

FOLLOWING WISE LEADERS Sunday School- July 24, 2011

Unifying Topic: LET GOD RULE

Lesson Text

I. Choosing From the Chosen (Judges 7:2-4)

II. Israel's Confidence Strengthened (Judges 7:13-15)

III. God's Leadership Gone Bad (Judges 8:22-25)

The Main Thought: And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian. (Judges 7:15, KJV).

Unifying Principle: When leadership of a community is in transition, the people may abandon wise practices. To whom should the people look for wise leadership? The people should follow leaders who follow God.

Lesson Aim: To teach students that when they follow the directions of God, victory is certain.

Life Aim: To be able to discern the call to leadership.

7:2 And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.

7:3 Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.

7:4 And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go.

7:13 And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along.

7:14 And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host.

7:15 And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.

8:22 And Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.

8:23 And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you.

8:24 And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.)

8:25 And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey.

HISTORY:

Shamgar was the third judge who killed 600 Philistines with an ox goad (**Judges 3:31**). Forty years rest followed the work of Deborah (**Chapter 4-5**), the fourth judge. **Chapter 6** Then the people fell again into evil ways, and for seven years suffered the cruelest oppression at the hands of Midian. They were stripped to abject poverty. God sent the prophet to tell them where the real problem lied. It wasn't that the Midianites were so strong; it was that Israel was so disobedient and Israel thought the problem was the Midianites. God sent a prophet to tell them to turn away from their sin and turn back to God. It is human nature to blame others for problems that we cause. Their cry to God for help did not mean that they recognized or repented of their sin.

After the prophet, God sends an angel to assure Gideon that the Lord was with him. The Lord speaking directly to him commissions him to go save Israel! God would make him strong with might! After hearing Gideon's complaints and questions, the angel proves to Gideon He is the Lord God speaking. Gideon's first task was to destroy the idols (Baal; Asherah) and replace it with the altar for the Lord God, calling it **Jehovah-shalom** (*The Altar of Peace*). He followed God's instructions. However, he was found out to be the one that had destroyed the idols, even though it was done at night. Soon the armies of Midian, Amelek, and others are uniting against Israel. However, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Gideon and he blows the trumpet of war. Now Gideon plays his trump card by asking God for a fleece; proof. He is still not sure God will use him to save Israel. He is still not sure God would deliver the

victory. He asks God twice for proof. And God still gives the proof that Gideon needs to be reassured with. God answered his request twice and really gives him the compassion he needs. **Gideon will be Israel's the fifth Judge.**

Chapter 7:1 Jerubbaal is Gideon's other name. In Judges 6:32, he was given the name after destroying the idols of Baal, meaning "*let Baal plead.*" The idea is that Baal ought to be able to plead for himself if he were really a god. And the fact that Baal was unable to stop Gideon's action implies that he didn't portray himself as a god. An Israelite man had compromised with Baal worship and somehow had convinced the community to follow him. Every detail of Gideon's story is important. Now, **Gideon and the people that were with him rose up early**, and camped **beside the well of Harod**, known as "*spring of trembling.*" And **the Midianites** were across the valley **to the north, by the hill of Moreh**, some four miles away. Thus the scene is set and the time for battle finally is near. Gideon's hastily assembled volunteer army is to be chosen and then sorted out.

LESSON:

Judges 7:2-4 Choosing From the Chosen

7:2 Fearful and trembling Gideon, who must obey at night under the cover of darkness and be constantly reassured by signs and fleeces, now arrives at the well of trembling with his men and the Lord tells him there are **too many men for Him to give the Midianites into Gideon's hands**. Why did God say this? He didn't want Israel to say or think they had won the victory through their own strength; or even to say, they **had saved** themselves. Self-sufficiency is any enemy when it causes us to believe we can always do what needs to be done in our own strength.

7:3 Now there is a process of elimination. And it may seem strange until one understands what was actually happening. First, he asked **whosoever was fearful and afraid to return home**. Out of thirty-two thousand men, **22,000 people returned home and 10,000 remained**. This is the number of men Barak had in Judges 5-6.

7:4 **The Lord said again, there are still too many**. The men are brought to the water where God would sift and separate them. It is not Gideon who is separating them out, it is the Lord. The Lord will choose His army.

[READ THE REST \(vv5-12\)](#)

Judges 7:13-15 Israel's Confidence Strengthened

7:13 Those who follow God must have faith. The opposite of fear is faith. The Midianites are camped just below the Israelites. Gideon and his trusted servant/armor-bearer, Phurah, go at night to the outpost of the Midianite camp (V10). The fact that he went down with Phurah indicates that he was afraid to go alone. Even Phurah's name means foliage, indicating that Gideon was hiding behind his armor-bearer. As they come near the camp, **a man was telling a dream to his friend**. The first said that he had **dreamed about a cake of barley bread which tumbled into the host of Midian and knocked over his tent**.

