

AN UNEXPECTED LEADER Sunday School- September 13, 2009

Unifying Topic: **GIDEON: A DELIVER FOR THE PEOPLE**

Lesson Text

I. Oppression Against the Israelites (Judges 6:1-3)

II. God Sends a Prophet (Judges 6:7-10)

III. The Angel of the Lord Visits Gideon (Judges 6:11-14)

The Main Thought: And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? (Judges 6:14, KJV).

Unifying Principle: When situations seem hopeless, we assume there is nothing we can do. How can we face threats to our well-being— even our very existence— with confidence? The story of Gideon, the self-described weakest member of the weakest family in Israel, demonstrates that God calls and equips ordinary people to bring about extraordinary changes.

Lesson Aim: To examine the call of an ordinary man named Gideon and how God intended to use him to save the nation of Israel.

Life aim: To prove that God can use anyone for His purposes, even if that person's faith wavers.

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- 6:1 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.
- 6:2 And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.
- 6:3 And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them;
- 6:4 And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.
- 6:5 For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it.
- 6:6 And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.
- 6:7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,
- 6:8 That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage;
- 6:9 And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land;
- 6:10 And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.
- 6:11 And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.
- 6:12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.
- 6:13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.
- 6:14 And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

HISTORY:

According to **Judges 5**¹ Deborah and Barak sang a song that day. The song appears to have been written by Deborah. It was common for the Israelites to commemorate special occasions with songs. While there were no books in those days, songs would be sung for generations and the events described in the songs would long be remembered. It was a way to tell stories. The writing style of the Bible switches here from historical narrative to poetry with the following song:

When leaders lead in Israel,

¹ Taken from www.bibleoftheday.com

*When the people willingly offer themselves,
Bless the Lord! (V1-2)*

Here Deborah is praising God because the leaders of Israel were able to lead a voluntarily united army of Israelites into battle and the glory belongs to God.

Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes!

I, even I, will sing to the Lord;

I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel. (v3)

Deborah is telling all the great and powerful people of the earth, the kings and princes to take notice and listen to the praise that she gives to God. For no matter how great men are on earth, they must take notice of God as the Most High.

Lord, when You went from Seir, when You marched from the field of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens poured, the clouds poured water; the mountains gushed before the Lord, this Sinai, before the Lord God of Israel. (v4-5)

It is hard to know exactly what reference Deborah is talking about, whether when the Israelites defeated Sihon and Og or other times. But the Lord, God is the true God who made the earth tremble at Sinai when He gave the law to Israel. God is a God who controls all the powers of nature, he makes the earth tremble (Psalm 18:7, Isaiah 64:1, Exodus 19:18), the heavens pour water, and the mountains melt (Psalm 97:5).

In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were deserted and the travelers walked along the byways. Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel. (v6-7)

From the time of Shamgar (who killed 600 Philistines with an ox-goad in Judges 3:31) to Jael (who just killed Sisera with a tent peg Judges 4:20) God had abandoned Israel. No one traveled on the highways because civilization had broken down and trade was not safe. Anyone carting goods for sale along the highways was placing themselves in danger of thieves and other trouble makers. God was not with Israel and Israel lived trapped in captivity. The captivity of Israel was so bad that Israel cried out and God made Deborah a prophet in Israel and she viewed herself as a mother to Israel.

They chose new gods; then there was war in the gates; not a shield or spear was seen among 40,000 in Israel. My heart is with the rulers of Israel who offered themselves willingly with the people Bless the Lord! (v8-9)

Deborah clearly states that the cause for Israel's problems was that they chose to follow new gods as one would choose a new outfit and when they went whoring after other gods. God abandoned them and there was war. Even though there were no weapons of war in Israel, there were leaders who rose up with all willingness to fight against their oppressors and the people followed those leaders. Deborah said her heart is with those leaders and she expresses her appreciation to God for them.

"Speak, you who ride on white donkeys, who sit in judges attire, and who walk along the road. Far from the noise of archers, among the watering places, there they shall recount the righteous acts of the Lord, the righteous acts for His villagers in Israel; then the people of the Lord shall go down to the gates." (v10-11)

Deborah here addresses herself to those people whose lives have markedly changed since their victory over Canaan:

- a. The people of distinction who as a mark of their wealth or position ride on the rarer breed of white donkey; and
- b. Those who judge; and
- c. Those who are now free to walk along the roads.

The Israelites were now safe to resume their normal daily business without interference from thieves. They were able again to use their wells without harassment and for all of this; Deborah urged them to give thanks to God, as God was the one who delivered Israel from her misery.

"Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, Barak, and lead your captives away, O son of Abinoam! Then the survivors came down, the people against the nobles; the Lord came down for me against the mighty." (v12-14a)

Deborah is stirring herself and Barak to sing a song of praise to God who gave them victory against the Canaanites who were stronger and better armed than Israel.

"From Ephraim were those whose roots were in Amalek. After you, Benjamin, with your peoples, from Machir rulers came down and from Zebulun those who bear the recruiters staff. And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; as Issachar, so was Barak sent into the valley under his command; among the divisions of Reuben there were great resolves of heart. Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, to hear the pipings for the flocks? The divisions of Reuben have great searchings of heart. Gilead stayed

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beyond the Jordan, and why did Dan remain on ships? Asher continued at the seashore and stayed by his inlets. Zebulun is a people who jeopardized their lives to the point of death, Naphtali also, on the heights of the battlefield." (v14b-18)

Deborah praises those who fought risking their own lives against the mighty which included the giants of Amalek, who seemed to constantly be fighting against Israel. Deborah praises Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir (son of Manasseh), Zebulun, and Issachar.

But Deborah mentions the tribes that did not fight. Deborah sang that the men of the tribe of Reuben must search their hearts as to why they did not fight for Israel. The trans-Jordan tribes (those that settled on the east side of the Jordan River) did not fight, they remained in Gilead. The tribe of Dan remained on their ships and did not fight, neither did Asher.

Deborah makes special mention of the valiant efforts of Zebulun and Naphtali who risked their lives in battle.

"The kings came and fought, then the kings of Canaan fought in Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; they took no spoils of silver. They fought from the heavens; the stars from their courses fought against Sisera. The torrent of Kishon swept them away. That ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon." (v19-21)

The kings of Canaan came to fight against Israel, but they did not win and take away spoils of war, like silver. God fought for Israel from heaven and He used the stars and heavens as His weapons to wage war against Sisera. God caused the Kishon River to overflow and sweep the Canaanites away in defeat, tumbling their chariots and rendering their great advantage useless.

"O my soul, march on in strength! Then the horses hooves pounded, the galloping, galloping of his steeds. Curse Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, Curse its inhabitants bitterly, because they did not come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." (v22-23)

Deborah expressed that her own very soul fought with all its might through prayer and the encouragement and even prodding of others. Deborah cursed Meroz, which is a village in Issachar/Naphtali who did not come and fight with Israel against the Canaanites.

"Most blessed among women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; Blessed is she among women in tents. He asked for water, she gave milk; she brought out cream in a lordly bowl. She stretched her hand to the tent peg, her right hand to the workmen's hammer; she pounded Sisera, she pierced his head, she split and struck through his temple. At her feet he sank, he lay still; at her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell dead."(v24-27)

Deborah blessed Jael greatly for murder of Sisera, the great Canaanite general. Deborah clearly and in plain language describes exactly how Jael killed Sisera and Deborah blesses her bravery and guile in making Sisera feel safe in her tent before she killed him.

"The mother of Sisera looked through the window, and cried out through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarries the clatter of his chariots? Her wisest ladies answered her, Yes she answered herself, Are they not finding and dividing the spoil; to every man a girl or two; for Sisera, plunder of dyed garments, plunder of garments embroidered and dyed, two pieces of dyed embroidery for the neck of the looter?" (v28-30)

Sisera's mother was so confident of his victory that she imagined he was taking so long in coming home because he was enjoying the bountiful plunder of his victory. She imagined that he was enjoying young girls and plenty of beautifully dyed and embroidered garments. But that was not the case.

"Thus let all Your enemies perish, O Lord! But let those who love Him be like the sun when it comes out in full strength." (v31)

Deborah here prayed and prophesied that all of God's enemies would be defeated the way that Sisera was defeated. This chapter ends with the statement that, following this decisive victory over the Canaanites, the land had rest for forty years.

Judges 6:1-6: Oppression Against the Israelites

After their victory over the Canaanites and the land resting for forty years, the cycle of apostasy – punishment- deliverance is repeated because the children of Israel did evil in the eyes of God. They worshipped idols and forgot God's commandments. Perhaps after God had given them victory over the Canaanites, they were faithful in their worship to God, but that faithfulness did not last. The consequence of Israel's sin was that God handed them over to the Midianites for seven years. Each year for seven years the Midianites, the Amalekites, and people from the east would come upon the Israelites land like a plague infecting and destroying the land. These people would come each year at harvest time in so great a number that they were like locusts descending upon the land. They would

come with their camels and their tents and there were so many of them they were beyond counting. They would destroy the produce of the earth, leave the land desolate as far as Gaza, take the sheep and the ox, and threaten the very lives of the Israelites.

