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Gideon’s Victory Over the Midianites

7: 1-25

Gideon’s victory over the Midianites DIG: As you read Judges, identify how Isra’el continued its downward spiral of unfaithfulness to ADONAI? How does God test our faith? What was prophetic about the Angel of ADONAI’s description of Gideon as a “mighty warrior” in 6:12? How did God encourage Gideon’s faith? Why is ADONAI so intent on showing Gideon his weakness?

REFLECT: When have you had to trust God despite not understanding what He was doing or asking? Why does God choose the weak and lowly to bring about His purposes? In what ways might we try to do God’s work by our strength and for our own glory? How should knowing that ADONAI acts in unpredictable ways impact how we live? When is it difficult to trust God? Memorize Judges 7:2.

Strength made perfect in weakness.

Restoration: Here we see **Gideon’s** victory over **Midian**. He began with **thirty-two thousand men**, but **God** reduced the number to **three hundred**. This was to ensure that **Isra’el** knew the victory was by **God’s** power, not **their** own strength. **The weakness** of **Gideon** and of **Isra’el** can be seen in **Chapters 6-8**. One can trace this theme in **Isra’el’s** total **helplessness (6:2-6)**, in **Gideon’s** lack of status and relative obscurity (**6:15**), in **his fear** of **family and townspeople (6:27)**, in **his** need for additional assurance (**6:36-40**), in the radical reduction of **his** army (**7:2-8**), in **his fear** of the battle and **his** need for additional encouragement (**7:10-15**). So **Gideon** is not our conventional hero. Instead **he**, and **Isra’el**, are presented in their weakness. **Second Corinthians 12:9** nicely sums up the main point of **Gideon’s** victory over **Midian: ADONAI’s power is most fully displayed when His people are weak.**¹⁶⁸

The Division of the Armies (7:1): Early in the morning, Jerub-Ba’al (that is, **Gideon** as seen in **6:32**) and all his men camped beside the spring of Harod,

which bubbles out at the foot of **Mount Gilboa**. It seems that even though the author is on to the next phase of the account, **the destruction of the altar of Ba’al (6:25-32)** lingers in his mind. In the end, **Gideon** steps out and wins a great victory, but the name **Jerub-Ba’al** reminds us that **he** is a reluctant warrior.¹⁶⁹ Ironically, **the spring of Harod** means *the spring of Trembling*, a fitting name for a **spring** that described the mental and physical state of **Gideon** and the majority of **Gideon’s troops** as **they** anticipated the looming battle. **The camp of Midian was** about five miles **north of them** with a force of **135,000 (8:10)** in the **Jezreel Valley near Mount Moreh (7:1 NIV)**. **The Midianites** were obviously aware of the presence of **the Israelite** army and **their** intelligence service knew the name of **its leader (7:14)**, but **it** does not seem to have been regarded as a serious threat; probably **they** felt secure in **their** greatly superior numerical strength and the confidence gained by the success of the previous **seven years**.¹⁷⁰

The First Reduction of Gideon’s Army (7:2-3): With **the fleece**, **Gideon** tested **God** twice (**to see link click [Bc](#) - The Sign of the Fleece**); now **God** will test **Gideon** twice. **ADONAI** said to **Gideon**, “There are too many warriors with you. If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to Me that they rescued themselves by their own strength.” As **First Samuel 14:6** teaches, it is no problem for **God** to save with **the few as easily as the many**. So in keeping with **Deuteronomy 20:8**, **Ha’Shem** said to **Gideon**: **Therefore, tell the people that whoever is timid or afraid should return home to Mount [Gilboa]. So 22,000 of them returned home, but 10,000 remained (7:2-3 NLT).**



The Second Reduction of Gideon’s Army (7:4-6): But then the LORD told Gideon, “There are still too many!” This led to a second test. “Bring them down to the spring, and I will test them to determine who will go with you and who will not.” So Gideon took the men down to the water. There, ADONAI told him, “Separate those who cup the water in their hands from those who lap it up with their tongues like dogs.” Three hundred-men drank from cupped hands. All the rest got down on their knees to drink and lapped up the water like dogs (7:4-6 Hebrew). When the men went down to the spring to drink, all of them would have to get down on their knees, since it’s not possible to drink any other way. The issue was not who knelt and who stood, but who **cupped their hands** and brought it up to **their** mouth, and who would not. Thus, **Gideon** was given instruction on how to select men for **his** special cutting-edge forces. **Those** who were kept appeared to be the ones who bowed on **their** knees, but **cupped their hands** to bring up and **drink the water** from **their hands**, showing **they** were ready for sudden attack. The rest put **their** faces down **to drink**. The first test (of voluntary release) eliminated **the fearful**; here, the second test (of readiness at the stream) eliminated **the careless**.¹⁷¹

The Three Hundred (7:7-8): Then ADONAI said to Gideon, “I will use the 300 men that drank from cupped hands and give the Midianites into your hands.” Less than one percent of the original 32,000 (7:3) ended up following Gideon into battle. That handful of **men** represented the pure gold which YHVH desired in **His** service. **Gideon sent all the others** back to the base camp” (7:7 NLT). **They** would be called in later to participate in the fighting, even though **they** wouldn’t participate in the initial attack (see [Be – Gideon’s Problem with Ephraim](#)). However apprehensive **Gideon** might have been, **he** dutifully sent 9,700 Israelites home, but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and shofars of the others. Then **Gideon** took charge of the pathetically **small band** and prepared to face the vast army of **Midianites**. This passage ends with a statement concerning the enemy: **Now the camp of Midian lies below him in the Jezreel Valley (7:8 NIV)**. This is a transitional statement setting the stage for what was about to happen next.

