Lectures on the Book of Judges

Judges 4 — Deborah and Barak

William Kelly

We have not done with the witnesses yet. There is another, perhaps more remarkable, and assuredly more singular in the form taken, in the next chapter (Judges 4); so that it seems evident that it is a principle here. I am not choosing out some particular cases; but taking all as they stand. Here then we find a deliverer unquestionably, and one much put forward by God, but who would not have been thought of in an orderly state of things. I need not tell you that I refer to Deborah now. Certainly she does not act according to natural order. But wherefore was this? It was according to grace, though a rebuke to the men of Israel. Further, it was the grace of God, who, in the form of the deliverer, contemplated the condition of His people; for He meant them to feel that things were out of course. So it was, and so only, that Deborah was employed. Now this was a day of great trial: "And the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah: for he (Jabin) had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel." It was a long-continued and grievous affliction: "And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not Jehovah God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?" Here there is no doubt that God wrought sovereignly. She was a prophetess; she was the communicator of the mind of God at that time — pre-eminently so. But there is more to note. Was not this a rebuke to man — for instance to Barak? Undoubtedly, but it was according to the wisdom of God, and was ordered of Him to take that shape. It was the more remarkable, because one would not think at first sight such a thing probable as that a woman should be not only called out to direct men, but to direct them in a campaign — to direct the leader or general of the hosts of Jehovah. Surely therefore there was some marked and indispensable reason of God that should have so arranged it. "And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go." Can any one say that this was to the honour of Barak — "If thou wilt go with me"? A woman's going down to a field of slaughter indispensable to the leader! The general could not go without Deborah to bear him company,

share the danger and ensure the victory! So it was. "If thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with thee." In her at least there was no want of confidence in God. But we shall see that we have God marking His sense of Barak's unbelief: "Notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for Jehovah shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Another woman! Thus evidently on all sides of it the victory was altogether to the praise of God, and, as far as the form of it was concerned, man, Israel, general and all, ought to have received it as in this respect a humiliation. We need not dwell now on the particulars of this scene. These are more familiar, it may be, than the principle I have endeavoured thus to bring out plainly.