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JUDGES 4:1-9:57

Today's lesson covers the exploits of two very famous judges...one, a woman and one, a man. The story of Deborah is brief and the story of Gideon is much longer. God gives us very little insight into the personality of Deborah and how He prepared her to do all that she did. By contrast, He gives us a good deal of information about the personality and preparation of Gideon.

Let's look first at Deborah...

Judges 4:1-3...

We didn't have the time to really see it last week, but the first time God's people went into sin, God raised up **Othniel**, and he delivered them from the hand of their oppressors and for forty years, the people had rest from their enemies.

Then, **Othniel** died, and the people turned again to paganism and idolatry and God brought a man named Eglon who was the king of Moab to punish them. Then, the people cried to God for deliverance and He sent a man by the name of **Ehud** to deliver them. Then, the same thing happened again, and God sent a judge by the name of **Shamgar** to deliver them from the Philistines.

Now, by this time, you would think that God's people would get the point, wouldn't you? You would think that a light would go on and they would say, "**Have you noticed? Every time we start getting mixed up in the idolatry of the nations around us, one of their kings comes and jumps all over us and makes us his slaves. Then when we cry to God, He delivers us. You know, maybe we should just stick with the Lord from now on.**"

We said last week if the people had done what they were supposed to do, if they had, **with great determination**, kept coming against their enemies, instead of settling down and being "at home" with them...how much easier their lives would have been!

Well, here in **chapter 4**, they have again gone into **apostasy**...into **rebellion**...into **idolatry** and God allowed Jabin, the king of Canaan to oppress Israel and he oppressed Israel for twenty years!

Verses 4-9...

Humanly speaking, this looks like an impossible situation... Israel is out-manned, out-gunned and out-positioned.

But, we know that nothing is an impossible situation. **God is the God of impossible situations, isn't He?** So what does He do in this impossible situation?

Well, God did something He'd never done before. God raised up a woman to a high place of leadership...He raised up a woman named Deborah.

All we really know about Deborah is that she was a prophetess and a judge. A prophet or prophetess spoke on the basis of a revelation from God.

We don't have prophets or prophetesses today as in the Bible. In Bible times, God would reveal His Word and His will to men and women and they would, in turn, reveal that to the people.

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But, today we have God's Word in written form, once for all delivered to us! Now, God **has** gifted men and women with the gift of prophecy. This gift enables these folks to set forth for us the message of God's Word in a clear and forceful way, but they will never ever give to us anything new...they will never ever give to us anything we don't already have in the Word of God!

There is no new revelation, Beloved, and if anyone ever comes to you and tells you of a prophet who is giving out new revelation, please understand they don't know what they're talking about! (If you were here last Sunday night, Ron Dunn spoke to this far better than I can!)

Getting back to Deborah...She was the only woman ever called by God to be the national leader of His people. And she had some great leadership qualities...

1) She saw a need and was committed to do something about that need.

She didn't accept the status quo. She knew something must be done and she was going to do something.

2) She enlisted help.

Deborah knew the people would sooner follow a man than a woman, so she sent for Barak.

3) She motivated help.

First, Deborah confronted Barak with God's command. She said in effect, "Barak, this is God's will, not mine. It is **not** an option, it is a command of Almighty God."

Secondly, Deborah strengthened Barak with God's promise...

Verse 7...It's one thing to challenge someone to do a job. It's another to remind him of the great promises of God!

Thirdly, Deborah encouraged Barak with her presence...

Verse 8...

So, Deborah **saw the need, decided to do something about the need, enlisted help, motivated that help** and

4) She devised a plan.

I wish we had the time to really go into this...but let me just summarize the rest of the story by saying that God told Barak through His prophetess and judge, Deborah, that because he was not willing to go against the Canaanites without Deborah, God would sell Sisera, the commander of the Canaanites into the hands of a woman.

Barak probably thought, "Well, that's okay...I really like Deborah, I don't mind if Sisera falls into her hands instead of mine..." Barak didn't know this woman would not be Deborah but a Gentile woman named Jael.

The children of Israel were victorious and the Canaanites were defeated and Sisera was killed when Jael drove a tentpeg through his head.

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Chapter 5 gives us a beautiful song of praise that Deborah and Barak sang. They knew that victory was the LORD's victory, not theirs, and the last sentence of **chapter 5** says "and the land was undisturbed for forty years."

Let's look at another judge God raised up...a man named **Gideon**.

Chapters 6-9 bring before us one of the most famous judges and one of the most famous of all Old Testament characters.

One of the great truths that we learn from Scripture is that when God looks at us, He doesn't see us for what we are...but what we can become as He works in our lives. He doesn't say to us, "**Get rid of all your weaknesses and all your inadequacies and all your failures and then, I can use you.**"

NO! He tells us to come to Him **just as we are**, doesn't He?

**EX: sign on church... "Be fishers of men,
You catch them,
God will clean them."**

See, He doesn't **transform** us and then **save** us...He **saves** us and then begins a **cleansing, sanctifying and transforming** work that lasts all our lives.

