

Judges Chapter 7 Part 6

Joshua 24:14 “Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and do away with the gods which your fathers served beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.

Joshua 24:15 But if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served, which were beyond the Euphrates River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Once the Mosaic covenant was in effect, then deviations from the 1st and 2nd commandments which resulted in worship of the gods of the land, was sometimes described as “adultery.” Read the book of Hosea.

Here is an interesting quote from Robbie Dean which I throw in for no extra charge:

James 4:4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

“James 4:4 gives us a tremendous warning; it tells us, it identifies in the passage what spiritual adultery is all about. Adultery has to do with

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unfaithfulness to a covenant. That is the root meaning of the word. It is not talking about a physical sexual act. It is talking about being unfaithful to a legal contract, to a covenant. And so James talks to those spiritually disobedient believers in this congregation who says do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God. That compromising, that "going along to get along" is hostility to God. It may make you feel better and not getting as much opposition from some people around you, maybe those in your family. But God is the one we need to be concerned about. And God says that if you compromise with the world, it's hostility to Him, and that is what should be foremost in our minds. James goes on to say that whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. I'm telling you things are getting awfully complex in our culture. And that the policies of numerous companies and corporations are going to be forcing a lot of believers to make a choice between a paycheck and God. But they don't look at it that way. They will be eased into the compromise one little compromise at a time until all of a sudden they realize that they have really made a mistake. And this is the warning that we have to be very careful. We have to learn to be shrewd."

We as Christians will have some difficult choices going forward. We will need to learn to be shrewd.

Tonight's lesson starts with a review and an emphasis from last week.

The relationship between God and Old Testament believers was defined by a series of covenants. The covenants in the Bible follow the suzerain-vassal treaty.

From Wikipedia:

"Suzerainty treaties and similar covenants and agreements between Middle Eastern states were quite prevalent during the pre-monarchic and monarchy periods in Ancient Palestine. The Hittites, Egyptians, and Assyrians had been suzerains to the Israelites and other tribal kingdoms

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of the Levant from 1200 to 600 BCE. The structure of Jewish covenant law was similar to the Hittite form of suzerain.”

“Each treaty would typically begin with an "Identification" of the Suzerain, followed by an historical prologue cataloguing the relationship between the two groups "with emphasis on the benevolent actions of the suzerain towards the vassal". Following the historical prologue came the stipulation. This included tributes, obligations and other forms of subordination that would be imposed on the Israelites. According to the Hittite form, after the stipulations were offered to the vassal, it was necessary to include a request to have copies of the treaty that would be read throughout the kingdom periodically. The treaty would have divine and earthly witnesses purporting the treaty's validity, trustworthiness, and efficacy. This also tied into the blessings that would come from following the treaty and the curses from breaching it. For disobedience, curses would be given to those who had not remained steadfast in carrying out the stipulations of the treaty.”

God made a covenant with Abraham. We call this the Abrahamic covenant. Abraham calls God “Sovereign Lord” (NIV) in Genesis 15:2.

Bruce Waltke says, “This is a rare title of God used when pleading with him (cf. Deut. 3:24; 9:26).”

The Hebrew is Adonai Yahweh. Adonai can mean sir or lord. But in this context it is amplified to mean Sovereign. Yahweh is not just “Lord,” but “God.” (NASB). If we take “Sovereign” from the NIV and “God” from the NASB the result is “Sovereign Yahweh” or “Sovereign God.” The emphasis is on God being the sovereign under whom they live.

Again from Bruce Waltke in the Word Biblical Commentary on Genesis:

“If Genesis presents God as making an irrevocable covenant with the patriarchs to make of them a nation to be a light to the Gentiles, Exodus-

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Deuteronomy represent Israel as accepting God's covenant or laws to become that light to the nations. In connection with transforming the twelve tribes of Israel into a nation, God gives the people a covenant setting forth in detail their religious and ethical obligations. Not surprisingly, in that context Israel for the first time calls God "King" (Deut. 33:3-5; cf. Ex. 15:18; Num. 23:21) and God refers to Israel as "a kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6)."

Duane Christiansen in his commentary on Deuteronomy says of Deuteronomy 33:5, "We may put "In God we trust" on our coins and currency, but Israel went much further—they made God their king."

Another reference in the Torah:

Exodus 15:18 The Lord (Yahweh) reigns (from the same Hebrew root as "king") forever. (NIV)

There was a covenant between God and Abraham and subsequently with Moses/Israelites which established a kingdom with God as King. Problems arose when the Israelites abandoned God for other gods.

When Samuel was dealing with the Israelite people who asked, "...Now appoint us a king to judge us like all the nations." 1 Samuel 8:5, God said,

1 Samuel 8:7 And the Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people regarding all that they say to you, because they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being King over them.

