

Bible Reading Schedule The Golden Thread

April 24 – Judges 4

The story of Deborah is an interesting story because it shows what happens when people choose to not trust God and fully cooperate with God's plan. Israel has once again fallen into judgment because of their idol worship, and God speaks to Deborah because there seems to be no men who are willing to be Godly leaders of Israel. In that culture and in that day, for a woman to be leading Israel and acting as its judge, was very unusual and it said a lot about the state of affairs in Israel. You can see the lack of willing leadership on the part of men in the man who was called by God to lead but refused to. His name is Barak, and through Deborah, the prophetess, God promises to deliver Sisera, Israel's oppressor into Barak's hands. All Barak has to do is act—obey God. But Barak refuses to cooperate with God's plan unless Deborah goes with him. As Deborah agrees to go with Barak, she tells Barak, in verse 9, that the normal honor due to a victorious commander will not go to Barak but will go to a woman instead. As you read the story it becomes clear who the gets the honor. It is indeed a woman and her name is Jael. She is the one who puts Sisera to death.

Each of us is called by God to do certain things in the world we live in. We are saved to serve. We are given opportunities to glorify Christ and share in that glory. If we refuse to do what God has called us to do, it doesn't mean that God's plan will not be carried out, but it does mean that we will miss out on the blessing of being part of that plan.

Isaiah 55:10-11 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Through Christ we are invited to be part of God's plan to take the good news of the Gospel to the world around us. If we sit back and do not do our part, God will raise up someone else to do it.

April 25 – Judges 6: 1 – 16

By the time Gideon enters Biblical history, things have deteriorated tremendously in Israel. Because of their idol worship they are now being oppressed by Midianites. The Israelites are forced to live in caves, their food is being plundered and the army of the Midianites is so vast that it seems as if they are like swarms of locusts devastating the land. Everywhere you look in Israel, there is a Midianite raiding and plundering. Israel needs a deliverer, and God chooses Gideon—a most unlikely choice. Look how Gideon describes himself in verse 15: “How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh (Gideon’s tribe), and I am the weakest in my family.” God picked a 98 pound weakling to deliver Israel! God always works through the humble to carry out His plan, because that way God will get all the glory that is due to Him.

The same is still true today. We are called to be humble because God works through the humble.

1 Peter 5:5-7 All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he reminded them of what they were before Christ came into their lives.

1 Corinthians 1:26 - 2:1 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

The same is true for all who desire to be saved and to serve Christ, we must recognize our weakness; we must come humbly to him and ask for his forgiveness and his strength in our lives. But we also must remember that even though we come to Christ in weakness, his power fills us and gives us strength.

Philippians 4:13 *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

Just as small, weak insignificant Gideon would be able to defeat the mighty Midianites through the strength of God, we too can do whatever Christ our savior calls us to do, because it is not in our strength that we work, but his.

April 26 – Judges 7

Yesterday we saw Gideon's weakness and how that weakness and humility was the basis for God's choice of Gideon to be Israel's deliverer. Because of Gideon's weakness he would have to trust God and God alone would receive all of the glory. Now as Gideon gets ready to move forward and lead Israel in battle against the Midianites, God moves again to make sure that God alone will get the glory.

In an effort to be faithful to do what God had called him to do, Gideon raises a large army of 32,000 men. Even an army this large seemed to be no match for the Midianites whose army was so vast that in verse 7 we are told that it was impossible to count how many of them there were, but there were so many they seemed like swarms of locusts. But in God's eyes an army of 32,000 was still too big, so God gives Gideon several different ways to whittle down the size of his army. Before Gideon knows it, his army is down to just 300 men. Can you put yourself in Gideon's shoes, and think how he must have felt? He was already fearful of leading the Israelites, and now he would have to do it with just a tiny army of men. But understand why God was doing this. Look again at verse 2. God wanted Israel to know that He alone was the one who would save them.

Psalm 33:16-18 *No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. ¹⁷ A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. ¹⁸ But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unflinching love,*

Even at 32,000 men, Gideon's army was still no match for the Midianites. If Gideon and Israel were to be victorious it would only come by way of God's hand. The same is true for us. Most of the time we are oblivious to how powerful our enemy Satan is, but Peter characterizes Satan as a powerful lion just waiting to pounce on us.

1 Peter 5:8 *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

No matter how strong we think we are, we are no match for Satan, we need God to fight for us, and we should always be sure to give God all of the glory for our spiritual victories.

Galatians 6:14 *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

Gideon's victory over the Midianites only came as he humbled himself and allowed God to work through him. Our victory over Satan only comes as we humble ourselves and allow the power of the cross to work through us.

April 27 – Judges 13

Samson was born in a miraculous way. Verse 2 tells us that Samson's mother was considered to be sterile and unable to conceive a child. But then an angel appears to her and announces that she will indeed give birth to a son, and tells her that this son will be born for a special purpose—to deliver Israel for her oppressors. By now maybe you have already made this connection, but do you see the similarity to Jesus' birth? In a sense it was impossible for Mary to conceive. She was in a state of total disbelief when the angel came and told her that she would give birth to a son, because she had never been with a man.

