

JUDGES

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Judges chapter 7 as we continue our study through the Word of God. Here in Judges chapter 6 through chapter 10 verse 5 the focus is the central region of Israel that has been affected by compromise, idolatry, a falling away from God. And specifically, in Judges chapters 6 through 8 the focus is on the fifth Judge in Israel, Gideon.

And last time we saw God call Gideon when he was hiding out from the enemy, threshing grain in the winepress and God said to him, “**The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!**” Judges 6:12. And I am sure Gideon looked around to see who the Lord was speaking to, it couldn't be him, could it? And it was and once Gideon realized this he made all kinds of excuses why he couldn't deliver Israel from their bondage at the hands of the Midianites. For seven long years they have been stealing their crops after Israel had harvested them and now God wants to do a work and Gideon was unsure.

Well, finally Gideon took a stand and submitted to God's will. He destroyed the altar of Baal and the wooden image that not only were the people of Manasseh worshipping but even his own family! Gideon was able to gather 32,000 men to fight with him against the Midianites. Now that might not seem to bad until you consider that the Midianites had 135,000 men of war to fight against Israel according to Judges 8:10. That means Israel was outnumbered 4 to 1! Not great odds but it is possible that they could win this battle if they fought hard enough and had a sound battle plan!

Now, as we move into Judges chapter 7 tonight, God is going to change the odds a little. But, interestingly enough it will not be in favor of the children of Israel. At least it will not look good from a human perspective. And as we will see, God will have His reasons for doing this. With that said, let's begin reading in Judges chapter 7, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word and look at this fifth Judge in Israel, Gideon!

JUDGES 7

VERSES 1-3

1. Picture in your mind what is going on here. At the well of Harod, which is located at the foot of Mount Gilboa were Gideon and his 32,000 men. The Midianites were about 4 or 5 miles away at the foot of the hill of Moreh. Both armies are preparing their men and then the Lord tells Gideon, "Son, hold on a minute, you have too many men!" "A, Lord, I think you have that all wrong. They have too many men, so take away some of their men and let's even up the score here!" I don't know about you, but I would look at it like that. But do you see that this is purely from a human perspective, if God is going to do something, it will be for good no matter how bad it may look now. He is working and we need to trust and walk by faith!

2. So the Lord tells Gideon to ask how many of his men are fearful and all those that are fearful can go home. And the Lord is just re-instructing them of what He said before they even entered the Promise Land back in Deuteronomy 20:8, **“The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, ‘What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart.’”** You see, where there is fear there is no faith and that can spread to the other men. Thus, if they were fearful they were not to go into battle. Now please understand that I believe this is more than being nervous or unsure. It was a paralyzing fear that caused them not to walk and the Lord did not want them in the battle!

Now I’m sure Gideon thought he might lose a few men here but these are his soldiers, fighting men, the majority will stand strong. And then 22,000 soldiers went home in fear! “Lord, not a good move here! Yes, I know, where there is fear there is no faith but if there are no people then there is no army!”

3. Why in the world did God do this to Gideon? It is simple, even with the 32,000 men they could have claimed the victory and the glory would go to them instead of the Lord. It is as we are told in Psalm 33, **“No king is saved by the multitude of an army; A mighty man is not delivered by great strength. . . . Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and our shield.”** Psalm 33:16, 20. You see, the Lord is going to show them that it is not because of them that they will be victorious and He will show them by whittling down the number of soldiers even more. You see, it is **“ . . . ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the Lord of hosts.”** Zechariah 4:6. If you truly believe that then numbers will not matter even if the odds are 14 to 1 against you!

4. I like what John Wesley said, “Give me a hundred men who fear nothing but sin and love nothing but God, and I will shake the gates of Hell!” I agree!

VERSES 4-6

1. I think this is kind of funny here. Before the Lord told Gideon that all who were fearful could go home and 22,000 left. So maybe Gideon’s thinking, “Okay Lord, tell me who you are sending home this time. Maybe all those wearing cheese heads will go home, I can fix that. Just let me know and I will take care of it. They can eat those cheese heads but no more are going home!” And you know what, the Lord doesn’t tell him who are going home this time. He says to just bring the men down to the water and all those who get down on their knees and drink separate them from those who lap water out of their hands. After that the Lord will decide or tell Gideon who is going home and who will remain for battle!

