

The Way of the 300

Sunday 25th September
Judges 7:1-22a

The period of the Judges, from Joshua (~1500BC) until Saul (~1020BC), was a time when the twelve tribes of Israel were in a relationship of a loose confederacy. Each tribe managed their own affairs.

When socio-political issues arose, that effected the majority, or whole, of the tribal confederacy, we see the rise of judges to provide general leadership and to deal with the problems at hand.

Not surprisingly, these socio-political issues arose as a result of a recurring pattern in the life of the people.

1] When times were good, the people would forget God's past mercies and deliverance, and go their own way. So often, they would even turn to foreign cultic practices and worship foreign gods: eg. Baal & Asherah - just to be trendy and be part of the 'in' set.

2] God would allow their neighbouring enemies to attack and plunder them: ie. He withdrew His hands of protection from them and let them experience the full consequences of their choices.

3] After a period of social strife and collapse, the people would begin to cry out to God for deliverance.

I wonder if they also asked the question:
'Why did God let this happen to us?'

How often do we hear this?

4] In response to the people, God would raise up a judge to call them back to worship Him alone and to live according to His principles. This judge would also be directed, as God's instrument, to deliver them from their troubles.

5] As a result of God's mercy and deliverance, there would be a time of peace and prosperity for the people. Don't we all like these times!

6] When the judge died, the people would again return to living for themselves, pleasing themselves and even worshipping the false nature gods.

Now, while most of the Judges united the tribes at these times, the spiritual qualities of these judges was often not a notable feature. In fact, **most of the Judges were rather flawed people who were sometimes used by God in mighty ways.**

We only need to consider Abimelech (9:5) in that he killed his own brothers. What about Jephthah (11:4) who was a brigand, before he rose to lead the people. Finally, there was Samson who was more controlled by lust than a desire to serve the Lord.

Gideon was certainly no different in that his political leadership was more

significant than his spiritual devotion to God. Despite this, the story of Gideon is recorded for us in Judges 6-8; and in Hebrews 11 we read that Gideon is an example of a man of faith.

This is an amazing statement, to say the least!

We cannot ignore the fact that, in Judges 8:27, we discover Gideon's example was not altogether pure, because, in his latter years he returned to some of his former family cultic practices when he made an 'ephod of gold' in his own home town and allowed the people to worship it.

It was an opportunity wasted when Gideon could have called the people back to the Lord, but he did not. As we read in 8:27 '.. it became a snare to Gideon and his family'.

Gideon's rise to leadership came after a period of 40 years of peace, following Deborah's victory over the Canaanites, but, as so often happened, the people used this period of peace and prosperity to indulge themselves and, as a result, turned away from God.

Following 7 years of attacks from the neighboring Midianites and Amalekites, the people eventually called out to God for deliverance. Despite their neglect of God, God still loved them and reached out to them. He chose Gideon to again rescue the people and to condemn their growing idolatry.

After Gideon had tested God, to make sure that God was real and all powerful, Gideon was commanded to cleanse the land of the foreign gods, including the Baals and Asherahs.

This was a real challenge to Gideon, whose upbringing had been rather cultic and anything but pure in his own worship of God. It's amazing to think that sometimes God is prepared to use impure vessels to achieve His purposes.

Once the land was cleansed, Gideon then set about gathering a force of men to defeat the invading enemy. He gathered 32,000 men, **but God said there were too many**. 22,000 were allowed to go home, while 10,000 remained (vs.3).

Again the Lord said there were too many, and He devised a way for Gideon to cull the number even further. Gideon was told to take the men to a stream and have them drink the water.

The way the men drank the water determined their suitability for the task at hand. Those who knelt and put their faces to the water were excused. Those who scooped the water in their hands and lifted it to their mouths were accepted.

After this testing by God, only 300 men remained (vs.6). They were the ones who had not done what everyone else had done (ie. followed the mob). **They were the minority.**

They were the ones who were able to keep watch of what was happening around them while they drank. **They were vigilant.**

As the Lord said to Gideon, *"With the 300 men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place."* (vs.7)

Out of originally 32,000 men, God chose only 300 to defeat the enemy of many thousands, because God wanted the Israelite people to know that their victory truly was from God and not by their own efforts and skill.

Even today, **self pride can be a problem for mankind**, rather than giving God the credit for what He does on our behalf. Let's face it, how often do we lay blame on God for the terrible things that happen to us, **BUT**, take the credit for our own skills and intelligence for the good things that come our way?

The battle Gideon fought was swift and decisive. Gideon was told by God to scout the enemy camp where he overheard two men talking. Their conversation was confirmation to Gideon that God would defeat the Midianites.

Gideon returned to his men and gave each one a ram's horn trumpet (a shofar) and a clay jar with a flaming torch hidden inside. Gideon then divided the three hundred men into three companies and marched on the enemy camp.

At Gideon's signal, the men blew their trumpets and smashed the jars on the ground. It was all designed to create noise, fire and utter confusion.

As we read in vs.22; *'When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords.'*

The victory was decisive and complete, and heralded in a time of peace in Israel for the next 40 years. Gideon himself remained a significant figure in the lives of the people, until he eventually died of old age. God is great!

Ultimately, the story of Gideon is not about the man, or the Hebrew nation. The story of Gideon, like many of the stories of the so called heroes of the Bible, is really about God.

What we learn from passages such as this is how incredibly patient God is with the willfulness of mankind. Today, we live in a world, and a nation, that is so very similar to the days of Gideon.

People have enjoyed times of great prosperity and progress, and have also become very self-satisfied and complacent. Mankind today is taking enormous pride in its own achievements.

Is there nothing that we cannot achieve?

[eg. Dubai tower - tallest building in the world.]

After all, with our many recent scientific and engineering breakthroughs, surely we are masters of our own destinies - OR ARE WE?

The lessons from the story of Gideon are clear:

1] Firstly, God, in His sovereign will, can and does withdraw his hand of protection and blessing when **WE** choose to ignore Him and go our own way.

We cannot, and should not, always presume on the grace and mercy of God.

Just because the nature of God is one of 'agape' love, it does not mean that we can spit in His face and think there are no consequences.

What loving parent does not discipline their child in the face of repeated, willful, destructive and appalling behavior? Do we not see our efforts of discipline as an expression of our love; though the child may feel hurt, indignant, and harshly treated at the time. Some lessons have to be learnt the hard way. God's love for us is just the same!

2] The second lesson we learn today is that God can, and does often, raise up a few to prevail over the many. The expression, 'might is right', has no currency with God. When God says, 'enough is enough', you'd better believe it.

God's will is always the imperative and mankind plays the fool no more than when it chooses to ignore or reject HIM. When the time of God's accounting comes there is no-one who will be able to stand against Him.

It is in the seemingly small and powerless that God so often reveals his victory.

When Abraham & Sarah left Haran, in obedience to God's calling, who in the world could have imagined how this old man and his half-sister wife would be the seed to forever transform world history.

When the evangelist, Mordecai Ham, was speaking in 1934, in Charlotte, Nth Carolina, little did the world realize the impact his message would have when a 16 year old boy, named William Franklin Graham, made his decision for Christ.

And when the Lord Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem, who, other than Mary, Joseph, Anna & Simeon had any idea of what was to come.

3] The third lesson is the importance of **faith and vigilance**. As the 300 chosen men were faithful and vigilant, so today we are being called to be like-minded in heart and action.

Make no mistake, Jesus is coming again, and those who are prepared for His coming will find courage, strength, comfort and joy.

Close: 1 Thess.4:14-17