Luke 1:26-34 *God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." ³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"*

From birth Samson had been set apart to be used by God to be Israel's deliverer. In the same way, Jesus was set apart from birth to be our deliverer.

Matthew 1:20-21 *But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*

The name Jesus means Jehovah (Yahweh) is salvation. From the moment Samson was conceived he was set apart to deliver Israel from the Philistines. In the same way from the moment Jesus was conceived he was set apart to deliver salvation to us and deliver us from our sins.

April 28– Judges 16

Yesterday, we considered how Samson and Jesus had both been called from birth to deliver their people from the oppression they faced. Today, we will see how differently they each lived out that call on their lives. You know the sad story of Samson. Judges 16 is just a sample of the way Samson lived out his calling. Samson never truly lived up to his calling or to the promise of being Israel's deliverer. For Samson life seemed to be a game to play—a constant testing to see how much he could get away with. Think how different Samson and Jesus are in the way they lived out their callings. Samson seems to be always be focused on a good time, having his needs met and being comfortable. Jesus, on the other hand, was concerned at all with the comforts of life.

Matthew 8:20 *Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."*

Samson was more concerned with what he wanted than he was with what God wanted. Jesus lived his whole life concerned with just one thing—doing the will of the Father.

John 6:38 *For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.*

How different these two deliverers were. Which one are we more like—Samson or Jesus? Are we seeking our own comfort ahead of God's will? Are trying to live our lives on the edge of obedience like Samson did, or are we seeking to completely obey the will of the Father like Jesus our savior?

Romans 6:15-18 *What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

In a very real sense, Jesus was a slave to the will of the father, because he willingly gave up his rights, so he could do what God had sent him to do. Through Christ we have been set free from the power of sin, but we have been set free to serve the one who set us free.

April 29– Judges 21

In Judges 19 and 20 we read the sordid and sad tale of how the men of the tribe of Benjamin mistreated a Levite and his wife as they visited in one of the towns belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. Because of this incident, the other 11 tribes of Israel went to war against the tribe of Benjamin to seek justice for the way the woman had been defiled. Many from the tribe of Benjamin died because of the battle between the Israelites and the tribe of Benjamin. It was so bad that the tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped out. To keep that from happening the other tribes of Israel devised schemes by which the men who remained from the tribe of Benjamin might be able to go and get wives for themselves. That is what we read about in Judges 21. But perhaps the most telling thing in this chapter is found in verse 25. “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.” The last verse of the Book of Judges is in many ways the theme verse for the whole book. Throughout the book of Judges Israel is constantly being led off into sin, by their own evil desires, which results in judgment and God’s discipline. Without a king—a strong ruler, Israel was prone to fall into sin. The same is true for us. Without a strong king to lead us, rule over us, and subdue us, we too will constantly fall into cycles of sin which lead to God’s judgment in our lives. That is why we so desperately need Jesus—our great king.

Jesus sets the pattern for how we should live our lives.

Philippians 3:7-17 *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have*

lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ **Only let us live up to what we have already attained.** ¹⁷ **Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.**

But as our king, Jesus not only sets the pattern for how we are to live, he also gives us the power to live in a way that is pleasing to God.

2 Peter 1:2-8 *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. ³ His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

April 30 – Ruth 1

Because of the deaths of their husbands, Naomi, Ruth and Orpah are in a desperate situation. In that culture at that time, a woman without any man in her life was put in dire financial circumstances. Men were the ones who transacted business and made money. It was hard enough for Naomi that her husband had died, but when her two sons also die it means there is no means of financial support for her and her daughters-in-law. Because of the financial distress that Naomi is facing she decided to return to her hometown of Bethlehem. The custom of her day would have had her two daughters-in-law go with her, because they

had become part of Naomi's family through marriage. But Naomi offers, and then implores them to stay in their homeland and find new husbands and start a new life. Initially both daughters-in-law decide to accompany Naomi back to Bethlehem, but as they begin their journey Orpah decides to go back, and leaves Naomi and Ruth. But for no other reason other than love and loyalty, Ruth continues on by Naomi's side and says, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried." And then Ruth confirms her promise by making an oath to Naomi, "May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." As we will see over the next few days this is a life changing decision for Ruth, but it is also a beautiful picture of God's covenant loyalty to us.

Just as Ruth voluntarily bound herself to Naomi through an oath, God voluntarily binds himself to us through an oath.

Hebrews 6:16-19 *Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. ¹⁷ Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁸ God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.*

This passage in Hebrews is referring back to the promise and the oath that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, and 17, but the writer of Hebrews makes it plain that it applies to us as well. God's covenant loyalty to us is the anchor for our souls, because it holds us fast to him.

But before we leave this, let's notice one more thing. Ruth promised to follow Naomi even to her death. That is the ultimate covenant loyalty. It is again a picture of God's covenant loyalty to us. To keep the promise that God has made to us through Abraham, God sacrificed himself (Jesus). To keep God's promise, Jesus died the death we deserved to die, so that we might live and have that hope as a n anchor for our soul firm and secure. That is why we can have the utmost confidence in all of God's promises especially this one:

Deuteronomy 31:6 *Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.*