

### Immediate Context

Clothed in the Spirit of God, Gideon summoned the local tribes and 32,000 showed up to fight. Rather than proceed immediately into battle, Gideon tests the Lord with the fleece and the Lord graciously affirmed He would be faithful to help Israel overcome. It would seem that everything was now in place for the fight, but the Lord wasn't ready yet and neither was Gideon. One thing we must keep in mind as we study this chapter is that this whole conflict was really about God and Israel, not Israel and Midian. The Lord's goal is to draw this people to Himself. The Midianites are just props. This principle remains true in the lives of God's people today (*Romans 8:28-29*).

### Judges 7:1-8 – Thinning the Herd

Gideon leads the force of 32,000 men south of the Midianites, and camps by a spring named Harod. Interestingly, the name of the spring is derived from the Hebrew word meaning, "to tremble". As we will see, it was a fitting location for what was to come next.

- Why did the number of Gideon's army need to be reduced? The Lord said they were too many to go and fight because they would believe they won because of their own strength and not the intervention of the Lord.
- Why was the first cut made on the basis of fear? It could be said that the cut was made more on the basis of faith than fear. Those stayed who had some degree of confidence in the Lord, their leader, their own strength, or perhaps were just so fed up with the Midianites that they didn't care if they risked their lives. We shouldn't be fooled into believing that 10,000 godly and courageous men remained. **There is nothing we read about the character of Israel before or after this passage indicating that there were a significant number of faithful people.** Recall that faithful Gideon's journey began by pulling down the idol at his parent's house and he is almost killed for it. It is interesting that 22,000 men who responded under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord now found themselves fearful and trembling and willingly departed.
- Why was the force reduced even further from 10,000? The Lord said that this was still too many. The purpose of this battle was to demonstrate that the Lord remained faithful to Israel and was worthy of their faith and worship.
- The first test was based upon a question posed to the men, requiring them to respond honestly. The second test was one of observation, noticing a distinction in the way they drank water. What was the difference between the men who lapped the water like a dog and those who knelt down to drink water? Some suggest that those who did not kneel down were more alert than those who knelt, indicating that they were better soldiers. Others would suggest that the distinction is arbitrary.
- How do you determine which interpretation is correct? The 10,000 remaining weren't necessarily the best fighters, but the ones without fear. The final 300 did not accomplish great military feats in this campaign by their cunning and strength. They just had to be able to carry a torch, break a jar, and blow a trumpet. **The glory of these men was the Lord, not their abilities or fitness for battle.** In his commentary on Judges, David Wilcock says, "*The object was to reduce Gideon's army to a force not of a particular kind, but of a particular number... The three hundred are meant to be not an elite, but a group so inadequate that when the battle is won*

(God declares) it cannot be a case of Israel's saying 'My own hand has delivered me'".<sup>1</sup> Read *Hebrews 11:32-34*, an important cross reference to properly interpret this passage. The point is that Gideon was a man of faith who was made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, and put foreign armies to flight. It is very likely that the distinction between those who knelt to drink and those who did not was arbitrary. **God's intention was to reduce the number dramatically, not because they were unfit for battle but because they were too fit for battle in the eyes of men.** By separating the men based on this arbitrary distinction, He achieved His goal.

- What lesson we can glean from this passage? We have a tendency to steal God's glory; therefore it is often necessary for the Lord to strip us of our own glory so that His glory may be seen in us. Read *2 Corinthians 12:9*. Despite crying out to God to remove his thorn in the flesh, Paul was told that the Lord's strength is perfected in the weakness of man. When we are weak in the flesh, then we can be strong in Him.

As the 10,000 departed, the 300 remaining men were left with all the provisions, including clay jars/pitchers in which food would be stored, torches, and the trumpets used to signal the troops and rally morale.

#### Judges 7:9-15a – Gideon's Final Assurance

When Gideon twice threw out the fleece at the end of *Judges 6*, he had an army of 32,000 men. Now, the Lord had purposefully reduced the force to 300.

- How did Gideon feel at this point? He had to be shaken. What was going to be a difficult task had now become an impossible task.
- Why did the Lord put two options in front of Gideon? The Lord demonstrated His compassion yet again, offering to provide fresh assurance as He increased the degree of difficulty of this task. Recall, Paul's thorn was given to him as a result of the abundance of revelations he received. **There is a correlation between the degree of grace given to an individual and the difficulty of the tasks to which they are called.** As Jesus said in *Luke 12:48*, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more."

The Midianite camp would seem like the least likely place for Gideon to gain encouragement. Here he saw the enemy scattered without number in the valley. Yet, at the borders he hears two men talking, one with a dream and other with an interpretation. Not only is he known by name by the enemy, but they are expecting an attack and a loss to Israel.

- How do these men know Gideon? Why did the tent represent Midian and the barley loaf represent Israel? How did they know how to interpret this dream? How did Gideon happen upon these men? **All of these questions became their own answer. The miraculous nature of what just happened is too obvious to miss. As the Lord said to Isaiah, "Before you call I will**

<sup>1</sup> Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Judges*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press. 1992. Page 71

---

answer!" (*Isaiah 65:24*). Gideon saw that the Lord was already working on the other side of the equation before he went into battle.

- What is Gideon's response? Why did he do this? His response is perfect... he worshipped God. This was the first and absolutely right response to seeing the Lord's faithfulness demonstrated. He worshipped and went forward in faith

#### Judges 7:15b-22 – The Battle... or was it?

- Why shout, "For the Lord and for Gideon"? The battle was first of all for the Lord, but also for Gideon, the man the Lord had called to lead Israel. We know that the Midianites were aware of him for some reason.
- When is the third watch of the night? It is from midnight to 3:00 am. This attack happened right at midnight when the Midianites had fallen into a deep sleep.
- How difficult was this battle? Is it consistent with what the Lord promised Gideon in Judges 6:16? This battle was easy from Israel's standpoint. As they blew the trumpets, smashed the pitchers, and held the torches aloft, the Midianites woke from slumber, were terrified, and began to fight one another. God was faithful to His promise that this would be an easy battle.
- Why did the Midianites turn on one another? It appears that the Lord beset them with a spirit of fear, confusion, and panic. Perhaps the man that Gideon overheard was not the only one who was having a bad dream that night. This was the ultimate move of psychological warfare. The Lord was the one who accomplished this. It was nothing that Gideon or his men did.

#### Judges 7:23-25 – The Return of the 31,700 and Ephraim

As the Midianites retreat, they are moving south along the Jordan River valley to reach a point where they could ford the river and escape to the east. Gideon summoned those who were part of the earlier army (the 31,700) and they give chase. He also sends for the tribe of Ephraim to guard the popular fords of the Jordan, in order to pen the Midianites in and capture them. The Ephraimites were successful, capturing and killing the two generals (or princes) of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb.

It is interesting that Oreb's name is translated "raven" and Zeeb is "wolf". Both of these animals are scavengers, which is consistent with the character of the Midianites. The death of these two leaders was significant enough to warrant the naming of the locations where they were killed: the rock of Oreb and the wine press of Zeeb. Apparently, they made it across the Jordan, because the Ephraimites brought their heads back with them from across the Jordan.