

October 12, 2025 (Lesson 6)

UNLIKELY VICTORS: DEBORAH AND GIDEON

1. **Deborah: Judge and Prophetess** (Judges 4:1-23)
2. **Gideon: Commissioned to Rescue Israel** (Judges 6:11-16)
3. **God Gives Miraculous Victory** (Judges 7:1-22)

Central Truth: Through faithfulness to God, even the unlikely are empowered to do His will.

Focus: Observe God's use of unlikely people to accomplish His purposes and determine to follow His call.

Evangelism Emphasis: The Holy Spirit empowers believers to witness for Christ.

Golden Text: "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Do you ever wonder if the Lord can use you? You may feel like you do not have the gifts or talents to be an instrument in God's hands. Perhaps you feel you don't have the education, experience, or ability required, but this is not true. Anyone who is faithful and obedient can be used of the Lord, even to do mighty works of God. Our lesson this week demonstrates this truth.

In the period of the Judges—from the death of Joshua to the coming of King Saul—Israel had many deliverers. If we count Eli and Samuel, there were fifteen judges during this period. They came from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. The two we will consider this week are especially noteworthy. They illustrate how God can use any person who will surrender to Him and follow His will. Deborah seems an unlikely candidate for leadership because women were not often allowed to lead in ancient times. Gideon was an unlikely leader because he was full of insecurity and self-doubt. But, as we shall see, the Lord used both of these individuals to accomplish great things for Him.

1. DEBORAH: JUDGE AND PROPHETESS

A. Deborah's Call (Judges 4:1-9)

⁴ And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

⁶ And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the Lord 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? ⁷ And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand. ⁸ And Barak said unto her, If

thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go. ⁹ And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kadesh.

After Ehud died, Israel again rebelled against God. The Lord then gave them into captivity to Jabin, a king of the Canaanites. “Jabin” was probably a royal title used by generations of kings. Jabin ruled from the city of Hazor, north of the Sea of Galilee, not far from the waters of Merom, now called *Lake Hula*. This city had been captured by Joshua (Josh. 11:10-13). However, it did not take long for the Canaanites to rebuild Hazor and establish it as a major stronghold. For twenty years, Jabin ruled the Israelites, especially the central and northern tribes. This was God’s punishment for their rebellion.

Jabin had an impressive army commanded by a man named *Sisera*, who lived some distance from Hazor in “Harosheth of the Gentiles” (Judg. 4:2). The reference to “Gentiles” probably indicates a city of mixed population. Apparently, Sisera ruled the city of Harosheth. He was likely another king who was allied with Jabin and administered their combined armies. Verse 3 states Sisera commanded nine hundred chariots of iron. A chariot is a powerful instrument in battle and gives a definite advantage when fighting. The number *nine hundred* may seem large, but this is historically validated. In an Egyptian record from 1468 BC, Pharaoh Thutmose III boasted of conquering his Canaanite enemies and taking 942 chariots as spoils.

Jabin oppressed Israel “mightily” (v. 3), referring to great force, violence, or harshness. The affliction of the people was worse than what they had previously experienced. In response, they “cried unto to the Lord”—the same language used of the Israelites’ cries in Egypt many years before. As happened with the Egyptian bondage, deliverance would come from the Lord.

At this time, a woman named *Deborah* was a judge and a prophetess. She made her headquarters in the hills of Ephraim, at a location known as “the palm tree of Deborah” (v. 5). At the Lord’s

direction (see v. 6), she called for a man named *Barak* to take charge of Israel's men and deliver Israel from bondage. Deborah was in a position of spiritual and civic leadership, and she initiated the military campaign against Jabin. For a woman to be used in this way was unexpected, but God can use anyone willing to be used for His glory.

Deborah's prophetic word to Barak (vv. 6-7) detailed a masterful military strategy. Barak was to do three things: (1) Call Israel to war; (2) gather at Mount Tabor; (3) engage Sisera in the Kishon River basin. As we shall see, this latter move would prove to be of great significance. Barak reacted with hesitation; he was uncertain in himself. Considering the strength of Sisera's forces, this seemed natural. Yet, he recognized the authority with which Deborah had spoken. He declared he would go only if she went with him. Deborah said she would go, but the honor for the victory would go to a woman. This would happen, but in a surprising way.