2. Now can you imagine what is going through Gideon’s mind here? “Okay Lord, we might be able to do it with 9,700 men. Send those 300 home and lets get started!” Not yet, there is some confusion in Gideon’s thinking or at least in what he was hoping for!

VERSES 7-8

1. So Gideon's army went from 32,000 to 10,000 and now he is down to only 300 men! He went from odds of 4 to 1, and then to 14 to 1 and finally 450 to 1 against them! Why did God send those 9,700 men home? Because they were not paying attention when they were drinking water but the 300 cupped the water in their hands and were aware of what was going on around them. That could be the reason and it could be as simple as the Lord only wanted 300 men!

2. Wood makes this application for us today. He wrote, "The thought is disturbing, but it may well be true, that the composition of God's army to fight Satan's hosts in any day is really little different. How many Christians are so fearful of the enemy that they are of no real use in this warfare, and how many of the remainder are so self-centered, rather than God centered, that they find little place for effective ministry."

You see, we can be too big for God to use us but not too small. If you think too highly of yourself, you will not be looking to the Lord. But if you know it is beyond your ability, you will look to the Lord. Paul was brought low so that God could use him mightily. In II Corinthians 12:7-10 we are told, **“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”** That is the perspective we need to have. Strong in the Lord, but we are nothing apart from Him! For Gideon, all he had to trust in was the Lord for how can an army of 300 men defeat an army of 135,000 men!

VERSES 9-11

1. You have to love God's grace and mercy that He extends to Gideon here. The Lord just eliminated most of Gideon's army, he lost 31,700 men and now his army is down to just 300 men! Thus, the Lord is going to strengthen the faith of Gideon, who was fearful at this point. The Lord not only tells Gideon that they will be victorious, but He sends Gideon into the enemies camp with his servant Purah because Gideon was fearful, to hear what the enemy is saying about this soon to come battle. It is out of this Gideon will be strengthened!

2. Folks, God calls us to do things that seem way out of reach for us but He doesn't leave us there. The Lord will guide us; encourage us so we can walk by faith! He will stretch our faith and He will help that faith to grow. Even with the doubts and fears we may have, God will comfort us and lead us so that we can press on, move forward!

VERSES 12-15

1. Israel, because of the oppression they were under, they were seen as nothing and this is portrayed in the dream that one of the Midianite men had and he was telling his buddy about. He dreamed that this loaf of barley, which was the poor man's bread, it was insignificant, rolled into the camp of the Midianites and destroyed them. As Gideon and Purah continued to listen, the other man said, “. . . **'This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp.'**” Judges 7:14.

Obviously this is the hand of God that not only gave this man the dream and his buddy the interpretation of that dream, but it also strengthened the faith of Gideon! When God is working it draws His people into worship, as we see here with Gideon. And it also pumps them up you might say. Gideon is ready for battle and he is encouraging the people to, “. . . **'Arise, for the Lord has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand.'**” Judges 7:15.

VERSES 16-18

1. Now it seems like Gideon came up with this battle plan all on his own. He divided his army into three divisions. He gave each man a trumpet and a pitcher with a torch in it and then they are to follow what Gideon does. Okay, not a great plan, they don't even have a sword with them as far as we know. Folk's, Gideon did not come up with this plan. How do I know that? Because we are told in Judges 6:34 that “. . . **the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon.** . . .” Judges 6:34. Thus, Gideon was Spirit lead in a very natural way and that is how God works many times!

VERSES 19-20

1. Here is the timeframe of the battle. The middle watch was about 10:00 pm (first watch 6-10 pm, middle watch 10 pm - 2 am, morning watch 2-6 am). And so most of the enemy was sleeping, and the army of Gideon is all around them, split up in three divisions. And so when Gideon blew his rams horn, all his men where to do the same. Then they broke their pitchers making this loud startling noise. And when they took their smoldering torches out of their pitchers and waved them in the air, the embers would burst into flame. They then shouted “**The sword of the LORD and Gideon.**” And please notice who gets first billing you might say here, it is the *LORD, YAHWEH!* That is the way it should always be folk's! And as this took place, all this noise and light brought mass panic and confusion within the camp of the enemy, as we shall see.

