

## APRIL 27

### Judges 7:1-8:17

#### Judges 7

This chapter has one of the more well-known stories of the OT. It also gets used for management and discipleship pointers all the time.

Vs. 2-8 Notice how often you find the words, *the Lord said to Gideon*. God was very involved in this action and in guiding this fearful follower.

V. 3 Isn't it interesting that God told Gideon to let the fainthearted go home? The last sentence where it says, *Then 22,000...*, the RSV and Luther say first that "Gideon tested them and then 22,000 returned home." Gideon did as God said and the people left. Humanly speaking, this says something for Gideon's faith in accepting God's way of doing things, considering he was facing a huge army. Later we will see King Saul break faith with God when the people begin leaving him as he is getting ready to face the Philistines. Waiting for Samuel to arrive and sacrifice to the Lord was too hard for Saul. Seeing these 22,000 men leave was just as much a test for Gideon.

I've heard people discuss why the "lappers" were chosen over the "kneelers," and my conclusion is that it had nothing to do with one group being better fighters than the others. God simply wanted the smaller group.

Vs. 9-25 Notice that it was God who told Gideon to go and listen to the dream (nightmare) being explained. The Lord's encouragement of Gideon was very gracious. This was good timing too.

V. 18 When Gideon had the men yell out, *For the Lord and for Gideon*, I think he included himself because of what he heard in the explanation of the dream. The enemy army knew Gideon's name.

Notice that once the victory was given, Gideon engaged the help of the other tribes. Gideon, in a good sense, always seemed to be thinking of doing what he did with others.

Since God was doing this, He didn't need the numbers. Actually, God could have fought this war completely without Gideon. So, why did God need anyone at all? There are some good things for us as disciples here. One thing that stands out to me is that every generation needs to follow God and allow Him to give them their own experiences of grace and deliverance. This event became a testimony to the people, showing them, among a thousand other things, that the Lord loved them and could deliver them if they followed Him. We have the Word that tells us to follow and trust God, but God gives us our individual testimony and stories of His love and power as we trust and follow.

#### Judges 8:1-17

Vs. 1-3 This is a strange event and we'll see this kind of situation again, but not with a happy ending. The tribe of Ephraim seems to have an awful, aggressive spirit. The issue was not that they wanted to help, but they wanted the booty, the goods, materials, money, weapons and livestock they would obtain from the plunder. Gideon is the model of diplomacy. And, in fact, Ephraim was called and they were raking it in. They were saying they wanted to have been called to the initial battle to have obtained the plunder of the Midianite camp. In a few pages, Ephraim will pull this stunt again with a guy who has just "lost" his daughter. Jephthah won't think it is funny and he won't back down.

Vs. 4-9 These Israelite towns guessed wrong. Since Gideon already had the Midianites on the run, these people should have trusted God and helped him. This lack of faith and disloyalty to God and to Gideon would prove fatal for them. If Gideon was known to the Midianites, he was certainly known to his own people. Not to help was the same as refusing to follow the Lord. It

might have been that these towns had seen how many Midianites had retreated, and were now looking at how few men Gideon had. They may have been good at mathematics, but it is always better to side with the Lord and let Him make the final accounting.

Vs. 10-12 Here is where we get the numbers. The enemy began with 137,000 and were reduced now to only 15,000. Gideon personally only had 300 men with him and they were about to clean house. Obviously the victory was from the Lord, in fulfillment of what He had spoken to Moses in the blessings and curses. If Israel obeyed, one man would be able to put a thousand of the enemy to flight. It was God who fought. The people were merely representative and there for clean-up.

Vs. 13-17 Gideon, as a judge, also judged and gave order to Israel.

I guess my thoughts for us as disciples are what I shared above. The stories of others may encourage or inspire us, but what God wants for us is more. As we follow His Word, trusting and obeying Him in the harvest, He gives us our own stories as we see Him do that which only He can do. So many of our stories today come from popular writers and the experiences of the saints of yesteryear. God wants to do things with us in our part of the harvest that testify to His presence with us and His power to transform people. We need to follow as disciples, reaching the lost and making disciples. He will show us it is not by our power, but His. He will receive the glory as we tell others what we have seen Him do.

### **Luke 23:13-43**

Vs. 13-25 Luke makes it clear that Pilate really did try to release Jesus, including a massive "pre-crucifixion" beating to make the Jews feel sorry for Him, feeling that justice had been delivered. The number of beatings Jesus received are, humanly speaking, why He needed help carrying His cross and why He died so soon. The reality is, that if any of us had received those beatings, we would have never been the same and might have died from the wounds. It might have been years before we could have done anything public. We would have never been normal. Here and in John's account, you sense that Pilate was slowly understanding the deep, irrational, spiritual hatred that was flowing through that place.

