

APRIL 29

So, we are at a landmark. With today's reading, you have made it a third of a year. You have read 100 psalms and you have finished Luke, the last of the synoptic Gospels (summary, parallel accounts), plus you've read the first six books of the Bible. Even if you're behind and your "regular reading" muscles are not yet toned and strong, you've probably done better than you did last year. More importantly, you've given the Spirit lots to work with. You've already had insights and grown stronger in the Lord. But even with some of what you've read (that you think has gone in one eye and out the other), when you don't expect it, a word will come to you or a story will come to mind and you'll see the Spirit giving you insight or leading you in the situation you are in. That's what being a child of God and a disciple in the harvest is all about: growing in Him. All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. And He leads us through His Word and the Spirit.

Judges 9:22-10:18

Judges 9:22-57

Vs. 22-25 There is an expression, "God doesn't always pay on Friday," meaning that He doesn't always pass judgment according to our sense of timing. I wonder what it was like for Jotham to have to wait three years to see God finally work things around like this.

V. 23 We will see this a couple more times in 1 Samuel 16:14 and again in 1 Kings 22:19-23. God judges those who rebel against Him by allowing demonic forces to give them what they want. I'm sure God is doing the same today.

V. 24 God didn't forget what had happened and He included those who supported Abimelech. Since God knows the heart, you can still be guilty without pulling the trigger. It's good to keep your heart cleansed from this kind of guilt.

With all of this betrayal going on, it is interesting that Abimelech seems ignorant of it. He doesn't do anything until he is incited to action by the anger of Zebul (the city's mayor) in v. 30.

Vs. 26-41 This section is ironic in that Abimelech won everything back, but his pride got the best of him. If he had stopped here, he would have had peace, but God knew he would push things to literally bring destruction upon his own head.

V. 38 Zebul (one guy with a funny name) goads Gaal (another guy with a funny name) to take the fight to the open fields. This was a bad move for Gaal.

Vs. 42-57 In the deaths of his brothers, Abimelech had been guilty of irrational violence and arrogance. Now those character qualities will lead him to judgment.

V. 49 Like medieval castles, in the center of the grounds of the castle they had a tower for refuge and defense. It sounds like they started a fire at the base of the tower, or on the roof of the tower or both; and everyone died from the smoke.

Vs. 50-57 The same trick didn't work at Thebez. In God's justice, He guided a woman to throw a small millstone, about the size of a brick, on the troops and she beamed Abimelech. God's justice was complete.

Abimelech was never called a judge. He ruled a part of Israel and by his presence he kept other enemies at bay, but he never brought peace. This story shows the awful condition of the nation. No other tribe sought to correct the murderous injustice Abimelech and the men of Shechem committed on the family of Gideon. This is what being free of God and His Word can do for you. It frees you up to be corrupt.

Judges 10:1-18

Vs. 1-5 The only things I see with these two judges is that Tola was on the west side of the Jordan and Jair was on the east side of the Jordan. Tola probably kept the Philistines at bay until the arrival of Samson. Jair may have kept order until Jephthah arrived. It seems that they were sort of like local heroes to be reckoned with, though it never says who they fought against. Jair was a rich man, like Gideon, with lots of sons and donkeys. I wonder if they had donkey races, and if so, I'll bet they looked funny.

Notice that although these men were judges, it doesn't say that there was a period of peace. You get the feeling that these men were very local and gave peace to the area where they lived. They still accounted for 45 years of bringing a good influence to the land.

Vs. 6-9 The two peoples mentioned here will be the focus of the next two judges. Jephthah will go after the Ammonites and Samson will go after the Philistines; although in Samson's case, it's hard to say he went after anything but Philistine women. He was a judge by arrogance and intimidation only.

Vs. 10-16 Eighteen years is a long time. The people here are finally crying out and they repented. It seems that this time, they understood, as a people, that they were really in trouble and knew that their trouble was because of idolatry. Notice that they willingly put away their foreign gods/idols. Where were the Levites and what, if anything, was happening at the tabernacle in Shiloh?