VERSES 21-22

1. Now keep in mind that these 300 men don't have a sword as far as we can tell. But the enemy was so confused by the noise and the light that they started killing each other, as they thought the enemy was within their camp. And Gideon and his men defeated around 120,000 men, while 15,000 tried to escape according to Judges 8:10. Remember the dream that the Midianite had, and how it was interpreted that the Lord and Gideon would defeat the Midianites and thus, they were ready to fight, the only problem was they were fighting and killing each other! Thus, it was the Lord who gave them this victory because at this point the men of Israel, the 300 of them, did not even draw one sword!

2. Now here is something that I think we can glean from this for our own lives. Paul tells us in II Corinthians 4:7, **“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.”** And listen to how The Amplified Bible puts this verse, **“However, we possess this precious treasure [the divine Light of the Gospel] in [frail, human] vessels of earth, that the grandeur and exceeding greatness of the power may be shown to be from God and not from ourselves.”**

You see, it is only as we are broken before the Lord that we can shine for Him. If we think it is about us, if we are proud, then what others will see is the darkness of our heart and not the light of Jesus. But again, if we are broken, it is then that the light of the gospel will shine forth from our lives!

VERSES 23-25

1. Now Gideon calls for reinforcements to go after the 15,000 remaining soldiers. Was this a lack of faith on Gideon's part? Not at all! Yes, God did start the work but I believe He is now going to work through not only the 300 men but also the other men from the other tribes that joined in this battle to defeat the enemy. In fact, Gideon is listed in that section in Hebrews called the hall of faith, where other men of faith are listed and thus, Gideon was a man of faith, not perfect and I believe here he acted wisely! And as we will see, he started out well but he finished the race of faith weak!

2. We also see the 2 princes of the Midianites, Oreb, which means, "raven," and Zeeb, which means, "wolf," being captured and killed by the men of Ephraim. God blessed the men of Ephraim in this battle.

JUDGES 8VERSES 1-3

1. Isn't it interesting how jealousy and pride almost hindered the work of God here. Yes, Ephraim was a strong tribe, especially when compared to Manasseh and thus, they start to complain. "Why didn't you call us sooner? Don't you know who we are? Don't you know how strong our men of war are?" And Gideon could have let them have it. He could have told them, "Hey look here, God wanted a mighty man of valor and he called me not you, so back off!"

We might do something like that but Gideon didn't! He tells the men of Ephraim that what they did far outweighed what he has done. God delivered the princes of Midian into their hands, Oreb and Zeeb! And thus, the gleaning of Ephraim is better than our whole harvest! Gideon wisely dealt with this contention before it got out of control and because of the words he spoke the work of God was able to continue on as Ephraim accepted what Gideon had said. They were no longer angry with Gideon. Folk's, it is as Proverbs 15:1-2 tells us, "**A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, But the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness.**" A good lesson for us to learn!

VERSES 4-9

1. These 300 men of Gideon are in pursuit of 15,000 of the enemy. And they come to Succoth and Penuel and ask for food. They did not ask them to join the front lines in this battle, but to just help the men out, they were hungry. But they refuse to give them food, but why? Because they were not sure who was going to win this battle and thus, just in case the Midianites win, they don't want to side with a loser. But Gideon pronounces judgment upon them. He knew that God had delivered the rest of the Midianites into their hands and thus, once they are victorious over them he will come back and will deal with the leaders of Succoth and Penuel, he will teach them a lesson.

2. Folk's, as discouraging as that must have been for Gideon, the same can be true as we are serving the Lord and the resistance we face from our friends as we do. Instead of helping us they become a hindrance to what we are doing for the Lord. But don't give up. It is as Paul said in I Corinthians 15:58, "**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**" The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, "**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be firm (steadfast), immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord [always being superior, excelling, doing more than enough in the service of the Lord], knowing and being continually aware that your labor in the Lord is not futile [it is never wasted or to no purpose].**" Keep moving forward, don't give up because as you serve the Lord your work is not in vain, God is doing something even though we might not see it yet!

VERSES 10-12

1. Here is an important lesson we see here in the life of Gideon. He didn't give up! God called him to a work, it was not finished, and he forged on till the enemy was destroyed. It also shows his faith that what God had promised Gideon, this victory against the Midianites, and He was going to bring it to pass as long as Gideon was willing to walk by faith! It is as Paul admonishes us in Philippians 3:12-14, "**Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**" May we press on!