A Godly Woman

The fact that I am a woman does not make me a different kind of Christian, but the fact that I am a Christian makes me a different kind of woman.—Elisabeth Elliot

B. Israel's Victory (Judges 4:10-23)

¹⁰ And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

¹⁵ And the Lord discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet.

¹⁷ Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

²¹ Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

Barak gathered 10,000 men to Mount Tabor, mostly from Naphtali and Zebulun (v. 6). Sisera heard of the gathered forces and moved to meet them. Barak led his army from Tabor and engaged Sisera near the Kishon river. There Sisera was soundly defeated. Two factors brought about victory for Israel. First, the Lord “enticed” Sisera to battle at the Kishon. This region is mostly swamp land. Sisera’s horses and chariots likely became bogged down in the muddy terrain. Second, the Lord himself fought against Sisera and defeated him (vv. 14-15). In Deborah’s post-victory song of triumph, she pictures the heavens themselves opposing Sisera (5:20). It is ironic that Sisera, commander of a chariot army, had to flee the battlefield on foot (4:15).

Sisera sought refuge in the tent of an ally, Heber the Kenite. The Kenites were a nomadic people, wandering throughout the region. Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, was a Kenite (v. 11). Thus, there were family ties with Israel. However, the Kenites were also allied with Jabin (v. 17), so Sisera thought he would be safe there. Heber’s wife, Jael, welcomed Sisera with apparent hospitality. Indeed, her service surpassed his wishes. He asked for water; she gave him warm milk. She gave him a place to rest and covered him with a blanket. She also agreed to his request to guard the tent opening so he would be safe. Now exhausted from battle and flight on foot, he fell into a deep sleep.

Then occurs one of those events in Scripture that is hard to comprehend. Jael picks up a tent peg and a hammer. She was probably familiar with them. Among ancient nomads, like the modern-day Bedouin, the wife took care of erecting the family tent. Jael stealthily approaches the slumbering Sisera, places the peg against his temple, and drives it through his head into the ground. The act is brutally violent, but this was a brutally violent age. It also violated the normal practices of hospitality, in which a guest must be protected at all costs. Yet, her act was accounted as a heroic act by Deborah, and Jael was considered “blessed” (5:24).

With the defeat of Sisera, all his forces are in disarray. Barak's army pursues all survivors and utterly wipes them out (4:16). Then all the rest of Jabin's forces are subdued and destroyed (vv. 23-24). Hazor itself is razed. This occurred in the later twelfth century BC. Hazor would not be rebuilt until the time of Solomon (1 Kings 9:15) centuries later.

§ *In verse 14, how did Deborah express her confidence in God? How can we have such confidence?*

2. GIDEON: COMMISSIONED TO RESCUE ISRAEL

A. Gideon's Questions (Judges 6:11-13)

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. ¹² And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. 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.

Once again Israel turned away from God and served false gods. This time they were worshipping Baal and Asherah (see Judg. 6:25). Apparently, the Israelites were mixing the worship of Jehovah with the worship of Baal. Such a practice is called *syncretism*, and it would plague Israel throughout its history. The account of the Judges should serve as a warning to us today, for we live in an age when people mix Biblical faith with superstition, the occult, Eastern mysticism, and a host of New Age practices.

As had happened before, God punished them through subjugation to a pagan nation. This time the oppressors were the Midianites. Midian was a region of the Arabian Desert, east of Moab and Ammon. They were a nomadic people. They were also distant relatives of the Israelites, being descendants of Abraham through his second wife, Keturah (Gen. 25:1-6). They were also likely some of the ancestors of modern Arabs. Being nomadic, the Midianites did not settle in the land;

rather, they conducted strategic raids on Israel during each annual harvest season. This practice added insult to injury. Israelite farmers would labor to raise crops, and then their enemies would swoop in and destroy it all. The Midianites were joined in these raids by the Amalekites, longtime foes of Israel. These raids left Israel impoverished, probably on the verge of famine (see Judg. 6:1-6).

As had happened before, the Israelites cried out to God, and He responded. First, He sent a prophet who rebuked them for their idolatrous rebellion (vv. 8-10). Then He called a deliverer who would overcome the Midianites—Gideon. Gideon was an Abiezrite, a rather insignificant clan in the tribe of Manasseh. Gideon lived in Ophrah, a town located west of the Jordan River.