As disciples we would be wise to remember that this same supernatural, spiritual resistance and hatred are always at work, sometimes even among the saved. Our praying and serving need to be on a supernatural level. Reading books on conflict resolution and honing our communication skills are great ideas, but thinking that we have the wisdom and skill always to succeed is foolish. We will never equal Jesus and Paul, and both Jesus and Paul said that our conflict is spiritual, both in dealing with the world rulers of this present darkness, and with dealing with the spiritually rebellious and depraved nature of men. Jesus was rejected and Paul was hounded by pharisaical believers. Our work in the harvest is no "cake walk," and any advances should be regarded as occasions to worship God for His grace.

Vs. 26-31 Matthew, Mark, and Luke all mention Simon of Cyrene. What is significant here is that as Luke wrote Acts, the influence from Cyrene was seen. The men of Cyrene were some of the first gospel preachers to the Gentiles. And I wonder, like you do, if Simon had some hand in what happened in the spread of the gospel in Acts.

V. 27 This apparently took place when they were putting the cross on Simon. Luke is the only one who records Jesus' words to the women. It seems that His words to them foreshadow the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. The destruction among the Jews would be so severe, that the only women who wouldn't lose a child would be the childless.

Vs. 32-43 In keeping with Luke's interest in God's grace and the gospel, Luke records the salvation of one of the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus. The other writers mention that they both verbally abused Jesus at first, just like all the others did. But in those hours on the cross, as the leaders paraded before Jesus expressing their irrational hatred, it must have dawned

on one of these men what was happening. All that he had heard about Jesus came to mind, and even on the cross, as he witnessed Jesus and the hatred directed toward Him, he believed Jesus was the Messiah. This guy actually understood and believed that Jesus would be coming into His kingdom.

To think, that among Jesus' final words on the cross, there were words of confirming the salvation of a lost person. Even in His death, Jesus was alert to what the Father was doing around Him. This is something for us as disciples to think about as we live and die for Christ in the harvest. Jesus did not wrangle or cry aloud, but His Father used His heart, His silence, obedience and gentleness, even in His death, to convict others.

### **Psalms 97-98**

We don't know who wrote these psalms, but I would think they were written sometime just after David became king, as he was organizing the nation around coming to Jerusalem, to Zion, and to worship. David appointed singers, some of whom had been with him during those long years of running from Saul. They would have known David's heart and spiritual influence and they would have been able to express these influences in worship. Since David was Israel's sweet singer, David may have had a direct hand in writing these psalms.

#### Psalm 97

Vs. 1-5 The earth recognizes that God reigns and it responds. The earth knows how to respond to God when He comes in judgment. Apparently men should do the same.

Vs. 6-7 This sounds like Romans 1:18ff. Interestingly, the heavens (angelic world) proclaim God's righteousness while God's followers witness His glory. Those who worship idols have the IQ of soup, and the demons behind idol worship are subject to God's power.

Vs. 8-9 God's choice to be worshiped in Zion, then and in the Millennium, shows that He is above all creation.

Vs. 10-12 seem to be for His servants and how we, as disciples, are supposed to respond to the Lord. It is interesting here to see the love of the Lord spoken of; but then, it is said that if we really love Him, it will be seen in keeping ourselves from things He hates, and hating them too. Our joy is to be in His deliverance, His light (His Word and the Spirit's leading) and His joy as we follow Him.

#### Psalm 98

Vs. 1-3 This song of joy is for the coming of God in salvation and judgment. Notice how often salvation is mentioned here. And look how often the nations are referred to. This reminds me of Romans 16:26, *but (the gospel) has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith.*

Vs. 4-6 The power of this joy is in proportion to our grasp of the greatness of the Lord and His salvation.

Vs. 7-9 The perspective is clearly that of being completely in love with the Lord. Judgment is only mentioned as being equitable, and His judgment is not to be feared by those who love Him. The real focus is that He will come, and when He does, everything will be complete and everything will rejoice at His arrival. This is a good thing to remember as we work in the harvest and live in a sad, tragic, dying world.

Romans 15:13 *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

There is that joy again and it should be present with us in the harvest.

**Proverbs 14:7-8**

V. 7 seems to complement 8b, in that the wise man seeks God in all the events of life to understand God's way and will for Him. For a wise man, there is nothing that helps him find God's will in the presence of a fool.

Apparently, a fool's own folly looks like the right way for him.