I wonder how this conversation with the Lord took place. I wonder if the people gathered together at the tabernacle in Shiloh.

Vs. 13-14 God gave the people what they deserved.

Vs. 15-16 The people were genuinely ready to follow God. Now, too, God was quick to move.

One of the benefits of being close to God in His Word and following Him is that we don't need God to use hard times to push us to repentance, obedience and the putting away of idols. We respond to challenges in an entirely different way, understanding that the Lord is moving things in the harvest to open up opportunities or to work some purpose we don't understand. But we don't have to worry that we goofed.

Vs. 17-18 It's interesting that these verses are included today since they really apply to tomorrow. They were looking for someone to lead them. You'll be surprised to see that they find a guy like Abimelech, only much truer to God. Jephthah is another of these judges who knows the stories, but doesn't know the Lord through His Word.

Luke 24:13-53

Vs. 13-35 I don't know who isn't inspired in some way by the story of the guys going to Emmaus. I would have loved to have been there. There is a lot to observe in this account. Have fun.

V. 27 That would have been a great talk to hear. These guys became totally engaged and v. 32 expresses what they were feeling. That still happens if we abide in our Lord's Word.

V. 34 On Easter, many Christians in all countries have a greeting and response when they see each other on Easter morning. One says, "He is risen!" and the other person says, "He is risen indeed." That response is taken from this verse.

We have no record of what happened when Jesus met Peter. We hear about it here and in 1 Corinthians 15, but the details are missing. Apparently Jesus had some very private words with Peter to keep him from giving up after having denied Him.

V. 35 This is a great sentence and I'm sure it has launched many sermons.

Vs. 36-43 This is Luke's "proof" that Jesus was risen and that the disciples were not just having a mass mirage of some kind.

This is the meeting that Thomas missed. I wonder if when Jesus put the fish in His mouth, if the disciples looked to see if it went through Him and hit the floor.

Vs. 44-49 The Holy Spirit had not been given yet, and for the next 40 days, they would need to understand the Word. So Jesus opened their minds. This is exactly what the Spirit does for us. We do not understand the Word for any other reason than that He helps us. Jesus' word to His disciples, to seek and find, apply to our understanding of the Word and God's will. *Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.* (2 Tim. 2:7) Do we really press on to understand until the Lord shows us?

Vs. 50-53 When I read this quick summary, I get the feeling that Luke might not have had the writing of Acts in mind. If he had, I think he would have made a smoother transition between books. The first part of Acts covers this section in much greater detail.

I wonder if Theophilus got this book and said, "Luke, this is great, but you can't stop here. Here, I'll stake you a couple hundred thousand drachma to write the continuing story."

Even beyond the book of Acts, we are the continuing story, following those who have gone before us, following Christ in the harvest while it is still day.

Psalm 100

This is a short, beautiful psalm that has launched a thousand songs.

Vs. 1-2 Notice that all the earth is to praise God, serve Him and come into His presence with singing. It is good for us to remember that sin isn't just what you do, it is also what you don't do. For moral, noble, lost people not to treat God as God is still sin. To give thanks isn't a command as much as it should be an involuntary reaction to Him.

V. 3 This expands on v. 1. He is God our Creator and God our Shepherd. And, we belong to Him. That is not slavery. It is an amazing and liberating life.

V. 4 This expands on v. 2. We are to come to God. Adam sinned and hid. The response of the saved is longing to be in His presence. Does He really get our time? Do we just sit before Him and enjoy Him?

V. 5 It is because of that *steadfast love* and that *faithfulness*, that Christ sought us and died for us while we were yet sinners and enemies of the cross. I'd say that defines God as pretty good.

Proverbs 14:11-12

I wonder if the *way that seems right* is the one that convinces you to make heaven here and live in houses, as opposed to realizing that we should choose to live in tents here and work in the harvest, until the Master calls us in from the fields.

Without the Word of God we are lost and will conjure up our own opinion of God's will or the "right" way. We need our "meds" daily. Without the daily input of the Word in our lives, all of us would stray from His love and His purpose for us in this harvest.