

The Necessity of Weakness.

Judges 7:1-9.

Sunday afternoon, April 24, 2011.

I. An unexpected twist.

- A. At the end of chapter 6 the Midianites once again invade the land of Israel to haul away its harvest and life stock.
- B. The spirit of the Lord “puts on Gideon,” and Gideon blows the trumpet and gathers the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali behind him.
- C. Before engaging the Midianites in bold faith, Gideon takes time to seek the Lord so as to make sure that everything is on track, and that Gideon is to go forward in engaging the Midianites, and to do so “as the Lord had said.”
- D. The Lord grants Gideon the signs of the dry and the wet fleece to reassure him that all is ready to move forward, and that he indeed is to deliver Israel from the Midianite oppression, “as the Lord had said.”
- E. The next thing that we would expect to happen is that Gideon will march into battle and engage the Midianites. However this is not what happens; things take an unexpected turn for Gideon.
- F. Gideon had risen early to inspect his fleece and indeed the second night the fleece was dry whereas all else was wet. But with the dry fleece came some special instructions as to how Gideon was to go forward, and with those special instructions came a word of explanation as well.

1. The instructions:

Gideon, the people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into your hands.

At the Lord’s direction Gideon would have to reduce his army’s numbers twice:

- First all those who were fearful would be allowed to go home, and better than two thirds did so. There were now ten thousand left out of the original thirty two thousand. However this was still too many for the Lord to give Israel the victory.
- Secondly, the Lord would once again reduce the remaining ten thousand by bringing them to the water to drink. Those who lapped up the water like a dog would stay; the ones who knelt down to drink would go. The result was 300 lappers and nine thousand three hundred kneelers. With a mere three hundred men the Lord would defeat the Midianite army which is described to have been as numerous as a locust swarm, and as the sand that is by the sea shore.

2. The explanation:

The Lord explains His rationale to Gideon as well; He does not want to afford to Israel the opportunity to boast in their own skill, strength or wisdom, but He wishes to arrange all things in such a way that it would be obvious to all that the Lord’s undertaking alone had given Israel the victory.

- G. Care needs to be taken that we do not make too much of the difference between the lappers and the kneelers. Many commentators over the centuries of the Christian era have labored to make the kneelers somehow inferior in character to

the lappers, leaving Gideon with a small army of elitist soldiers.

This approach flies in the face of the Lord's concern expressed in vs. 2 where the Lord labors to the end that He alone will get the credit for the victory, and not the skill and dedication of the three hundred remaining men.

Let us not make more of the method of drinking than a mere mechanism the Lord used to reduce Gideon's army to three hundred men. Such is all the text will allow us to say.

II. The necessity of weakness.

A. Judges 7:2 is the key to understanding what the Lord is doing at this particular time in the history of salvation. It is also the key to understanding why He went about His work in the manner He did.

1. The Lord shows us plainly that He is in the business of saving His people.
2. The Lord shows us that in order for this saving work to appear as His work and His undertaking in history, it is absolutely necessary that the instruments involved in this saving work be weak and humble.

B. Gideon was a man who had to be made weak, and kept in a state of weakness in order to be useful to the Lord's purposes.

Look at the theme of weakness in the life of Gideon so far:

1. He is made weak by the Midianites as he is hiding in the winepress, winnowing grain in secret to provide for the needs of his own family.
2. Gideon's lack of status and standing among his own people. He came from the smallest clan among the families of Manasseh, and he was the youngest one in his family.
3. He was fearful of his own family and his townspeople when asked by the Lord to tear down Baal's altar and the image of Asherah, so he does it in secret, at night.
4. He needs to be reassured by the Lord before engaging the Midianites.
5. Having been reassured by the sign of the fleece, and perhaps having his confidence and courage up in leading Israel to victory, the Lord senses the need to cut him down again and to make him weak by reducing his army to less than one percent of the men he originally had. This in turn would lead to the need of Gideon for further reassurance.

Application:

1. We should in these events recognize a foreshadowing of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ who also came into this world in great weakness and humility, and He finished the work the Father had given him amidst the weakness and humiliation of the cross.
2. We should recognize here a pattern for Christian ministry as well. It has pleased God by way of the foolishness of preaching; and by the foolishness of the message preached, to save those who believe. By contrast Islam chose to propagate its faith by the sword.
3. Finally, we have here a pattern for Christian ministers (using the term loosely). Do we not hear in these things an echo of the words of the Lord to the apostle Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is perfected in (your) weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9. The best work of grace is often accomplished amidst our greatest weakness.

In summary: The necessity of weakness seems to be the Lord's method.