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The inspired record now reveals how God reduced the size of Gideon's army. Those who were "fearful and afraid" were commanded to "return and depart early from mount Gilead." Out of an army of 32,000 men 22,000 depart.

Now that the cowards are out of the ranks of God's army, He then makes the statement that serves as the title of this article: "The people *are* yet *too* many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there" (7:4). God's instructions were, "Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink" (7:5). Those who "lapped" were kept and those who "bowed" were sent home. Out of the original 32,000 men only 300 remained!!

Three hundred men now set themselves to attack "the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east" who "lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels *were* without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude" (7:12). But these three hundred troops are no ordinary soldiers, for they have implicit trust in God and His plan to win the victory.

Judges 8:10-12 records that the armies of Israel killed 135,000 of "the hosts of the children of the east." Gideon and his God fearing 300 believed and obeyed their Commander-in-Chief. By the power of "Jehovah of hosts" truth's standard waved over the field of battle when the fighting ceased.

We have lived to see what God said would happen if Gideon had won the battle with 32,000 men. "The people that *are* with thee *are* too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying mine own hand hath saved me" (7:2).

The church has reached an all-time low in faithfulness when a person in promotion of a multimillion dollar effort to "spread the gospel" declares that Christians in American have never had a plan to evangelize the U.S. Has such a one never read the New Testament? No wonder the, state of the church in this present apostasy was not even considered in this "first ever plan to evangelize America." When no provisions were made to differentiate between faithful and unfaithful brethren regarding the placement of contacts made in the effort, something was sadly lacking.

Any "plan" to evangelize America that stipulates that you get the contacts we make only when we get your money is contrary to the very spirit of New Testament Christianity (Gal. 6:10). Where did anyone come up with such an idea (Col. 3:17)? Shades of Oral Roberts and of Rome! Let many come to fill the house of God. But let them be drawn only by God's distinctive Gospel. Let those who do the evangelizing trust in God's plan to the complete exclusion of anything that would water down the truth and glorify man's intellect. Let the faithful remember Gideon and his faithful 300 and always do things in God's way lest we "vaunt" ourselves "against" God, "saying mine own hand hath saved me" (Jud. 7:2).

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“THE PEOPLE ARE YET TOO MANY”

Judges 7:4

The neglect and/or improper study of the Old Testament has resulted in the ignorance of people on various subjects, one of which is the ultimate and final source of man's spiritual strength. With these facts before us, let us study a forgotten but important and timely principle from Judges regarding the genuine and only source of spiritual strength for God's people in any age.

We begin in the divine record at the point where Gideon and his army are encamped by "the well of Harod" anticipating the battle with the Midianites. The Lord is giving final instructions to Gideon concerning the army of Israel. From the human perspective it is not only strange but foolish advice when God declares: "The people that *are* with thee *are* too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands" (Jud. 7:2). "Too many"!! How is it possible for an army to have "too many"?? Usually the converse is true. But this is God's army, doing His bidding, walking "by faith, not by sight" (II Cor. 5:7). Whatever God's army accomplishes, it is to be because God is with and for them. Timely and well put are David's inspired words on this point: "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, *and* my high tower" (Psa. 18:2). The strength or power of God's army at any time is never increased or diminished solely on the basis of the number of persons found therein. No matter what the numerical size of God's army, it is the army's strong faith in God's way or plan that wins the battle!

God wanted Gideon's army to win the battle, but they were to do so with the full realization that God alone was the sole reason for their victory. God declared the aforementioned point with the words, "lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me" (Jud. 7:2).

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“Proof-Text” Preaching

What changes are transpiring today! We, in the kingdom, have moved from that time when our preachers gave the “proof-text,” and the church was known for having that kind of preaching, and denominational people spoke with some envy of it as they wished that their own preachers would use more Bible! Yes, the move is now underway, with voices being raised against using the Bible as “proof-text.” A swing, indeed, from one extreme to the other.

Underlying that spirit that says, “No proof-text preaching!” are some attitudes about the Bible which really, when all is said and done, reveals a terrible attitude against the Word of God. But the murmurings go like this:

(1) “...using the Bible as a book of law.” Let us all know that sin is identified by God as transgression of the law (I John 3:4). If men sin then men break the law of God. Law is in effect. The supreme law is that of God, and by the Word of God we are completely furnished unto every good work (II Tim. 3:16-17). If it is good to reject evil and to abide by the will of God, then the Bible so directs us. It is a book of law.

(2) “...pronouncing anathema if you don’t abide by the rules.” It was an inspired apostle, Paul, who pronounced anathema upon those who would present to men anything other than the Gospel Paul had proclaimed (Gal. 1:6-9). It was also the same inspired apostle who pled that we must all walk by the same rule (Phi. 3:16). We find, in a late New Testament passage, that those who “goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God” (II John 9). These are condemned because, in effect, they did not abide by the rules.

(3) “...the stress on obedience.” Amazing that any would offer any objection to the idea of obedience, when inspiration tells us that Jesus became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey Him (Heb. 5:9). And, a great picture of the end of time shows men condemned eternally because they did not obey the Gospel of the Lord! (II Thess. 1:7-9).

Indeed, these and similar objections are lame and pitiful! And, they certainly reveal a tremendously poor attitude about the Word of God, amounting, in the final analysis, to a poor attitude about God Himself. If I love God, I will love His Word to me. If I respect Him, I will respect His words. If I feel honor toward Him, I will honor His Word! It’s as simple as that.

But on this “proof-text” matter, another simple point or two. First, we ask the question: In whose realm are we operating when we speak of righteousness, holiness, proper living, right behavior, etc.—God’s realm or just an area where man is supreme? Certainly, we are speaking in God’s area! Then, should not God be allowed to speak, since we are dealing with His area? Granting that, the next question would be: How can I know what God’s will happens to be in any area of

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NEWS AND NOTES

News and notes will return when Ken Chumbley returns from England.

Please keep Ken and the work in England in your prayers. Next Saturday, March 20, there will be a day long lectureship at the Cambridge City Church of Christ in Cambridge.

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life, service, and worship that I would speak concerning? I can rule out the sayings of men, and the think-sos of men, because we know we are dealing with God’s area. I am left with the firm truth: I can know only the will of God by looking into that Volume which God states is our Guide, and which furnishes us completely unto every good work—the Bible (II Tim. 3:16-17)!

There follows another question: If I am dealing in things of God, and if I am going to allow God to speak, and if I have to get information from God through the Bible, would I have some disposition that forbids my telling men where I found the information? I am dealing with this man’s soul, or that man’s soul, and I am telling them what God has said, and should I not tell them where God said it? If I tell them where God said it, I give the “proof-text”! And someone now says that is a wrong method? Peter did not know it, in Acts 2, when he cited Joel and David in the course of his sermon. The men in Berea did not know they were behaving in an improper fashion when they read the Scriptures after Paul, searching the Word, to see if he had taught them properly (17:11). Rather, they were correct in doing so, for God called them “noble”!

Over the kingdom, we are not hurting because of “proof-text” preaching. Rather, great harm is being done today for a lack of “proof-text” preaching, and, sadly, much of that is so because there is no text for what the speaker is saying!

*Bill Jackson
Deceased*

Ken Chumbley