

Message #25**Deuteronomy 20:1-20**

A few years ago, I had the privilege of traveling to the west side of Turkey to see places that are in the Bible. It was a fascinating experience. But when we were in Turkey, just a few hundred miles east of us was a Turkish military guarding the border from the Iranians and the Russians. So we were in Turkey as a sightseer on the west side and others were in the same country as soldiers on the east side.

It seems to me that many people of God are living life here on earth as if they are just sightseers. As some travel through life they just seem to look around to see what they can see. But when we check the Biblical record, we are not here as sightseers, we are supposed to be here as soldiers and it is expected we will be good soldiers who will fight a good fight and wage a good war.

Israel was on the verge of crossing the Jordan and entering the Promised Land that God was going to give that nation. But as Warren Wiersbe said, "The Jews weren't entering Canaan as sightseers but as soldiers prepared for battle and expecting God to give them victory" (*Be Equipped*, p. 157).

Now whenever a nation goes to war, there are rules of war and if one does not abide by the rules of war, one may be subject to war crimes. According to war rules, civilians are not to be targeted; essential things people need for survival are not to be destroyed and the sick and wounded are to be treated and helped.

Now most Christians today don't realize they are in war. Although I think more believers are waking up to this reality. Like it or not we are in war. This is a world of great conflict when it comes to God's world and will. We are to be warriors who have courage and conviction and control.

What we see here is this:

GOD EXPECTS HIS PEOPLE TO FIGHT A GOOD FIGHT AND WAGE A GOOD WAR BY FOLLOWING HIS GUIDELINES FOR VICTORY AND BLESSING.

There are many N.T. passages that inform us we are in a warfare battle - II Cor. 10:3-4; Eph. 6:10-18; I Tim. 6:12; II Tim. 2:3-4; 4:7. We too need the word of God for we too are in war.

There are some very specific guidelines that God sets forth for His people who are about to enter the Promised Land.

GUIDELINE #1 – Do not be afraid when you are outnumbered; know God is with you. 20:1

God's people will face enemies. They may be personal, political, financial or spiritual. But God's people will face enemies. Those enemies at times will appear to be bigger and stronger.

God says, “**do not be afraid of them FOR/BECAUSE the LORD your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you.**”

There is no question that Israel would come up against intimidating enemies as they would enter the Promised Land. They had horses and chariots and huge numbers of trained soldiers. God says when you face those kinds of enemies, do not be afraid because I am there with you and I will give you the victory.

David said, “Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the LORD our God. They have bowed down and fallen, but we have risen and stood upright” (Ps. 20:7-8).

God has challenged His people and wants His people to fear Him, not some enemy. So what we must do is go to work on fearing the Lord and let God take care of the enemies.

When you face some major threat, you keep your focus on your relationship with God and leave the threat to Him.

GUIDELINE #2 – A God-appointed spiritual leader is to address the people before battle.
20:2-4

This is important to see because the first person God wanted to address the people before they went to battle was a spiritual leader, not a military leader. He will have a military leader address them, but He starts with the priest.

Before they went to war, God wanted the priest, who was the spiritual leader, to address the people. Priests were not experts in war, but they knew God and they knew the word of God. They could pray for them and they could encourage them.

Now this was not some emotional rah rah speech to be given by just any religious leader; this was a speech that was to be presented by a God-appointed priest.

The priest is to appear before the people and address them with the following words:

- 1) Hear O Israel. **20:3a** - this message is for God’s people only.
- 2) You are approaching a battle against your enemies **20:3b** - you are facing conflict.
- 3) Do not be fainthearted. **20:3c**
- 4) Do not be afraid. **20:3d** - don’t fear numbers or weapons or chariots
- 5) Do not panic. **20:3e**
- 6) Do not tremble before them. **20:3f**

It is still the job of a minister to challenge the people of God not to be afraid, not to panic, not to tremble, but to trust God.

Now the priest who is talking to these people is to present four reasons why not to be afraid:

Reason #1 - Because the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. **20:4a**

Reason #2 - Because the LORD your God will fight for you. **20:4b**

Reason #3 - Because the LORD your God will fight against your enemies. **20:4c**

Reason #4 - Because the LORD your God will save you. **20:4d**

In other words, you will win.

GUIDELINE #3 – The military officers are to address the people before the battle. **20:5-9**

Now the officers are to address the people and amazingly are to present a lessening of numbers message.

When you typically think of going to war, you naturally think the bigger the numbers of soldiers the better. You would not want the officers to tell you we are going to lessen our numbers categorically so we will actually be fighting with less numbers and not more.

