

What Barack Obama Must Learn from Barak of the Bible

Written by J. Lee Grady

Wednesday, 21 January 2009 01:00 AM EST

We must pray that our new president will honor the God of our fathers and seek counsel from His prophets.

The hearts of millions of Americans were stirred on Tuesday as we watched Barack Obama place his hand on Abraham Lincoln's Bible and swear to uphold his duties as president. The cynicism and divisiveness of politics gave way to civility for a few moments as Obama stood on that massive stage in front of the Capitol and spoke of a "new era of responsibility" that he hopes to initiate.

We've seen similar patriotic moments in our lifetime, but Obama's speech chiseled a landmark in our history. His message was especially poignant when he noted that his own father might not have been served in a local restaurant 60 years ago—yet today he "can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath." The tears of older African-Americans in the crowd testified that Martin Luther King's dream has been realized.

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I salute Mr. Obama as my president and I welcome the racial reconciliation that his election symbolizes. But we all know that presidents aren't proven by ceremonies, nor are they ultimately judged by their speeches or the response from the crowds. Today the inaugural stage will be dismantled, the decorations will be put away and the confetti will be swept up. And President Obama will face one of the most challenging jobs on the planet.

I am praying that he will learn the lesson of Barak.

Yes, there is a man in the Bible who shares our president's name. Barak was chosen by God to lead Israel at a time of serious military and economic crisis. The Canaanites were plotting an invasion, so Deborah—the prophet of the Lord at that time—called on Barak to defend Israel even though Jabin's iron chariots far outnumbered Israel's ragtag army.

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Barak had an unusual response to Deborah's request. He told her: "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go" (Judg. 4:8, NASB). This may sound like an admission of weakness, but Barak was no mama's boy. He is actually listed as a hero of faith in the book of Hebrews (see Heb. 11:32). So why did he insist that Deborah accompany him?

Barak knew he could not be a successful leader without the Lord's prophet by his side. He needed the counsel of God. He wanted the supernatural wisdom and favor that comes from honoring the Lord and His word.

Every leader in the Bible was measured by his or her reliance upon the one true God. The Bible gives us a long list of the kings of Israel, and each one either stood or fell depending on how he aligned himself with God and His true messengers. Those who honored God and listened to His prophets experienced economic prosperity and military victory; those who turned to idols and listened to false prophets failed miserably.

Saul disobeyed Samuel's counsel and ended his rule in disgrace. Jeroboam set up golden calves for the people to worship, and because he disregarded the prophetic warnings of Ahijah he also failed. King Ahab refused to listen to Elijah's rebukes, and instead surrounded himself with the prophets of Baal. His rule ended in tragedy.

There were a few kings in Israel, however, who chose godly counselors. David gave the prophet Nathan access to his palace and permission to speak into his personal life. After David's sex scandal and political cover-up, Nathan's confrontation brought him to repentance.

After King Hezekiah realized that he faced the most serious military threat in Israel's history, he repented and prayed for deliverance. Isaiah the prophet then showed up and told him: "Because you have prayed to Me ... I have heard you" (2 Kin. 19:20). Isaiah predicted the demise of the Assyrian army, and in one night the angel of the Lord slew 185,000 men.

Many other leaders in the Bible responded faithfully to God by choosing godly counselors to guide them. King Josiah consulted with the prophetess Huldah. Even kings of pagan nations were blessed when they listened to God's prophets. Darius and Cyrus appointed Daniel as a top adviser, and King Ahasuerus elevated Mordecai to his highest cabinet post.

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How will Barack Obama be measured as a president? Hopefully he will be much more than just a symbol of racial healing. I am praying that he will seek out the Lord's prophets and turn to God with the same fervor that Barak exhibited when he sought Deborah's guidance.

Obama sent a few signals during his inauguration ceremony that affirmed our nation's Christian values. His choice of California pastor Rick Warren to offer the invocation hinted that our new president is willing to include evangelical Christians in his policy discussions. But if President Obama truly wants to make the most positive mark on American history, he cannot simply position a few token Christians on his stage while the prophets of Baal surround him.

The racial healing our nation is experiencing right now will prove to be superficial if Obama veers our nation away from the God of our fathers and rejects His moral principles. In his speech on Tuesday, President Obama said he felt "humbled" by the events surrounding this historic election. The test of his humility has now begun. It will be made obvious by who he listens to.

Many secular forces—from inside Congress, from Hollywood and from foreign nations—hope to use Obama to promote wicked agendas. Will he seize this moment and recognize his ultimate need to depend on God? Will he turn to God like Barak and lead our country into its greatest hour of victory? Or will he follow the path of Ahab and become a stooge for Jezebel and her false prophets?

It's time for the church to pray like never before that true prophets will have access to the White House and that our new president will honor God in the way he leads America.

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