in the face of adversity, conflict, or danger; instead, she met the challenges head-on (Judg. 4:9). Deborah's gender did not dictate her capacity to act as a leader; instead, it was her banner and mantle, as she served ethically in her roles and used her ability to fulfill the vision of her leadership and the needs presented to her by the community (Judg. 4:8–9). She judged consistently and daily and availed herself in the same place and manner to meet the needs of others (Judg. 4:5). Some valuable leadership lessons revealed from the analysis of Deborah's narrative are as follows. She was a reliable, courageous, fearless communicator and problem solver (Judg. 4:5, 9–10). Because of the integrity of her character, she was renowned. Deborah understood the necessity to be collaborative and a team player (Judg. 4:9–10). She was brave, and she compelled others to be brave. She was an encourager and caused people to desire to be on her team and support her goals (Judg. 4:9–10). As a prophetess, wife, and judge of Israel, these verses reveal Deborah's leadership role and influence in her community. As a

judge, she is a decision-maker for many people; therefore, she must exercise justice and good counsel. Deborah exemplifies and exercises wisdom, foresight, and courage for her community. She denotes that women and gender are at the forefront of victory (Judges 4:9). Deborah represents an example of gender and calling by God in a nontraditional and unprecedented scenario. She fit the leadership role because of her calling and not gender, but gender made a difference in the outcome and the future of Israel and history (Judges 5:1–31).

RESULTS

This research study results reveal that Deborah was a woman, wife, judge, and prophetess in the patriarchal society of Israel. When introduced through the scriptural narrative of her life, the scripture relates to Deborah as the “wife of,” which denotes her gender role and ownership in an ancient patriarchal society; her husband was responsible for her; otherwise, she had no rights. Deborah’s introduction includes a prophetess and judge’s offices, which only God designated in the Israel community; again, both respected roles during this time as they depicted the relationship of a woman of God. The uniqueness of Deborah’s life is that she understood the relationship of calling, and her relationship was that of surrender and submission to God’s sovereignty and salvation. Deborah was a pioneer, the only woman judge mentioned in the Bible, and an influential leader in challenging times. Deborah’s leadership calling and example to those led by her and those who followed gained their trust and camaraderie. Deborah found judging in the same place every day and consistently walked in this role displaying an understanding of the essentiality of calling, her influence on her community, and her relationship with God. Good leadership is critical and renders the esteem of those under one’s influence. Those who knew Deborah did not want to face the battle without her. Leaders do not always set out to be legendary. However, leaders’ decisions to follow their calling can land them on the shortlist of legendary because generations will benefit from one’s calling and commitment. For Deborah, it extended for forty years of prolific, positive consequences of righteousness, deliverance, and peace in Israel.

IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings of this study add to the body of knowledge and the variables that can be pragmatic to the phenomenon of gender, calling, and women in leadership. Factors of inquiry might arise from this study, including cultural dynamics such as the plausibility of using the Bible as a tool for an organizational leadership model and the differences in cultural environments because of ancient and modern-day variances. The nuances of gender, calling, women in leadership, the value women bring to organizational communities, and the wealth and diversity of leadership outcomes without the double standards found in this research are essential topics for future research.

CONCLUSION

The significance of this study was to acquire leadership lessons on calling and gender from Deborah, a woman of the Bible, to add to the cache of women in leadership. Gender is a significant issue in all leadership environments. Today, women in society face a magnitude of challenges and obstacles on the road to leadership success. Women as pioneers and leaders must recognize their behaviors and classify them with their core beliefs and values rather than choosing to identify with behaviors that are not true to their nature of leadership. Through leadership models and standards, women enhance their understanding and find their calling with performances that are effective and androgynous, allowing them to embrace the uniqueness of their leadership abilities and fortify their leadership expertise (Bevere, 2010). The leadership journey varies for each woman, and the essence of Deborah's calling, appointed leadership characteristics, and the intentionality of her behaviors based on beliefs were all unique factors in her life and leadership outcomes.

This research provides practical lessons for students, scholars, and practitioners in leadership as they consider the diverse needs of women and the personal and innate characteristics of women in leadership. Deborah responded to the call of leadership competently, expertly, and skillfully because of her abilities and the opportunity to lead. "Integrating dominant leadership into one's core identity is particularly challenging for women within organizations, who seek to establish credibility that is deeply conflicted about whether, when, and how they should exercise

authority” (Harvard Business Review, 2019). Women are often overlooked for leadership roles because they are deemed unqualified or lack the assertiveness or aggressiveness in comparison to their male counterparts, which is a common bias in itself toward women (Helgesen, 1990). When women, as leaders, act in behaviors aligned with their values systems, affirmed based on their leadership contributions rather than gender perceptions, the results are more successful (Harvard Business Review, 2019). Work cultures that espouse the belief that women are more suitable for administrative than dominant leadership roles are more likely to choose men than women for prominent leadership positions, continually perpetuating the leadership gap between men and women and disseminating gender biases. According to Harvard Business Review (2019), “effective leaders develop a sense of purpose” when they walk in calling and are therefore capable of “look beyond the status quo to what is actually possible with a compelling reason to take action...” despite risks, and they connect others to larger purpose, they inspire commitment, boost resolve, and help colleagues find deeper meaning in their work” (Harvard Business Review, 2019, p. 61). All of which echo Deborah’s role and narrative.

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