This leads me to the point I want to make. In some passages, Israelites understood their relationship as a Hebrew word that is usually translated into English as servant or slave. Based upon the covenant, I suggest a

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term like “vassal” might be more appropriate. Or even “subject” since that is a word we might be more readily familiar with than “vassal.” This brings into clearer focus their relationship to God. When Americans hear the word “slave” they are thinking of people who are captured and forced into unwanted labor. Like Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelites in Genesis 37:28.

Israelites under the covenants had a choice to obey the terms of the covenant and receive blessings or to reject faith obedience to God and receive discipline, per the covenant.

Christians are citizens of Heaven. Israelites were subjects in the kingdom. Indeed, in the Millennium, Jesus Christ sets up His kingdom with Israelites as His subjects and Christians in resurrection bodies helping administer the kingdom.

Before finishing Judges chapter 7, let us look back at the history portrayed in Judges chapters 1-6.

Moses brought the Israelites out of Egypt. Joshua took them into the land and led them in battle against key strongholds. But Israel had not yet occupied the land. They needed to clear the land of the Canaanites per God’s commands.

The book of judges starts with the mopping up operation of the sons of Israel in Canaan. The tribes of Judah and Simeon do a fairly good job at the start. But the conquest goes down hill until Dan is defeated by the Canaanites.

The judges/deliverers do a good job starting with Othniel but goes down hill until Samson. What follows Samson is worse than the Canaanites. With Gideon, they reached a point where they were fully assimilated into Canaanite culture so that they have completely abandoned Yahweh and

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have “strongholds” to Baal and idols to Asherah and active hostility toward Yahweh.

Enter the Angel of the Lord.

Gideon meets the Angel of the Lord, the 2nd person of the Trinity, the pre-existent/pre-Incarnate Christ. Yet Gideon has to have Him prove who He is with a test. In physical appearance, the Angel of the Lord looked like a person based upon Gideon’s interaction with Him. Gideon eventually realizes this is the Angel of the Lord. But there is a lingering question as to how powerful this “god” with a little “g” is. So, in a second test, Gideon determines that this Angel of the Lord is actually more powerful than Baal. The Angel of the Lord tells Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites. But He does not believe until he hears this from the lips of a Midianite soldier who is interpreting a dream of another Midianite soldier. Once Gideon hears the dream and its partial interpretation, he instantly has a plan and a clear path forward. He believes God with a big “G.”

Judges 7:19 So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle night watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands.

Let me answer a question before you ask it. When did Gideon become a believer in Yahweh? Did he believe as a child and abandon Yahweh? Or did he believe sometime within the time frame of Judges chapters 6-7? I don’t know.

Gideon divided the 300 men into three groups. Three hundred men stayed with Gideon. The other two groups, probably located on either

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side and positioned further up each side of the Midianite camp, watched and waited for Gideon to act. Remember, the Midianite camp is in a valley.

As in the Midianite dream, the round bread rolled to the camp. So Gideon “came to the outskirts of the camp.”

Judges 7:20 When the three units blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and shouted, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!”

A couple of weeks ago, I suggested that the 300 men held the pitchers upside down with the torches inserted inside to hide the light.

Also remember that the “trumpets” are “shofar,” the Hebrew ram’s or goat’s horn. “Blowing” the shofar is the same word as “thrusting” a sword. So instead of a sword in their right hands, the 300 had shofars. To paraphrase, the shofar was mightier than the sword in this situation, but only because God made it so.

Judges 7:21 And each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled.

Each of the Israelites stood firm.

Each. Literal man, in the singular.

Stood. This verb is in the plural. This suggests that “man” is a collective. Perhaps a translation could be “They stood, (each) man in his place.” In my mind, this is dramatic. Like statues they stood near the Midianite camp, some part way up mountains to the sides of the camp. Each man is a witness, stationed in his own place to see what God is going to do.

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I don't want to just pass by this concept of "witness." There were an unknown number of fighters under Ehud who became witnesses. There were the 10,000 fighters under Barak which were mentioned some weeks ago as witnesses. Now we have the 300 witnesses. They were witnesses to God in charge of history. God is in charge.

Place. Interesting that this is a preposition meaning "under."

Around. This indicates that the Israelites were not positioned in a group or clump but spaced such that they encircled the camp. This would make the lights appear to be individual units of men; perhaps 50, 100 or maybe even 1,000 men for each torch.

The second half of the sentence deals with the Midianite army.

Have you seen the movie Sahara in which the "heros" are outnumbered by a few tanks and armored vehicles. Then all of a sudden, a vast army of tribal warriors surround them from the mountains. Now, picture that, at night, men standing with individual torches representing large military units. The people who are surrounded panic. They know they are about to die.