7:14 Unable to understand the meaning of the dream, his friend gives the interpretation, to which his friend replied, **This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon...for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host**. Nothing will encourage a coward more than discovering that his enemy is afraid of him. The significance of the dream was to convince and reassure Gideon (the barley thresher) that the Midianites were all afraid of him, than him being afraid of them. In this case, both dreamer and interpreter are not Israelites, they are the enemy! It reassures Gideon that God is in control of everything: of the battle, the enemies, and Israel. Like Rahab and the inhabitants of Jericho, the enemy was afraid and knew that Israel's powerful God would give the victory to Israel. God not only provided Gideon with encouragement; He did it through the mouths of his enemies.

7:15 All Gideon could do was just stand outside the enemy's camp worshiping God. He is so encouraged and strengthened with excitement that he returns back to his men telling them to **Arise for the Lord** has given them the victory; God **hath delivered into their hand the host of Midian**. On the basis of that encouragement it was as good as done! The enemy doesn't seem so big now. Whatever you're going through, your confidence is strengthened by one Word! And that Word can only be brought up in your Spirit by God. We can worship anywhere by changing our focus from life's struggles to a God who cares. His worship comes up by His Spirit flowing in your heart.

Judges 8:22-25 God's Leadership Gone Bad

8:22 All that Gideon set out to do was accomplished. Gideon is weary and tired and the men of Israel ask him to be their ruler; rule over them—he, his sons, and even passing it down to generations. The men of Israel are full of gratitude for Gideon delivering them from the Midianites. As you remember, for seven years, the Midianites were the ones that greatly oppressed the Israelites with raids, leaving them in poverty. Even Gideon was one that was found hiding from them in the winepress threshing wheat. They were so grateful that they thought Gideon had delivered them and they desired him to rule over them. They want this strong leader over them. However, something has gone entirely wrong! They had forgotten about God!

8:23 The people wanted to make Gideon their ruler, but Gideon stressed that God was their true King and Ruler. He understood that it was not his place to take the throne over Israel. Gideon refused for himself and his sons to hold such a position.¹ Though Gideon said he didn't want to be a king, in the rest of the chapter he acted like one. His words were humble but his actions were not. It is easier to talk about humility and service to God than it is to actually live it.

8:24 Having refused, **Gideon requested** instead **that they give him the earrings of his prey**, which they had taken from the fallen Ishmaelites (used interchangeably here for Midianites). Both Ishmael, by Hagar, and Midian, by Keturah, were sons of Abraham; and their descendants became closely allied.² They were fleshly people. The descendants of Isaac were the spiritual people. The flesh and the spirit have been fighting ever since. They adorned themselves {both men and women} with gold jewelry, such as necklaces and earrings. The earrings of so many dead would be worth a tremendous amount of money.

8:25 The men willingly responded and spread a garment upon which each man cast the earrings of his prey. **Verse 27** says Israel went a whoring after it: which became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house. Instead of giving glory to God for His miraculous deliverance, the people began worshiping the prey of that deliverance.

SUMMARY:

There were too many people going out to war against the Midianites. God's process of elimination dwindles them down from 32,000 to 10,000, then to 300. This is the only way God would give the enemy into the Israelites' hand. He wanted them to know that the victory comes from the Lord and not in their own strength. Gideon had never led an army and a vast majority of the soldiers were untrained and inexperienced. It wasn't about their skill; it was about the number of men God would keep or let go.

God was determined to build Gideon's confidence. If he wasn't sure about what God would do in this war, it had to be clear. He was allowed to take his armor-bearer/servant with him and spy out the enemy's camp. And at the outskirts of the enemy's camp Gideon overhears one of the soldiers tell another of a dream he had dreamed. The dream shows that God will give Gideon the victory over the Midianites. This caused Gideon to begin to worship God, then going back to the men in his camp and encouraging them. To know that God has your back is enough to let Him rule; to know that the enemy knows that God has your back is enough to let God rule!

The grateful Israelites then asks Gideon to be their ruler, because they're looking at Gideon as the deliverer who has won the battle for them instead of God. And this is the one thing that God was trying to divert them from. Only God can receive the honor for anything we come through! Gideon knows this and he refuses the rulership, because God could only be Israel's one and only king.

APPLICATION:

Do you think your leader is wise enough for you to follow? What have you gained from their leadership? Have you put them in the place of God? Wise does not always mean knowing it all, it means being obedient to the only wise God!

¹ <http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/0708.htm>

² <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/judges/09.html>