The call of Gideon came through an announcement from the Angel of the Lord (vv. 11-12 NKJV). The Angel of the Lord appeared many times in the Old Testament and spoke as God himself (see Gen. 16:7-12; 22:11-12; Ex. 3:2; Judg. 2:1-4). Some scholars think this was a special messenger who acted in God's behalf. However, it is more likely the Angel of the Lord was actually God himself (Jesus in angelic form).

The Angel found Gideon in a wine press threshing grain. Normally wheat was threshed out in the open, often on a hilltop. This was done so the wind could blow away the chaff. However, Gideon didn't want the Midianites to find him and destroy his wheat. So he threshed in a winepress, an enclosed space usually located at the bottom of a hill. The Angel declared God was with Gideon and called him a "mighty man of valor" (Judg. 6:12). Gideon's first response was a question: "If God is with us, why are we suffering like we are? Where is the miracle-working God we have heard about?" (see v. 13). Good questions. In the natural, it seemed God had forsaken His people.

Ordained by God

In the Bible, it's whether you're filled with the Holy Spirit, whether you're anointed by God, whether you're called by God, whether you're obedient to Him. I want to be those things.—Anne Graham Lotz

B. The Lord's Promise (Judges 6:14-16)

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? ¹⁵ And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. ¹⁶ And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

The Angel then tells Gideon God will deliver Israel through Gideon himself. He has already called him a “man of valor.” Now he tells him he should deliver Israel in “his might.” Gideon's response is somewhat comical. Basically, he says, “What valor? What strength?” He points out that he is no great hero. In fact, he is from a lowly family in a lowly tribe, and he is low on the totem pole in his father's house. In today's language, Gideon says, “Who, me? I'm a nobody. God can't use me!”

But Gideon's response does not deter the Angel. God is going to deliver Israel through Gideon. This is a promise. But how can this be? How can God use this insecure, cowardly, backward man to lead an army against the huge masses of Midian (see v. 5)? There are several factors in play here. First, God says, “Am I not sending you?” (v. 14 NIV). The call of God upon Gideon will enable him to emerge as a hero. There is an old Quaker saying: “If God bid thee ride, He will provide thee a horse.” When God calls us, He will equip us for the task. Second, the Lord says, “I will be with thee” (v. 16). None of us can do anything on our own (see John 15:5). But when God is with us, there is nothing we cannot do. His call and His presence ensure victory.

There is one other thing to consider. Why would the Lord call this insecure person “a man of valor” and speak of his “might”? Could it be that God was speaking of Gideon's potential? He saw

Gideon for what he could be. He spoke about the man Gideon would become. This should give all of us hope. God doesn't see us just as we are. He sees us for the potential He has placed within each of us. He looks with a visionary gaze on who we will become in Him.

When the time came, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon" (Judg. 6:34). The original Hebrew literally says the Spirit of God was "put on Gideon," even as a person puts on a coat. Gideon was enveloped by the Holy Spirit. He then blew a trumpet and called the northern tribes of Israel to rally together (v. 35).

§ *Why must we not use our background as an excuse for not doing exploits for God?*

3. GOD GIVES MIRACULOUS VICTORY

A. Gideon's Three Hundred Men (Judges 7:1-7)

² And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.

⁷ And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.

The men of Israel responded. About 32,000 men gathered in the Valley of Jezreel, one of the most fertile and productive regions in Israel. This valley has been the scene of many battles throughout history. The future battle of Armageddon will take place in this valley. The Israelites camped on the southern edge of the valley, at the foot of Mount Gilboa, near the well (or spring) of Harod (v. 1). *Harod* means "trembling" and may refer to the shaking fear the men felt at the prospect of facing the Midianites. The Midianites were camped about four miles away near the hill of Moreh, on the northern edge of the valley. They probably came to this valley to raid the rich farmlands located there.

The men of Israel had reason to be afraid. The Midianites present in the land were a huge mass of people. They are compared to a plague of locusts (6:5) covering the ground. They also had large

numbers of camels, very useful for both raiding and fighting. This might be the first mention in history of mounted camels being used for warfare. In other words, they were a mighty force capable of easily winning a battle.

Gideon probably looked at the men he had under his command and wished for many more. However, the Lord saw things differently. God told Gideon, “You have too many men” (7:2 NIV). The Lord said He would give Midian into Gideon’s hand, but He did not want anyone to think it was a natural victory. Israel should not say, “Look what we did!” God instructed Gideon to tell anyone who was afraid to leave. Can you imagine Gideon’s thoughts? He certainly wished most would stay, but 22,000 departed.