VERSES 13-17

1. As Gideon finishes his defeat of the Midianites, he goes back to the cities that refused to help Gideon and his men by giving them food to eat as they were hungry from the battle. And Gideon told them that after he defeats the enemy, he would be back to punish the leaders in these cities. The leaders of Succoth he whipped or scourged them with thorns and briers, and many feel that this was so severe that these leaders died. And the leaders of Penuel, he goes after them and they are hiding in a tower for safety and Gideon brings down that tower killing these men. The place they ran to for safety end up being the place of their destruction!

VERSES 18-21

1. Here we see these two guys, Zebah and Zalmunna, Midianite leaders still around. And Gideon is questioning them about his brothers that were killed, if they had anything to do with it. It does not seem like this took place in war but was an random act of violence, they were oppressing the children of Israel and Gideon's brothers got in the way and they killed them. Thus, Gideon was going to do the same to them, as Deuteronomy tells us he was to do as the avenger of blood, **“But if anyone hates his neighbor, lies in wait for him, rises against him and strikes him mortally, so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities, then the elders of his city shall send and bring him from there, and deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you.”** Deuteronomy 19:11-13.

2. Now this is interesting because Gideon tries to get his son to kill these men but he refuses because he was afraid. We don't know how young he was but this did play a role in his actions or his refusal to kill these men. Why did Gideon do this? To be a leader and have a youth kill you was shameful, that may have been the reason. But, in any case, since the lad wouldn't do it, these two men knew they were going to die, they deserved it and told Gideon to get on with it and Gideon did just that and killed them!

3. One more point here. Notice that they took the “**crescent ornaments.**” What is the symbol for Islam today? It is the crescent moon. Folk’s, this is not a new religion started by Mohammad; it goes way back in time. Mohammad only tweaked it you might say, made it a monotheistic religion instead of worshiping many gods. It was trouble back then and it is still trouble today!

VERSES 22-23

1. The people wanted to make Gideon and his descendants after him king, a kind of perpetual kingship coming from the lineage of Gideon. Thus, this desire in Israel to have an earthly king started very early on and by the time we get to Samuel, it reaches its peak and they demand a king like the other nations. In I Samuel 8:1-9 we are told, “**Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice. Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, ‘Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.’ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, ‘Give us a king to judge us.’ So Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day — with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods — so they are**

doing to you also. Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them.”

They asked for it and they got it but in the end it was not all they thought it would be!

2. Samuel, like Gideon wanted the people to see that it was the Lord that needed to rule over them and not a man. But like today, many look to a man to make a change and in the end, it is not the change they were looking for because the best of men are men at best. And yet, to let the Lord rule is far better, there is nothing better than that! Just as the Lord was king over Israel, He needs to be king in our life!

3. Now here is the thing with Gideon. He said the right words but his actions didn't reflect what he said. He told the people he did not want to be their king and yet that is how he lived. His words may have been very humble, but his actions were definitely not! Let's read on and you will see what I mean.

VERSES 24-26

1. When you total it all up, Gideon received over 50 pounds of gold besides the robes of the kings they killed! He had amassed quite a fortune here. And yes, he served the Lord but now he was living at a level he shouldn't have been living. How can I say that? Because he was living like a king, the position he said that he didn't want to have because the Lord was to be the king in Israel. Folks, may our words match up to our deeds!

VERSE 27

1. This was not a linen ephod that the priests would wear, but this one was made of gold.

Why did Gideon do this? We are not sure but some speculate that the tabernacle was in Shiloh, which was located in Ephraim, those troublemakers that were complaining before. And thus, maybe Gideon wanted some prestige, wanted to show the people of Ephraim that he had a gold ephod and this was not only a snare to him and his family but also the people of Manasseh!

2. In Exodus 20:25 we are told, “**And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it.**” God wants the focus and the worship to be about Him and not the object that was made or the person who made it. Let me give you an example of what I mean and how people today are still playing the harlot with God.

There is this ancient statue of St. Peter, portrayed as he gives a blessing and preaches, while holding the keys to the kingdom of heaven and this statue is famous throughout the world. This statue of St. Peter is located at St. Peter's Basilica within the Vatican. Some scholars have attributed it to Arnolfo di Cambio (1245-1302). On this ancient bronze statue, St. Peter has his right toes worn down by centuries of pilgrims who traditionally touch the foot. Not only that, but listen to this article on The Famous Statue of St. Peter. We are told:

There is almost always a crowd of worshipers about this statue. As soon as the devotions, which are continually going on at some one of the many altars, are over, the devotee rises, approaches the statue and kisses the great toe of the foot of the Apostle; after which he softly rubs his forehead against the instep. Several toes have been worn away by this contact of human lips, and have been replaced, and if you will look at the foot carefully you will see that the present toe is considerably worn.