Most present the idea that we have overwhelming numbers on our side so our victory is guaranteed. God says I want to lessen the numbers based on four deferments.

The people who went to war were to be men, not women.

Some commentators have pointed out that when you are about to go into battle, you do not want to go with those preoccupied with something else. You also do not want to go into battle with those who manifest fear because that can affect the entire operation.

When you step out by faith to do something for God and you have a bunch of people around you who are too afraid to step out by faith, they can discourage the rest of the group. So God said there are some people I want to go home.

There were four different deferment categories that the officers were to present to the people as to who was to go home and not fight:

Go Home Category #1 - If a man had built a new house and had not dedicated it yet, he was to go home and not go to war. **20:6**

A man who had never had a chance to live in his new house was to go home and dedicate it and live in it. Notice the reason; he could die in battle, not having lived in the home. So in battle there would be people who would die.

God says it is not right for a man who has never lived and dedicated his own home to go out in battle and get killed and then another guy who didn't even build the home comes in and takes it over.

Go Home Category #2 - If a man had planted a vineyard and had not yet harvested and used the fruit, he was to go home and not go to war. **20:7**

A man who had planted a vineyard, but had not even harvested and tasted the fruit was to go home; otherwise someone else may end up with his fruit without doing the work to get it.

Go Home Category #3 - If a man was engaged to a woman and had not yet married her, he was to go home and not go to war. **20:7**

If a man was engaged to a woman, but had not yet married her, he was to go home; otherwise he might get killed in battle and some other man would end up marrying his fiancé.

Go Home Category #4 - If a man is fainthearted or afraid, he is to go home and not go to war. **20:8**

God said when you go to war you do not want fainthearted people who are afraid because he might make a negative impact on the other soldiers. So any who were fainthearted or afraid should go home and not go to battle.

This is why you want to be careful who is on your board. This is also why you must be careful in a congregational meeting.

Now someone might say what kind of military strategy is this? It is God's strategy. He doesn't need big numbers to win.

Remember the story of Gideon? God dropped his army number from 32,000 to 300 (Judges 7:3, 7-8). After God dropped the numbers, He dropped the Midianites and Amalekites. God doesn't need big numbers; He wants faithful, fearless people who are good soldiers.

It is a fatal mistake to push the wrong people into service. It can be devastating to the entire work of God. We must depend on God to provide the right person for the job because to push someone into some responsibility they should not have can be a very serious warfare blunder.

GUIDELINE #4 – The military officers are to appoint commanders as head of the people. **20:9**

After the numbers had been whittled down, the officers were to appoint commanders and captains and put them over the various troops.

God wanted organization and order. So God will fight battles, but there is to be authority and order in the ranks of the battles.

GUIDELINE #5 – When one approaches a distant city for battle, offer terms of peace. **20:10-12**

God is a God who offers mercy and redemption before destruction. If any person would willingly surrender to His sovereign will and submit to His word, he would be saved.

When God's people came to a city that was far removed from the immediate Canaanite area, they were to offer a peaceful solution to the people:

Solution #1 - If the people agree to let you have the city and not fight, then all the people shall be your forced labor and shall serve you. **20:11**

Solution #2 - If the people don't agree to a peaceful solution, then you shall attack it and take it. **20:12**

Keep in mind that these people in these cities are godless and they are up against God and God is still giving them an opportunity to live.

GUIDELINE #6 – When God gives you victory over distant city enemies, you are to follow God's warfare rules. **20:13-18**

Rule #1 - All the men are to be executed. **20:13**

Rule #2 - All the women, children, animals in the city are yours. **20:14**

Rule #3 - These rules are to be followed for far away cities, not nearby cities. **20:15**

Rule #4 - Do not leave anything alive. **20:16**

Rule #5 - You are to utterly destroy the people God commands you to destroy. **20:17-18**

Moses lists six nations here that were to be destroyed:

- 1) Hittites
- 2) Amorites.
- 3) Canaanites.
- 4) Perizites.
- 5) Hivites
- 6) Jebusites

God says the reason for this total destruction is so that they do not end up teaching you to do detestable things and lead you to sin against God.

GUIDELINE #7 – When you are engaged in a long war to take a city, do not destroy fruit trees.
20:19-20

God expects His people to be disciplined in warfare. You don't destroy trees that bear fruit. God's people don't need some "green deal" to cause them to realize the importance of things in the environment like trees. We have God's word.

The trees did not sin against Him, the people did.