

Commentary on Judges 7:2-4, 13-15; 8:22-25

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, July 24, 2011**, is from **Judges 7:2-4, 13-15; 8:22-25**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the *Bible Lesson Commentary* below.

Judges 7:2-4

(Judges 7:2) The LORD said to Gideon, “The troops with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand. Israel would only take the credit away from me, saying, ‘My own hand has delivered me.’

We depend on God for everything, whether we acknowledge or know this fact or not. The Israelites needed to relearn the truth that all their blessings flowed from God and they could only find true and lasting happiness by obeying the LORD. When God designed His plan for defeating the Midianites through the Israelites, He intended for them to learn to depend on Him, to trust Him in all situations, to appreciate His watch care over them, and to love Him and worship Him only.

(Judges 7:3) Now therefore proclaim this in the hearing of the troops, ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home.’” Thus Gideon sifted them out; twenty-two thousand returned, and ten thousand remained.

Fear when contemplating battle or facing an enemy is a natural response. The LORD wanted Gideon’s army to include people who knew how to overcome their fears with the supernatural response of faith and trust in God. Less than one-third were able to think of the coming battle with faith instead of fear, so the others returned home. God knew it would be far better to spread faith among Gideon’s army with the few that remained than spread fear; especially when those with fear outnumbered those with faith two to one.

(Judges 7:4) Then the LORD said to Gideon, “The troops are still too many; take them down to the water and I will sift them out for you there. When I say, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go with you; and when I say, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.”

Ten thousand warriors were still too many because God wanted the Israelites to learn that His people could face with faith overwhelming odds against them, and with God’s help and strategy they could win any battle. God reserved the right (and still reserves the right) to choose who He wanted to go into battle against His enemies and the enemies of His people God chose (and still chooses) the best people available for His every endeavor.

Judges 7:13-15

(Judges 7:13) When Gideon arrived, there was a man telling a dream to his comrade; and he said, “I had a dream, and in it a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian, and came to the tent, and struck it so that it fell; it turned upside down, and the tent collapsed.”

Gideon wanted to know more about the enemy he faced. Among so many Midianites, with God’s help he could easily slip undetected into their unsuspecting camp. God easily began to demoralize the enemies of Israel through dreams, and many believed that God spoke to them in dreams.

(Judges 7:14) And his comrade answered, “This is no other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, a man of Israel; into his hand God has given Midian and all the army.”

God inspired a Midianite warrior to interpret the other’s dream in a way that sowed seeds of fear into the hearts and minds of Israel’s enemies. The message conveyed among Gideon’s enemies was one that Gideon and his troops needed to hear; that is, God had given the Midianite army into the hand of Gideon.

(Judges 7:15) When Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped; and he returned to the camp of Israel, and said, “Get up; for the LORD has given the army of Midian into your hand.”

The right response to hearing the Good News of God’s salvation is immediate worship of God, a worship that includes rejoicing and thankfulness, a worship that inspires the believer to strive to obey God immediately in all things. Gideon’s next response was to tell his army the Good News of salvation by God that God had planned for them if they would immediately “Get up!” and take the action required by God in the dark of night.

Judges 8:22-25

(Judges 8:22) Then the Israelites said to Gideon, “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also; for you have delivered us out of the hand of Midian.”

The Israelites naturally wanted Gideon, a successful leader, to rule over them as their king. They wanted him and all of his descendants to be their leaders and always save them from trouble. However, God was to rule over His people as their King, and the people needed to totally depend on God, not on other men, to lead them and save them through leaders called “judges” that God alone chose. Only later in their history, because of their insistent demands, did God allow the Israelites to have kings so they could be as their neighbors. Then, they suffered the consequences that God foretold when they forsook Him as their King.

(Judges 8:23) Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you.”

At this point in his relationship with God, Gideon did what was right. He would not do what the people demanded and establish an hereditary monarchy. Later, because the people kept demanding a human king, God told Samuel, the last judge, to anoint Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, as their king. When King Saul failed God and the people, God told Samuel to anoint David, from the tribe of Judah, as their king and an hereditary monarchy was established.

(Judges 8:24) Then Gideon said to them, “Let me make a request of you; each of you give me an earring he has taken as booty.” (For the enemy had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.)

Gideon was not immune from wanting to profit from a successful expedition and be paid for his services, so he asked each soldier to give him a gold ear ring. Presumably, each soldier had acquired much gold from the dead Ishmaelites or Midianites. What Gideon did with these gold ear rings eventually led the Israelites into idolatry once again (See Judges 8:26-27).

(Judges 8:25) “We will willingly give them,” they answered. So they spread a garment, and each threw into it an earring he had taken as booty.

In appreciation for Gideon’s leadership, they each paid him for leading them successfully. Gideon seemed to get the credit instead of God for the victory, and Gideon took the credit away from God (see Judges 7:2). Gideon used the gold to make an ephod which turned the hearts of the people away from God and eventually led to the destruction of Gideon’s family.

Five Questions for Discussion

1. How often do you think about the fact that you depend on God for everything? When you do think about this fact, how do you respond? Why is it important for people to know about and consider this fact of existence?
2. What are some dangers or events that some people fear today? What are some ways people can overcome their fears? How can faith in God help someone overcome their fears?
3. Why do you think God wanted to choose which soldiers went into war? Why do you think God’s unusual battle plan worked so effectively? Why is it important for us to seek to work with and worship with the people of the Lord’s choice?
4. What role do dreams have in people’s lives today? How might dreams mislead someone? How might God use dreams to lead someone? Today, why do some people put too much emphasis in dreams and their interpretation?

5. At what point did Gideon cease to be a good judge? How can the desire for great wealth sometimes mislead people? If you read ahead to learn about Gideon's fate and the fate of his sons, after a wonderful beginning why is the story of Gideon so tragic?

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