The army. This is the same word just translated "camp" in this very sentence. This translation is identifying that people are fleeing, not the tents.

Crying out. This word contrasts with the one used of the Israelites shouting "A sword for Yahweh and for Gideon." This one is filled with fear.

Fleeing. There is a textual issue here of small importance: was this the normal Qal or the causative hiphil. This word for flee is indeed for fleeing out of fear. But the Israelites, Gideon in particular, was said to flee.

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Judges 6:11 Then the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites.

When you look at that, you do not see anyone fleeing. But the verb translated “to save it” is the same verb for fleeing. Literally, “in order to flee” wheat from the Midianites. Now, the Midianites are fleeing. A subtle irony.

Judges 7:22 And when they blew the three hundred trumpets, the Lord set the sword of one against another even throughout the entire army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.

Here is Constable’s remarks on this scene:

“Gideon commenced his "attack" at "the beginning of the middle watch," which was evidently midnight. Many of the Midianites would have been sound asleep—and upon awakening, would have experienced utter confusion by the sights and sounds of their enemies! In addition, the movements of their own soldiers, milling around the camp as a result of the recent watch change, would have disoriented them even further. Perhaps the camels *stampeded*, too, being frightened by the torch fires and general confusion, and giving the waking Midianites the impression that *mounted soldiers* had invaded their camp.”

Robert Chisholm, echoing another commentator, suggests that “the torches were apparently used to set the Midianite tents on fire.”

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Judges 7:23 And the men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian.

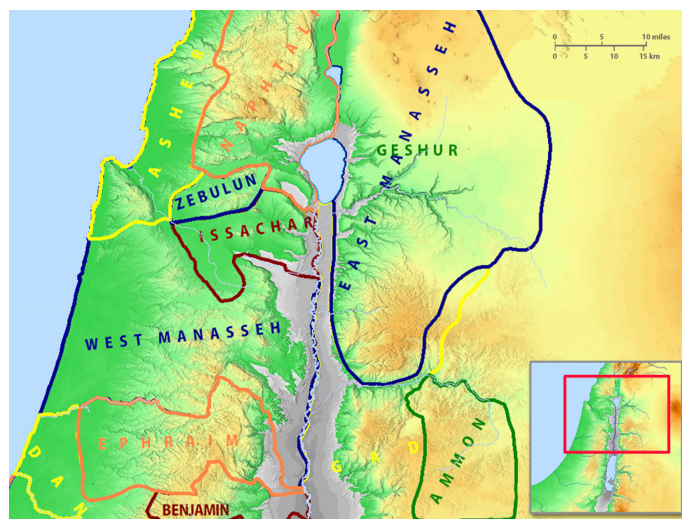
Men of Israel. In my interlinear Hebrew version, it says “men” is in the singular. So again this must be a collective.

Summoned. Another interesting but subtle irony. The verb is used in

Judges 4:3 The sons of Israel cried out to the Lord; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years.

In Judges 4:3, the sons of Israel “cried out to the Lord.” Here in Judges 7:23 and again in the next verse, this verb in the niph'al (passive/reflexive) is used of the “men of Israel.” It just struck me, when they cried to the Lord, they are called “sons.” Here when they are called, they are called “men of Israel.” Again, another subtle Hebrew irony.

Tribes. These tribes are near to battleground. Of note is the absence of Issachar. This tribe did work with Barak in chapter 4.



Location of tribes: Asher, Zebulun and All Manasseh

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All of Manasseh. Why not say all Naphtali? Good question. The answer is that Manasseh is broken up into two parts: one on the east side of the Jordan River and the other on the west side of the Jordan River. So the call went to both sides of the Jordan River.

Pursued. Once a military force is winning, they don't just say, OK we did enough to scare them away for today. No, the idea is total defeat. That is especially true in the Bible.

Here is what Ehud did:

Judges 3:28 Then he said to them, "Pursue them, for the Lord has handed your enemies the Moabites over to you." So they went down after him and took control of the crossing places of the Jordan opposite Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross.

Here is what Barak did:

Judges 4:16 But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not even one was left.

And:

Judges 4:22 And behold, while Barak was pursuing Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said to him, "Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking." So he entered with her, and behold, Sisera was lying dead with the tent peg in his temple.

So now, Gideon does the same. His farmer army is pursuing the enemy with the intent of destroying them so they never return. As far as the

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Midianites are concerned, they were never a serious threat against Israel again.

Judges 7:24 Then Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against Midian and take control of the waters ahead of them, as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan.” So all the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they took control of the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan.

Judges 7:25 And they captured the two leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and they killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb, while they pursued Midian; and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon from across the Jordan.