So, when the Midianites descended upon the land, the Israelites would retreat to the caves and hide themselves in dens in the mountains. This invasion happened every year for seven years, leaving the Israelites starving in utter poverty. The Israelites became impoverished and suffered and cried out to God for relief.

POINT:

The oppression headed by the Midianites was also aided by the Amalekites and the children of the east, nomadic groups from the Syrian Desert.

Judges 6:7-10: God Sends A Prophet

God heard the cries of the Israelites and sent a prophet to preach to the Israelites. This prophet was a man, (the Bible does not tell us his name) who preached the following message: Thus says the Lord God of Israel: *'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. Also I said to you, I am the Lord your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But you have not obeyed My voice.'*

The job of the unnamed prophet was to bring the Israelites to repent over their unfaithfulness to God.

First the prophet reminded the Israelites of how God delivered them from their inescapable bondage of Egypt, which God had accomplished by miracles and wonders. Second, God also wanted to bring the Israelites into total recognition of what happens to them when they turn from God to false gods. They were to recognize their sinful behavior, repent and turn back to God in worship. Then God would deliver them.

Judges 6:11-14: The Angel of the Lord Visits Gideon

After God sent the prophet to Israel, the Angel of the Lord came and sat down under the terebinth (oak) tree which belonged to a man named Joash the Abiezrite of the tribe of Manasseh. Gideon* was hiding from the Midianites in the winepress where he was threshing wheat secretly to keep it hidden from the enemy.

NOTE:

*The name Gideon (he who cuts down) means "Destroyer," "Mighty warrior," or "Feller (of trees)." God chose Gideon, a young man from an otherwise unremarkable clan from the tribe of Manasseh, to free the people of Israel from Midian and to condemn their worship of idols.

POINT:

Normally wheat was threshed (grain separated from the wheat stalks from the useless outer shell called chaff) in an open area on a threshing floor by oxen pulling threshing sledges over the stalks where the wind could blow away the lighter chaff when the farmer tossed the beaten wheat into the air.

The Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said, *'The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!'* When the Angel of the Lord said that the Lord was with Gideon what he meant and what Gideon understood him to be saying is that he was a man against whom no one could stand and he would have success wherever he went.

Gideon, under his present circumstances, found this statement hard to believe. Gideon said, *'O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.'*

He had questions and failed to see how God was going to work through him. The angel of the Lord told Gideon, God has sent you to go out in the strength that God has given you to save Israel from the hands of the Midianites. *'Have not I sent thee?'* (God Himself is speaking).

NOTE:

Although God promises us the tools and strength we need, we often make excuses too, like Gideon when called to serve in specific capacities. We serve God for man's sake. In doing this, He gets us ready to serve Him first so we can serve man.

SUMMARY:

Forty years' rest followed the work of Deborah. Then the people fell again into evil ways, and for seven years suffered the cruelest oppression at the hands of Midian. God sent the prophet to tell them where the real problem was. It wasn't that the Midianites were so strong; it was that Israel was so disobedient and Israel thought the problem was the Midianites. It is human nature to blame others for problems that we cause. The message of the prophet also shows that when Israel cried out to the Lord, they didn't understand that they were the problem. Their cry to God for help did not mean that they recognized or repented of their sin.

Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press (rather than on an exposed threshing floor) in order to save it from the Midianities. While the Angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak (terebinth) tree... 'The Lord is with thee, thou mighty (strong, powerful, great) man of valor' (courageous, brave, fearless, bold). God called Gideon what he would become, certainly not what he was at the time of this encounter. Just as Abraham's name meant "Father of many nations." Cephas or Peter meant "Rock." Our God is an awesome God...while others look at us and see our flaws and failings; God looks at us and sees our possibilities (in Christ).

In short, God recognizes in Gideon something that Gideon does not see himself. He thought so little of himself, and was so filled with doubt and unbelief, but God was patient with him. God sees our potential for what we can become, as He works in our lives. Gideon is a great encouragement to people who have a hard time accepting themselves and believing that God can make anything out of them or do anything with them as an unexpected leader.

APPLICATION:

Don't sell yourself short for what God can or will do in and through your life if you are willing to submit to the Refiner's purifying fire and the Master's touch! Remember that God does not save us and use us for what we are but for what by His great mercy and grace we may become. He is in the business of taking "nobodies" and transforming them by His presence. He begins with us where we are, be it in the winepress or on some mundane job, etc. He knows our weaknesses, our faults, our shortcomings but He does not say "If you get those things out of your life, then I'll be able to use you." He takes our inadequacy and transforms them into His adequacy. He takes our shortcomings and develops them into over comings. God has a way of seeing beyond our fears and frailty. Allow Him! Don't spend time making excuses, instead spend it doing what God wants!