Let's just quickly set the stage here...

The children of Israel have again gone into apostasy and God has given them into the hands of the Midianites.

The Midianites would camp around Israel and would raid the Israelite fields. They would wait until after the Israelites had their crops planted and then they would destroy their produce and not only that, but they would also take or destroy their livestock.

This had been going on for seven years, and once again the people cried out to God and **instead of sending a judge** to deliver them, God **sent the people His prophet** to remind them why they were in the shape they were in. He reminded them that they had not obeyed God...they had sinned.

Well, one day Gideon was secretly beating out his wheat. Somehow he had managed to bring in a small crop without the Midianites getting to it first and he was hoping he could get it beat out before the Midianites discovered it and took it all away from him...when suddenly the angel of the LORD appeared to him.

Verses 12-15...

I believe what Gideon was thinking was... "**Who me? LORD, you must have me mixed up with someone else. I'm not a warrior...I'm just a wheat thresher, and a scared one, at that.**"

You've probably heard the old story about the man who went to his psychiatrist with a problem. He said, "**Doctor, you must help me. Everything's going wrong. I feel worthless. My friends tell me I have a terrible inferiority complex. Can you help me?**"

So, the psychiatrist told him he would give him some tests and evaluate them. A week later, the man came back, and the psychiatrist said, "Friend, I have **some good news and some bad**

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news for you. The good news is that we have proved **you do not have a complex**. There is no doubt about that. But the **bad** news is, you **are** inferior.”

And Gideon was indeed inferior! Yet, God called him “a valiant warrior.”

Have you ever noticed how often this happens in Scripture?

God came to Abram and changed his name to Abraham...
“father of a multitude”...**and Isaac had not even been born to Abraham yet.**

Jesus looked at a man named Simon and changed his name to Peter...Peter meant “rock”.... **and Peter became a rock solid pillar of the New Testament church.**

And here He came to a weak, scared Jew secretly threshing out his little crop of wheat and he called him, **“O valiant warrior...”**.

The very first thing God called Gideon to do was to destroy the idols that were where? In his own back yard! These idols had been erected by Gideon’s own father! **God couldn’t use a man who had idols in his own back yard!**

What a hard thing this must have been! It’s much easier to do God’s will among our enemies than to do God’s will at home among our own family, isn’t it?

We don’t know, but perhaps Gideon, himself, had knelt down and worshiped these same idols and here he is tearing them down. What must the family have thought? “Old Gideon’s got religion and he’s trying to stuff it down our throats.”

But, Gideon was obedient! The people of the town sought to kill him and his father came to his defense. His name was changed by his father to Jerubbaal, which meant “let Baal contend against him”...or “let Baal plead his case.”

Well, obviously Baal could not contend against a man who was following God’s instruction...so the Gideon’s new name, Jerubbaal, only served to remind the people that Jehovah is God...Baal is nothing!

Verses 35-40...

This is the story we remember most about Gideon, isn’t it? The fleece story!

Let me ask you...was Gideon wrong to put out a fleece?

Theologians are divided on this question. Some go to great lengths to show us that this was very clearly a sign of no faith on Gideon’s part. And, it probably was! Gideon had already asked the LORD for a sign back in **verse 17**, and God gave him one in **verse 21**.

But, God doesn’t reprimand Gideon. God is so gracious to strengthen our weak faith, isn’t He? God simply very lovingly and compassionately proves His will to Gideon not once, but twice!

Now, does this mean we should always put out a fleece? No, I certainly don’t believe it does. Some of us would NEVER do God’s will because we would spend all our days thinking of different ways to put out our fleece.

Knowing me, as I know me, I’d probably say something like unto this...

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“Well, one night the fleece was dry and the ground was wet, and the next night the ground was dry and the fleece was wet. I believe tonight I’ll hang it on the door and see if the door will be dry or wet...and maybe the next night I’ll put it on my head and take a shower and see if it stays dry...”

God’s will, many times is very evident. All we have to do is look into His Word. When Casey called me several years and asked me to fill this teaching position, I didn’t know what to do. I never thought I would ever be able to teach God’s Word...standing in front of a group of two scared me to death! **I prayed and I prayed and one night God just woke me up from a sound sleep.** And it was as though I knew I was supposed to go into the den, take my Bible and look at a verse. I just opened my Bible to the **Book of Acts, chapter 18...**and my eyes fell upon these words that God spoke to Paul in the night by a vision... **“Do not be afraid any longer but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you...” verses 9-10a.**

Now, that’s unusual...at least for me, it’s very unusual. God doesn’t always give us His guidance in this way.

Let me just set forth for you some principles on God’s guidance.

1. God does not give us guidance, as much as He gives us a Guide.

Think about it...if you are driving in a strange city, which would you rather have with you...a road map and a list of addresses, or someone who knows the city and will take you where you need to go?

Did you know that the word “guidance” doesn’t even appear in the KJV? But over and over I read of the Guide, the Lord Jesus, who personally leads and directs me. That’s how Gideon knew God’s will...by personal contact with the Lord Jesus.