Among the memories of St. Peter's that will, at least, linger longest with me, is one which recalls a crowd of peasants gathered about the statue with rapt faces and upturned eyes, as though they were gazing upon God in heaven. They thronged about it, almost crushing one another in their efforts to kiss the bronze foot. Many of them, in order to secure this inestimable privilege, had walked from twelve to fifteen miles, knowing not where they would find shelter for the night. Standing here in this splendid church, they presented a strange and picturesque appearance, dressed as many of them were, in old sheep and goat-skin mantles, leathern leggings and sandals of hide. In this temple, grander than their wildest dream of heaven's glories, before this bronze statue that, to them, is the veritable Apostle, they evidently forgot the hardships of their rude existence.

Protestants can never appreciate the feeling which this statue awakens in the heart of a true Roman Catholic. Gregory II wrote Emperor Leo the Isaurian: "Christ is my witness that when I enter the Temple of the Prince of the Apostles and contemplate his image, I am filled with such emotion that tears run down my cheeks like rain from heaven."

Let me direct your attention to that quaint, old candlestick with its circlet of angel forms, the whole constituting, in its way, an interesting piece of artistic work.

Also let us not neglect to examine the wall back of the statue of St. Peter. In 1871 the clergy of the Vatican caused a mosaic portrait of Pope Pius IX to be placed there, in commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of his accession to the papal throne, a period equal to the duration of the supposed episcopacy of St. Peter, and which, up to that time, it was firmly believed no Pope could survive. The limits of our vision forbid our seeing the portrait of the Pope, but we can see its mosaic setting covering the wall back of the statue.

- Old and Sold Antiques Digest, The Famous Statue of St. Peter

God was against this in Gideon's day and He is still against it today! We are to worship God only and all this other garbage is idolatry and if you are in it, get out! The things we worship apart from the Lord are foolish, and thus, let us be wise and worship the creator of Heaven and earth, **YAHWEH!**

VERSE 28-30

1. Yes, the land had rest during the days of Gideon for forty years, but spiritually speaking, he was a failure as he was leading his people away from the Lord. Not only was this gold ephod a problem but he had a harem, many wives. The ideal, the rule is one man married to one woman and that is established for us in the book of Genesis! And in the New Testament Jesus expounds on this as He tells us, **“And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”**” Matthew 19:4-6. Jesus takes us back to Genesis to show us what marriage is all about, one man and one woman!

2. And all these children that were born to Gideon from his many wives, 70 in total. And we will see that the one son he had by a concubine in Shechem will kill 69 of them! Did he need any more wives or concubines for that matter? God does not sanction polygamy; it only brings conflict and crisis to families!

VERSES 31-32

1. This is interesting because this son he has with this concubine is called “Abimelech” and it means, “My father, a king.” Hey, I thought Gideon didn’t want to be king? Yes, he did say those words but his actions spoke contrary to what he said! When people look at our lives may they see our words and deeds working together to glorify God!

2. Gideon was a man used mightily by God but over time, he let success, he let riches, he let prominence bring him down. I think Cundall put it correctly when he wrote, “Perhaps it is easier to honour God in some courageous action in the limelight of a time of national emergency than it is to honour Him consistently in the ordinary, everyday life, which requires a different kind of courage.” May we not only start out strong, but also finish the race strong!

VERSES 33-35

1. After the death of Gideon, the people fell back into idolatry and into confusion. In fact Gideon and his children whom they wanted to make as their king, they could care less about. Interesting how the hearts of the people can change so quickly. And what a sad picture we see here. They made Baal-Berith their god. This name means “Baal of the Covenant.” Instead of God being their covenant God, they looked to this pagan god, this worthless idol. What a tragic ending but the people were only following Gideon who went after money and success and women, and thus, the children of Israel went after Baal!

2. We have seen some powerful lessons here this evening, but let me leave you with this. Paul, at the end of his life, as he was preparing to be put to death for his faith, gave these words to Timothy and to us. He said, **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”** II Timothy 4:7-8. May we do that, may we not be like fireworks that have a lot of color and beauty but quickly fade away. May we endure till the end and be an example to those around us of our love for God, not only in words, but also in our deeds, our actions!