The Spying Out of the Midianite Camp (7:9-14): With the excess eliminated from **Gideon’s** forces, YHVH seems eager to get on with the battle. But this time ADONAI didn’t wait for **Gideon** to protest the reduction of **his** forces. Instead, **God** raised the issue **Himself**. Verses 9 to 11 record **the sign** to **Gideon** that finally convinced **him** that **he** would defeat **the Midianites**. **That night ADONAI** gave

him both a command and a promise. The command was: **Get up and attack the Midianite camp** the promise was: **because I have given you the victory. But if you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah. Listen to what the Midianites are saying, then you will be strengthened to attack the camp. So he and Purah, his right-hand man, were to go down to the outposts of the camp (7:9-11 Hebrew).** The fact that **Gideon** was **fearful** again showed that **he** was still not **the mighty warrior (6:12)** that **he** would become. However, the one indispensable requirement for a leader of **God’s** people is not fearlessness, but obedience. Humanly speaking, there were two good reasons for **Gideon** to be **afraid**. The first was the sheer numbers of the enemy. **The Midianites, the Amalekites, and the Bedouin raiders had settled in the valley like a swarm of locusts.** The second was the resources and provisions of the enemy. **Their camels were like the grains of sand on the seashore – too many to count (7:12 NLT).** So while **Gideon** was troubled by **fearfulness**, he wasn’t paralyzed by it any more than when **he** was told to destroy **his father’s Ba’al altar (6:25-32); he went down to the enemy camp** and received the **strengthening he was promised.**¹⁷²

So with the stealth of spies, **Gideon and Purah arrived** and crept within earshot **just as a man was telling his companion about his dream.** Like **the dreams** in which **God** visited **Pharaoh** and **Nebuchadnezzar**, here **He** also provided an interpreter, in the form of a second **Midianite.**¹⁷³ Generally speaking, when **ADONAI** communicated with or through pagans, **He** would do so by means of a **dream.** Only with **Balaam** did **He** use direct speech (see the commentary on **Numbers Dn – Balaam’s Three Encounters with God**). But for people like **Pharaoh**, **Nebuchadnezzar**, **Laban**, and **Abimelech**, the Philistine king of Gerar, **He** used **dreams.** The basic content of **the man’s dream** was this: **I had this dream, and in my dream a loaf of barley came tumbling down into the Midianite camp. Barley** was the poor man’s bread, and it represented **Isra’el**, made poor by famine and **the Midianites.** More specifically, it represented **Gideon** and **his three hundred men. It hit a tenet, turned it over, and knocked it flat!** This symbolized the defeat of **the Midianites** by **Gideon.** **His companion** answered: **This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite victory over Midian and all its allies, meaning the Amalekites and the Bedouin raiders from the east (7:13-14 NLT).**¹⁷⁴ The strange dread that revealed itself in the dream was like **the great fear** that came over the citizens of **Jericho** before it fell to **Joshua (Joshua 2:9).** It is a supernatural, divinely induced **fear**, and the knowledge that **it** has already begun to take hold of **the enemy** was

the perfect antidote to **Gideon’s** own **fear (7:10)**. It was all the proof **he** needed. The impossible was about to happen again as **it** had in the past. **The God of the Exodus** was once again turning **His** face toward **His** people.¹⁷⁵

The Preparation for War (7:15-18): With the problem of **Gideon’s** fearfulness being resolved, **he** was then ready to proceed with **God’s** agenda. **When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he** was fully convinced that **he** would defeat **the Midianites**. Only then did **he** finally become **the mighty warrior** that **YHVH** had prophesied. **So, he bowed down and worshiped ADONAI. Then He returned to the camp of Isra’el** and issued the command: **Get up! ADONAI has given you the victory over the Midianite camp (7:15).**

