

Imperfect Leaders

The Judges in the Old Testament of the Bible led Israel from the death of Joshua to the first king, Saul. Well over 3,000 years ago these men and a woman led Israel to victory over their enemies. Some of them were prophets as well and some of them were generals. They also settled disputes between individuals and groups. They were the precursors of the kings who took over those functions when Samuel, the last judge and prophet, handed off to Saul and then to King David.

Of the 15 Judges in the Bible who judged Israel between c. 1374 – 1075 B.C., One did not serve by the will of God, One was a scared boy, One was a woman, One was left-handed, One was a womanizer, One was a failure as a father and One was illegitimate, killed his own daughter and led in a civil war. In those days most of these traits or circumstances were considered to be a serious handicap.

Let's take a brief look at The first four Judges:

The First Judge, Othniel, was the nephew of Caleb. Caleb and Joshua himself were the only 2 of the older generation that left Egypt under Moses to enter the promised land. They were the two spies of the 12 spies who believed that the Israelites could be victorious over the former inhabitants of the land so they had to wait a generation before they could enter the promised land. They were the two positive believing persons out of an estimated 3 million people. Othniel married Caleb's daughter, his cousin, and became the first judge. As a result Israel lived in the land at peace for 40 years, or one generation. He established the pattern of the Judges in Israel that would last about 300 years.

The Second Judge, Ehud, was next. It is specifically mentioned that Ehud was a left-handed man. There was a lot of superstition in those days about left-handed people. This kind superstition went on for many centuries. The latin word for 'right' is 'dexter.'" The latin word for 'left' is 'sinister.' That tells it all. However, Ehud used his distinctiveness to an advantage. In a private meeting with an enemy king he wore his knife sheath on his right thigh. He drew the knife with his left hand and killed the enemy king and safely exited the meeting. This was considered a great victory. It is said that even in the present century a left-handed fighter, or boxer, has the advantage over a right-handed one because the right-handed fighter does not expect the sudden strong blow from the left-handed man. It is estimated that left-handed people constitute about 12% of the general population.

The Third Judge, Deborah, was the only woman judge. She was a prophetess and she "judged Israel." There is no explanation or excuse given for this. It was God's prerogative. She was not a "co-judge" with Barak, he was her battle leader and he professed openly to following her. (Judges 4:8, The Bible) When Deborah prophesied that their enemy General Sisera would die at the hand of a woman many thought that she was speaking of herself. But she was actually speaking about a woman named Jael who drove a tent peg through Sisera's head when he entered her tent expecting safety and sex.

Even in the intensely patriarchal culture of the Old Testament, when God wants a woman to lead he will make it happen. Since Jesus came women should be respected as equals. Their functions

in the family and home may be different from that of a man, but she is no less important. In society and business women should be recognized for what they can do.

The Fourth Judge, Gideon, was God's great general and tactician. He started as a fearful young man threshing wheat in a winepress so that the enemy would not find him. An angel told Gideon that he was mighty and he believed it.

First he burned all of his father's idols. This started quite a furor. God encouraged Gideon with the miracle of the fleece, and then as he spied in the enemy camp he heard them express their fear of the Gideon.

Gideon recruited an army and came up with 32,000 volunteers. God showed him how to cull out the unfit soldiers. First, he told the fearful to go home, this left him with 10,000 men. Over two thirds were too afraid to fight. Then he watched the men as they drank, those who fell face first into the water he sent home because they did not remain watchful while they drank. This left only 300 men.

Then God showed Gideon a battle strategy. They lit oil lanterns and covered them with earthenware vessels. Carrying the hooded lights in one hand, they carried trumpets in the other hand and shouted, blew the trumpets and broke the pots covering the lights.

Somehow the sounds of the shouting and the trumpets and the lights so disoriented the enemy that they broke ranks and fled. Gideon's men chased them down and won the victory.

How do interpret this battle strategy?

First, fear is always to be challenged. As David later said, God will deliver us from our fears, both the causes for the fears and the fears themselves.

Second, while we are meeting our own needs we should remain watchful.

Third, we must fight negative forces with God's strategy.

Gideon's trumpets represent speaking out against wrong. Gideon's lamps represent showing the inner light of God.

The broken light covers represent allowing our humanity to be seen because it is then that the light shines through. There are no supermen or women. But the light of God within Christians cannot be put out. Letting our humanity shine through does not mean acting cruel or hateful. It simply means that our "yes" mean yes, and our "no" means NO. And we will enforce our No by all means available beginning with the gentlest and increasing to our strongest. When the light of God causes evil to flee we should pursue.

In the 2016 Presidential elections in the United States there was much dithering about finding the right candidate. For many from both sides of the aisle the eventual winner was not good enough

for the job. He is an imperfect leader. God has used imperfect leaders in the past both in spiritual and political posts.

And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, of Jephthah, of David, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. (Hebrews 11: 32 – 34.)

There were 15 judges in all who led and ruled for about 300 years. Of the 15 some were the only judge in their time and some overlapped with another judge in a different part of the country. Of the 15 we will consider the eight most prominent Judges who have the most information recorded in the Bible, 4 per letter in a two letter series.