The Lord tells Gideon there are still too many. God wants to make sure it is obvious that it is *He*, the Lord, who is winning this victory. Gideon is instructed to take the men down to the water and watch how they drink (v. 4). By this method, the Lord is going to indicate who should remain. Gideon watches as some of the men kneel to drink the water. Others remain standing, lapping the water like a dog. Apparently, they scooped the water up in their hands to drink, possibly indicating they remained alert and wanted to keep their guard up. The men who knelt were vulnerable. Whether this explains things or not, God said those who lapped water like a dog were to remain; the rest could leave (vv. 5-6). There then remained three hundred men. God declares, “By the three hundred men that lapped I will save you” (v. 7).

This account illustrates a Biblical principle: God doesn’t need great numbers, mighty people, or sophisticated means to accomplish His purpose. He is able “to save by many or by few” (1 Sam. 14:6).

God’s Shoe Salesman

Edward Kimble taught young men in his church. He wasn't a great orator or famous preacher, just a Sunday school teacher. One day he was led to visit a class member. Kimble went to the shoe store where the youth worked, shared the Gospel, and the young man accepted Christ. This was none other than Dwight L. Moody, one of the greatest evangelists of the nineteenth century.

B. Trumpets, Pitchers, and Swords (Judges 7:8-22)

¹⁵ And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian. ¹⁶ And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. ¹⁷ And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do.

²² And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Bethshittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abelmeholah, unto Tabbath.

Gideon was still Gideon, full of doubts and questions. So, once again, the Lord assured him of victory. This time He used a dream given to a Midianite soldier (Judg. 7:9-14). Receiving this assurance caused Gideon to worship the Lord. Now feeling confident, Gideon roused his three hundred men and prepared them for the battle.

He divided the men into three groups, a strategy used several times in Israel's history (Judg. 9:43; 1 Sam. 11:11; 2 Sam. 18:2). He gave each man three items: a trumpet, a pitcher, and a torch. The trumpets referred to in this text were ram's horns. Such horns were commonly used in ancient times for a variety of purposes, including calling to worship, gathering people together, and going into battle. Inside the earthenware pitchers they were to carry a flaming torch. They were instructed to follow Gideon's lead and shout with him.

Gideon placed the three companies of men around the Midianite camp (Judg. 7:18). Even though they were few in number, they would be surrounding the enemy. They positioned

themselves during the middle watch of the night (probably between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m.) At Gideon's signal, they blew the trumpets. This itself would have been frightening. Normally only a few members of an army would have trumpets. To be awakened to the sound of three hundred trumpets all sounding at once would have been terrifying. The men then broke the pitchers, adding to the noise. This revealed the flaming torches inside. Any Midianites stumbling from their tents would see bright flames surrounding their camp, but this was not the end. Suddenly, the valley was filled with the exuberant cries of three hundred men shouting, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon" (v. 18)!

The Midianites must have felt a huge army had come to attack them. They immediately panicked. They "ran, and cried, and fled" (v. 21). To add to their panic, God caused them to become so confused that they attacked one another (v. 22). Those who were not killed by their own brethren then raced to get away. Gideon rallied the men of Israel in pursuit and vanquished their enemies.

\$ *How is God's providence seen when Gideon enters the Midianite camp (vv. 13-14)? Why should this encourage us?*

VESSELS OF GOD'S GLORY

Think of the people we have studied in this lesson. Deborah was a woman called to be a leader in a male-dominated society. Barak was a solid leader, but one who struggled with insecurity and hesitation. Gideon had an inferiority complex and low opinion of his own abilities. All three faced personal challenges. All three could have been failures in life. Yet, all three were mightily used of the Lord. God is not bound by our limitations and failings. If we will obey, follow, and trust Him, the Lord can use any of us. Like the pitchers in the hands of Gideon's men, we can be vessels for His glory if we place ourselves in His hands.

Daily Devotions

- M. Equipped by God (Exodus 4:1-7)
- T. God Overpowers the Enemy (Esther 9:1-10)
- W. Called and Commissioned to Service (Jeremiah 1:1-10)
- T. Set Apart for Service (Galatians 1:11-17)
- F. Walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25)
- S. Use the Gift You Have Received (1 Peter 4:7-11)