

## IN RESPONSE - DIVINE GUIDANCE, PART II

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This lesson on Divine Guidance speaks to three ways in which the Bible is improperly used. In continuing on this negative course, I am not rejecting divine guidance altogether. What I am rejecting is the search for ongoing special revelation. Since the Bible has been given to us in completed form, we are not to look for *revelations* outside of the Bible.

But because the Bible is a book inspired by the Holy Spirit, some well meaning but mistaken people believe they can use the Bible in a mystical fashion. Somehow this book is to be used differently than other books. My response is both yes and no. No! The Bible is a book. It is therefore to be interpreted as a book. The revelation of God has been given to us in the form of words put together in understandable propositions. From this perspective the Bible is *not* different.

Yes! Because the Bible is *the* book of God, we should work all the harder to properly interpret and understand it. If a high school history text book is worth studying and understanding, the Bible is of infinitely greater value because it is the Word of God! And so we must take great care in our study and use of the Bible.

You have no doubt heard of people allowing the Bible to fall open and picking the first verse to which their finger comes. This false use of the Bible is an effort to find a “special word from God.” It is a seeking after special revelation. As I go to my Bible now it falls open and my finger comes to Isaiah 54:2, “Enlarge the place of your tent; Stretch out the curtains of your dwellings....” I interpret this to mean I am to buy a larger house. That may sound good. But it is *not* the Word of God to me. Isaiah 54:2 means something far different! We are not to use the Bible in this way to seek guidance!

In seeking divine guidance, we may falsely apply narratives in the Bible. For example, who of us has not heard of the process of putting out a fleece. I have even heard people say they are “fleecing the Lord.” And what they have in mind is the sign of the fleece used by Gideon. The story is given in Judges 6:36-30:

Then Gideon said to God, 'If Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken, behold, I will put a

fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken.' And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water. Then Gideon said to God, 'Do not let Thine anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground.' And God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.

What is wrong with following Gideon's example. What is wrong with proposing our own “fleece” before the Lord? Several things should be noted here. First of all, *God had already spoken to Gideon* in a concrete way (Judges 6:14). Gideon acknowledges this two times in the section quoted. Now when people I know talk about putting out a “fleece,” they are seeking a “word from the Lord.” The situation is *not* one where God has already spoken! And so the desire to follow the example of Gideon in putting out a “fleece” breaks down before it gets started!

Second, the fleece of Gideon confirms the already known Word of God. Such is not the case in modern efforts to “fleece the Lord.” In the latter case there is a desire for a “word from the Lord” which will give the needed guidance. The parallel again breaks down.

Third, Gideon's action in putting out a literal fleece was really not an act of faith.

Gideon's faith was not constant; it knew moments of uncertainty as well as heights of greatness. The patience of the Lord was remarkably shown in this section in which Gideon twice sought confirmation of the challenge presented to him. The Lord very graciously accommodated Himself to Gideon's request, understanding fully the frailty of human nature.<sup>1</sup>

It seems that Gideon realized that since God had already spoken, his request is a token of his lack of faith. “He found his own faith weak and wavering, and therefore begged of God by this sign to perfect what was lacking in it.”<sup>2</sup> Usually, when a person today puts out a “fleece” it is thought of as an act of faith. The person believes God will speak and offer the requested guidance. And so the parallel with Gideon again breaks down.

Fourth, Gideon knew he could incur the wrath of God for His request. “Do not let Thine anger burn against me,” he says as he puts out the fleece a second time. It would seem that Gideon knows he is pushing God! Again we see a drastic distinction between the fleece of Gideon and the contemporary “fleece.” Far from thinking that he may be pushing God, a person putting out a “fleece” today has no suspicion that he may be open to the wrath of God for his actions. To the contrary this is a supposed but mistaken effort to be faithful to God.

Fifth, we may ask if we can expect God to be so gracious as to accommodate Himself to us as He did with Gideon. We must remember that we live in the day of the *completed* Bible. Gideon did not enjoy such a full and complete revelation of God. It would therefore seem to be more presumptuous on our part to be seeking further special revelation from God when He has already been so gracious in giving us His written Word. The parallel with Gideon fails at this point too! For these reasons, we must not assume that *all* of the conduct of Old Testament saints, like Gideon, is normative for us today.

Another example of the improper use of Scripture is seen when an individual text of the Bible is taken out of its context. I have heard Dr. Jay E. Adams call this phenomenon *plaqueosis*. And he facetiously wonders if there would be money in contextual wall paper. The problem with wall plaques is that we too easily take the quoted verses out of their proper context and rob them of their precise meaning. And we are then lead astray!

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Judges and Ruth* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), vol. II, p. 163.

A good example is Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." It is possible for me to take this text as assurance for a business venture. I am doubtful because of the sheer size of the venture. I am reminded by a friend of this great Bible truth. And I take this text as my "business venture verse." And so I launch forward with renewed confidence that, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Then my business venture fails. I literally lose everything. I placed trust in God and His Word *but* God did not keep His Word.

Interestingly enough, God has kept *His* Word. The context of Philippians 4:13 shows that Paul is talking about contentment:

I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

The wonderful words of Philippians 4:13 refer to learning contentment in the circumstance of life brought by God. Such contentment can be learned! And the circumstances may include a business failure! The problem in our example is not with the Bible as the means of divine guidance. The problem is the improper use of the Bible!

Next time: an example of direct guidance which must be deduced from the Bible; and an answer to the question of what we do when there is no direct reference in the Bible to guide us. Stay tuned!

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