

Don't Judge Me, Lead Me: The Book of Judges

Judges 7:1-8

How God Gets Glory

How do you think God gets glory?

Given the track record of prideful humankind—under the influence of the Evil One, who was the first to cast a proud look (Proverbs 6:17) and stir up the wrath of God (Isaiah 14:12-14)—does God always have to wrestle glory from our covetous hands? His Scriptures give us insight into this question:

"And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth" (Genesis 11:1-9 KJV).

And then this passage:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (Romans 1:18-23 KJV).

These are examples from the Old and New Testaments of how fallen humankind tried to steal God's glory with corrupted hearts and devious minds. And oh, if this were true only in the pagan world! But how much more tragic it is when, in our times, God exposes evil practices within His church and among prominent ministry leaders. He will first judge His church (1 Peter 4:17 KJV). God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7 KJV).

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Do you recall a season of life when God reduced your earthly solutions to a problem to just Him and prayer? How did that feel? Looking back at that time, what did you learn about God's nature?

In today's lesson, we see in living color how God is preparing to get glory through Gideon—and then how we, as Jesus followers today, might simply give Him the glory through our surrendered lives.

Judges 7:1-8: How God Prepares to Get Glory

"Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh" (Judges 7:1 KJV).

The scene is set. The fearful battle stance of Gideon's army is assumed in the early morning hours. The new nickname of Gideon here—meaning "let Baal contend"—is ironic in this scenario as his God is the true, living God, Who would definitely contend and conquer! The spring of Harod, meaning "spring of trembling" (no loss of irony there!) was located at the base of Mount Gilboa's northern slope about 1.5 miles east of Jezreel, sitting at the narrow eastern pass of the Valley of Jezreel. The hill of Moreh was directly north of Mount Gilboa and south of Mount Tabor, blocking the northeastern corner of the valley. Travelers heading to Beth Shan and the Jordan fords would pass south of Moreh through the same area where Gideon and his men were stationed. The Midianites camped about 4-5 miles west of Moreh, near Ophrah, Gideon's hometown (Judges 6:11 KJV).

Fewer Men for God's Glory

"The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me'" (Judges 7:2 KJV).

Well, God certainly knew the hearts of His people—just as He knows ours. Think about that phrase—"boast against me." Humankind does not have to work hard to be boastful and rebellious toward God. We are that way in every moment apart from Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost. Listen to Galatians 5:19-21 (KJV):

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Gideon is meeting His Maker and Chief Commander and is finding out that neither he nor his sizeable army will be able accomplish God's very specific plan. Time to cut back!

The Test of Fear and the Power of Few

"Now announce to the army, "Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead." So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained" (Judges 7:3 KJV).

Maybe this narrative doesn't reflect well on the courageous fortitude of the Israelite army. But who among us would really charge into a formidable battle without some serious trepidation and knocking knees? Not!! I don't think any of those men were without serious trepidation—135,000 enemy soldiers (Judges 8:10) ready to eat the Israelites for lunch! The soldiers left over were probably too paralyzed with fear to leave.

*STUDY POINT: Fear is a constant theme in Gideon's life and walk with God. Find six other incidents and major characters in the Old Testament in which fear dominated—but did not determine—the outcome of the narrative. Write out each of the main passages, looking for actual outcomes. Beside each narrative, take note how God used these characters despite their obvious weaknesses. How could your study of these passages affect your own faith and walk with God?

Thinning the Ranks

"But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will thin them out for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go" (Judges 7:4 KJV).

Note carefully here the methodical reduction of Gideon's army by God. This effect adds so much edge-of-your-seat anticipation of what God is about to do. Time to cut back again!

A Curious Selection Process

"So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those who kneel down to drink." Three hundred of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. All the rest got down on their knees to drink" (Judges 7:5-6 KJV).

This is interesting. Perhaps the soldiers who kneeled down and lapped up water from the source would forfeit their ability to see oncoming enemy forces. Maybe those who laid low and kept their sight lines open could still scoop up water with their hand and drink. That's one perspective. Or maybe the opposite was happening; after all, we are dealing with scared, inexperienced, and outnumbered men!

God's "God-fidence" Plan

"The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the others go home"" (Judges 7:7 KJV).

God's promise that three hundred men would be enough to win the war gleams with "God-fidence," and Gideon has been good thus far in not voicing doubt toward God's unlikely battle plan. It wouldn't have mattered how God reduced Gideon's army from 32,000 soldiers to just 300. The point was that what mere men of any number could do in rescuing

Israel would not glorify God but would only encourage their boasting. Entering battle with a threadbare troop would require God to intervene—and gain the subsequent glory.

The Final Picture

“So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites home but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others. Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley” (Judges 7:8 KJV).

This verse paints the picture of a reduced, minuscule army of terrified men ill-prepared for serious battle led by a man who did not see himself as a “mighty man of valour” (Judges 6:12) whose only hope was the God they had so easily abandoned in better times, trading Yahweh for their own way, and myriad foreign idols. This would have been an opportune time to connect a “faith-o-meter” to the hearts of Gideon and his trembling troop. What were they thinking at this moment?

How Does God Get Glory?

Brethren, as I opened this teaching with the question, “How does God get glory?” I would like to answer with this statement, as illustrated from Scripture: God gets glory by doing things only He can do. The fact that He sometimes involves us is not so we can share His glory, but so that we might surrender all glory to Him, the only One Who is worthy.

“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake” (Psalm 115:1 KJV).

~ Reverend Darren McClelland