

Judges 7:1 – 8:17

Introduction – Jesus taught Paul “My strength is made perfect in weakness”. Paul went on to say that he would rather boast in his weaknesses for “when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor 12:9-11) Certainly, the theme of weakness in men and strength in God is paramount to the story of Gideon’s battle over the Midianites.

God-made Weakness (vv1-8) – Gideon’s messengers gathered together a fighting force of some 32,000 men. This isn’t much, though, considering the Midianites have over 135,000 in their ranks coming down upon the land. Nevertheless, the Lord wants to make clear that He alone is delivering Israel and He alone is to receive the glory (v2).

Two Reductions – The first is in line with God’s commands in Deut 20:8; Holy war cannot be fought except by men of faith, who have confidence in the Lord and are consequently basically unafraid. The second reduction comes to leave Gideon with only 300 men who, at most, seem to be able to boast that they drink funny. The ratio is now 450:1. God’s providence has made His people recognize their utter dependence upon Him for their salvation.

God’s Encouragement in Weakness (vv9-15) – One could almost blame God for making Gideon fearful again. But His point is to cause Gideon to turn to Him for reassurance of victory and not look to himself, his army, or anything other than God. And when Gideon accepts God’s offer of assurance, God kindly strengthens His faith. In fact, in one sense, God is taking pleasure in Gideon’s weakness, for it will only glorify His name all the more.

The Dream – It is rather ironic that God’s word comes through a Midianite private. His buddy’s dream is one of a round barley loaf, the bread of the poor, striking the tent of Midian and completely flattening it. But the other soldiers know what it means – Gideon (how does he know his name), God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand. The result is that Gideon bows in worship before the Lord. Gideon’s strength will be made perfect in weakness.

God’s Glory Through Weakness (vv15-22) – The battle plan is given to the three-hundred; Gideon has obviously received special instructions from the Lord. It would be missing the point to simply say this was psychological warfare. The dew-drenched, Spirit-anointed men and their deliverer now ‘image’ the coming of God’s glory cloud, complete with “...fire...and blackness and tempest...and the sound of the trumpet and the voice of words...”(Heb 12:18-19). The Midianites were not simply ‘psyched out.’ The Lord set the swords against one another (v22). We see a sleeping world awakened by the sound of the trumpet of judgment, the light of the Truth and a message about a sword of God and of a Messiah.

The World is Sleeping (1 Thess 5:5-8) – The enemies of God today are asleep to the real issues of life.

The Trumpet of Judgment – The trumpet proclaims the judgment of God (Josh 6:20, Rev 8:2) and of God’s victory (Rev 11:15).

The Light of Truth (John 3:19) – The deliverer proclaims the light, but men loved the darkness.

The Sword – of the Spirit is the Word of God (Eph 6:17) and the gospel proclaimed is the gospel of the Lord and of His Messiah.

A Variety of Judgments (7:24 – 8:17) – First God brings the decisive victory, and then the mopping up operation begins. The other Israelites take part, although in the midst of this victory we already see that there is not complete faithfulness in God nor in His chosen deliverer, Gideon.

Ironic Judgment (7:24-25) – Two commanders of the Midianite army are captured and killed by Ephraim. The places where they are killed become landmarks of God’s ironic and holy humor. The Israelites used to hide in rocks (6:2), but now Oreb is killed, possibly trying to hide in a rock himself. Gideon once hid in a winepress (6:11), but now Zeeb is killed at a winepress. The two heads cut off remind us of the theology of the crushing of Satan’s head.

Judgment in a Soft Answer (8:1-3) – Ephraim’s concern was with their own glory. But Gideon decides to turn away their anger with a soft answer (Prov 15:1). Ephraim can be commended for what they have done right, even if it is wrapped in seeking personal gain (compare Phil 1:15-18). Gideon does mildly rebuke them, noting that *God delivered* these princes into their hands.

Judgment for Unfaithfulness (8:4-17) – Succoth refuses to risk their immediate safety. They are afraid to stand on the Lord’s side. They are afraid to openly trust His promise of deliverance in the light of risky circumstances. They would not side with the Lord in His blessing, and so they come to know (v16) the Lord in His discipline. Even worse is the city of Penuel. They are not afraid of the enemy, but their trust is not in the Lord. It is in their big tower – they have a huge defense budget. Gideon’s judgment upon them is not only to destroy their tower, but to kill the men of the city as well. God is a jealous God and He will not share His glory with any other.

Living With Weakness – God is not in the business of making your life more secure or more comfortable. That is not His

goal. His goal is His glory. And His means of your sharing in that glory is to often make us weak – so that in that weakness, we see His glory and we share in that glory.

God's People – While we are called to live in community, you must remember that God's people will at times disappoint you. But do not let them disillusion you. And do not let your own fleshly pursuits of status and security weaken the unity and energy of the church.

Sovereign Strength – Our weakness, our situation, our struggles, are an opportunity for the sovereign God to show forth His strength. Do not despise those trials. Rejoice in them for what they will accomplish for Your Lord – and believe His promises (2 Cor 4:16-18).

Dave Hatcher – January 19, 2003