Next, the preparation for the attack began. Having been assured of victory, **Gideon** immediately began to prepare for the battle. **His** actions and instructions in the next three verses demonstrate great concern for detail; but like **ADONAI’s** instructions to **Joshua** before the battle of **Jericho (Joshua 6:1-5)**, the strategy appeared to be totally absurd. **Dividing the 300 men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars with torches in all of their hands (7:16 NIV).** At the time **the shofars** were blown, **the empty jars** and **torches** could be held temporarily in one hand. **The empty jars** would be used to hide the light of **the torches**. The strategy was this: The sleeping enemy was to be surrounded on three sides, and then suddenly exposed to the light out of the darkness of night, in conjunction with the loud sounds of the **three hundred trumpets**, this would spread confusion and panic in **the camp**.¹⁷⁶ **Gideon’s** instructions moved from the general to the specific. First, **he** said: **Watch me and follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do (7:17 NIV).** This led to specific instructions: **When I and the 100 men with me blow our shofars, then you blow your shofars all around the whole camp and shout, “For ADONAI and for Gideon” (7:18 CJB)!** The basic purpose was to make as much noise as possible. The goal was to confuse the enemy and convince **them** that **they** were surrounded by a very large army. The basic sequence would go like this: First, the blast of **the shofars**; then the crashing of **the jars** exposing the light in the darkness; followed by the battle cry; which was, in turn, followed by another blast of **the shofars**, culminating with alternating **shouts** and **shofar** blasts during the chaos and pursuit of **the enemy**.¹⁷⁷



The Attack on Midian (7:19-23): Gideon’s attack was timed to perfection. **He and the 100 men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch.** The first watch went from 6:00 to 10:00 pm; the third watch went from 2:00 to 6:00 am; **the middle watch, or the second watch,** went from 10:00 pm to 2:00 am. **They arrived at the beginning of the middle watch,** which would mean just about 10:00 pm, meaning the sentries would have just come on duty and their eyes were not fully adapted to the darkness just yet. All was set. Then, **the three companies blew the trumpets and smashed their jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands, holding the trumpets that they were to blow in their right hands, they shouted, “A sword for Ha’Shem and for Gideon” (7:19-20 NIV)! The sword** here was used figuratively for the battle because **Isra’el**, at this point, didn’t have any **swords**. Only **the Midianites** had **swords**, which **they** would use against **themselves**. In this way, when an **Israelite** came upon a dead **Midianite**, **he** could take **the sword** from those who were slain. Adding **his** own name to **God’s** name, the **sword for Ha’Shem and for Gideon**, may have been the first step toward **Gideon’s** own downfall, as will be seen as the story progresses.



Everything went according to plan. **Each Israelite stood at his position around the camp and watched as all the Midianites, Amalekites, and Bedouin raiders ran around in a panic, crying out as they fled (7:21 Hebrew).** The Jewish army stood still and didn’t enter the camp itself. There was no need to enter because the mass confusion already caused was enough to win the battle. **When the 300 Israelites blew their shofars, ADONAI caused the Midianites, Amalekites, and Bedouin raiders throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords.** The confusion and panic created **Gideon and his three-hundred men** was entirely **ADONAI’s** doing and resulted into massive infighting among **Isra’el’s enemies.**¹⁷⁸ **Those who were not killed fled** down the Jordan Valley through the **Beth-Shean Pass**, and eventually crossing to the east side of the Jordan River, as far as **Beth-shittah toward Zererah and as far as the border of Abel-meholah near Tabbath (7:22 Hebrew).** This battle was the biblical use of psychological warfare at its best, and it resulted in bedlam. In the chaos, **the Midianites and their allies** killed each other by **the sword**, as **they ran, cried out, and fled.**

The flight of **the enemy** led to the general call of **Isra’el** to arms. **Then Gideon sent for the warriors of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh, who joined in pursuit after the Midianites (7:23 NIV).** This included the thousands who originally left **Gideon**, since now this turned into a mopping-up operation, and so **the fear** was gone. The quickness with which they responded suggests that the **22,000** of **verse 3** and the **9,700** of **verse 8** had not been dispersed completely, and that many of **them** were still relatively close to the battle ground. Any shortfall

was made up by sending messengers to call up volunteers from **the Ephraimites** as well.¹⁷⁹

Gideon was apparently a man of great potential and natural ability, but **he** lacked faith. **He** was **timid** in the midst of **his** potential. It took **God’s** call, signs, and arranging of events to change **his** heart. Are we the same? Perhaps **ADONAI** wants to use us in some way: teach a class, lead worship, be a greeter, lead a bible study, minister to the sick, be a counselor to youth or the down-and-out. But we are **timid**. We ask ourselves, “Can **God** really use me?” We want assurance. In fact, we demand it. Are we delaying **God’s** plan? Are we really trusting **Him** if **He** must give evidence after evidence that **He** desires (not needs) our participation? Fortunately, **He** doesn’t leave us wallowing in our potential. And when **He** brings us to trust **Him** and serve **Him**; and when we do, there is worship of **Him**.¹⁸⁰

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for **You** are so wonderful in every possible way! **Gideon** was wise in following exactly what **You** said to do in **Your** plan for victory. Likewise, I also need to listen carefully to **Your Word** and follow it to defeat the enemy of pride/sin. To love and to obey is the wisest thing I can do. For it brings me **shalom** and **hope**. **For I know the plans that I have in mind for you,**” declares **ADONAI**, “**plans for shalom and not calamity - to give you a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11)**.” Though I may not completely understand the why behind what **You** say, trusting and obeying **You** completely is always the best plan! What joy it is to trust in Your great love for me. Obeying such a wonderful heavenly **Father** is a privilege! In **Messiah’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*