So, the first thing I need to know is that guidance comes from the Guide, and if I’m out of fellowship with the Lord Jesus, I can be a walking encyclopedia about the will of God...how to find it and how not to find it, but I will never know His will personally.

2. Guidance is based on the principles and precepts of the Word of God.

In the Bible, I see two kinds of guidance: **specific direct commands**...the basic requirements of God for my life as His child, and **general principles**, which apply to many areas of my life. When I take these precepts and principles of Scripture and apply them to my life, I get a clear picture of God’s will.

And in the process of finding these commands and these principles, I discover a very important fact...God is much more concerned about what I am, than about where I am, or what I am doing. If I’m not the right person because my life is not being lived by what I know of the Scripture, how is He going to reveal any more of His will to me?

I firmly believe that God wants us to know His will. I also believe that if our hearts are right and our fellowship with Jesus is close, then even if we misread God’s will, He will let us know by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us!

3. Guidance is communicated through the desires God gives us.

Sometimes we hear people talk about “surrendering to the will of God” and we get the idea that God’s will is something we really don’t want.

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But the wonderful truth is that, when we submit unreservedly to our Guide, we are never so happy and fulfilled as when we are doing His will. He plants hungers and desires in our heart and His will is wonderful and pleasant!

4. Guidance comes through the counsel of other believers.

God places in our lives other believers who He just may use to reveal His will to you and me.

Now, we must use discernment. Is that person walking with the Lord? Is that person in God's Word? Is that person being led by the Holy Spirit in his or her own life?

5. Guidance is confirmed through the indwelling peace of God.

I don't believe God is in the business of hiding His will in a box and locking it up and throwing away the key and then saying, "Okay, now see if you can find My will." No, He wants us to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. He has commanded us to "be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

There is never as much peace in our lives as when we are in the will of God!

What is the will of God? **It is the voice of the Shepherd.** The Lord Jesus said, "**My sheep hear My voice and I know them and they follow Me.**" The shepherd's job is to guide his sheep...he keeps them from straying, he gives them water and food, and he keeps them from danger! And that's exactly what the Good Shepherd does for you and me...His dumb sheep! If you want to know His will, listen to His voice, then follow Him.

Well, let's get back to Gideon, or we'll never get through!

Gideon gathered himself as many men as he could muster, didn't he? 32,000 in all!

Judges 7:2-8...

Do you know what God had reduced the odds to? 450 to 1!! **Chapter 8** tells us there were 135,000 Midianites!

Not only that, but these 300 Israelites were not armed with swords and spears. They were armed with trumpets and torches and pitchers. God once again wanted them to rely...not on the weapons of this world...but the mighty weapons of God! "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," saith the Lord of Hosts. These odds were God's design. **When the odds are overwhelming...God overwhelms the odds!**

Well, they came to the outskirts of the Midianite camp and they blew their trumpets and they broke their pitchers and they shouted "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon..." and then what happened?

The enemy turned their swords against one another and they were defeated and their leaders were captured and killed and **chapter 8** tells us that of the 135,000 Midianites, only 15,000 were left and they were eventually killed as well!

Gideon was indeed God's valiant warrior, wasn't he? But, oh, don't you wish Gideon's story ended here?

To sum up...

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The people wanted to make Gideon king. Gideon declined, but he did ask the people to bring all the gold earrings they had captured from the Midianites. And he made an ephod out of it...

Well, what's so wrong with that? Look at **verse 27...**

The ephod was a priestly garment. Gideon was not a Levite. Maybe Gideon's intentions were innocent in making this ephod...but it became yet another object of idolatry for the people.

See, what we see at the end of Gideon's life is **a lack of gratitude to God**. Nowhere after their miraculous victory do we see the people or Gideon praising God for the victory or building an altar to worship God. Nowhere do we hear a wonderful song of praise as we heard from Deborah and Barak.

A dear friend recently gave me a rock...On this rock it says **"If you don't praise His name, I will"**.

We also see at the end of Gideon's life compromise! Listen to what a few Godly men have said in reference to the end of their life.

Dr. Harry Ironside said, **"O God, keep me from being a foolish old man.**

Dr. M. A. Culbertson, retired president of Moody Bible Institute, said, when approached about having a building at that institute named for him, said, **"But you don't know how I will end."**

Dr. Vance Havner asked our own preacher one day if he would pray that **he would get home before dark**...meaning pray that he would get to heaven before he messed up and dishonored and disgraced the Lord!

May we not compromise as Gideon did!!

May we be like Paul...May we fight the good fight, may we finish the course, may we keep the faith!

I'm so sorry we've had to fly through this passage of Scripture. We should have had three or four lessons on it!! ☹

Let's just briefly draw some conclusions...

1. God wants His people to be like Deborah – willing to be His instruments of leadership.
2. Many times, God calls and commissions and enables and empowers those who are the least likely ones to lead His people.
3. God's people are able to do exceptional things in the power of the Holy Spirit.
4. God's people must never forget that God demands total obedience...never compromise!

Well, that's our quick look at Deborah and Gideon.