

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 7

Vv. 1- 8 *Selection of Gideon's three hundred.* Gideon started out with thirty-two thousand men in his army. When he allowed everyone who was fearful to return, twenty-two thousand turned back. God indicated this was still too large a force. He devised a test whereby Gideon took with him the men who lapped the water as dogs lap it. These men were prepared for battle, and with these chosen three hundred Gideon drove out the Midianites.

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Vv. 9-18 *The enemy soldier's dream.* Gideon overheard an enemy soldier telling of his dream. The interpretation was clear to the enemy warrior —God was going to deliver the Midianites into the hand of Gideon. Such a revelation must have struck fear in the hearts of the Midianites; and at the same time, it must have given courage to Gideon.

Vv. 19-25 *Israel's rout of the Midianites.* The Midianites, Amalekites, and children of the East had gathered themselves together to war against Israel. By the use of a divided force and by giving the impression they had surrounded the enemy, Gideon and his men were able to defeat the oppressing forces completely.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *Many are called; few are chosen.* Gideon started out with thirty-two thousand. Twenty-two thousand were allowed to return when they indicated they were afraid. The remaining ten thousand were reduced to three hundred by a test which God directed. It does not matter to the Lord whether He saves by few or by many. In like manner, not every soldier who enlists in the army of the Lord will receive the crown of life. Many are called, but few are chosen.
2. *God speaks in different ways.* The opening verse of the book of Hebrews declares God spoke in times past unto the fathers by the prophets in divers portions and sundry manners (Hebrews 1:1) . The dream of the enemy soldier must have been revealed and interpreted largely for Gideon's benefit, but the effect would have

been great on the enemy as well. Those who heard it must have been gripped by fear and left with little courage to fight. God has spoken primarily to us through His Son by the written Word. At the same time, the heavens declare His glory, and the firmament showeth His handiwork (Psalms 19 : 1) . When God speaks to our hearts, we should be quick to obey.

3. *For God and for His people.* The Midianite soldier declared that the meaning of his dream dealt with the sword of the Lord and of Gideon. He knew that Gideon was God's man. If a victory were achieved it would be to the glory of God, but it would also bring recognition to Gideon. What is done today in the church should be done for the glory of God, but victory will also bring glory to His church and to His people.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Gideon's Men Reduced to Three Hundred 7:1-14

Then Jerubbaal, who *is* Gideon and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley.

2 And the Lord said unto Gideon, 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.

3 Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.

4 And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will

try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go.

5 So he brought down the people unto the water: and the Lord said unto Gideon, 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.

6 And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, *were* three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water.

7 And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.

8 So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men: and the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley.

9 And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand.

10 But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host:

11 And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host.

12 And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seaside for multitude.

13 And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along.

14 And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host.

1. Where were the Well of Harod and the Hill of Moreh?

7:1

The Well of Harod is at the foot of Mount Gilboa. The Hill of Moreh is in the valley of Jezreel. Today a fine spring of water flows from the base of a hill and through an area which has been made into a recreational park for the benefit of the present-day inhabitants of the land. The valley is fertile and is tilled extensively. In the modern times, and in the times of Gideon, it was a place well suited for the pitching of a battle. Water was available for the troops, and the terrain was such as could be traversed easily by the troops.

2. Why did God want to reduce the number of soldiers?

7:2

If the battle seemed to be won in a natural way, the people would say they had won the victory by their own power. After the number was reduced and they faced overwhelming odds, they knew God had given them the victory. In such a case they would praise God instead of taking credit for themselves. We are not told how many soldiers gathered under the banner of the Midianites, but they were joined by the Amalekites and the children of the East. There should be no doubt, however, that Israel faced overwhelming odds when she put only three hundred men in the field.

3. *Was it a usual custom to allow soldiers to leave the army? 7:3*

Any faint-hearted man was sent home. The Law said, "What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest his brother's heart faint as well as his heart" (Deuteronomy 20:8). This is the provision which was given to Israel by Moses concerning times when the people would go out to battle. The morale of the army would thus be high, and in reality the army was left as a group of volunteers. If cowards were allowed to stay in the army, they would encourage others to be fainthearted.

4. *To what water did they go? 7:4*

Gideon went to the waters flowing out from the Well of Harod. Even today the water flows into a large pool where people can bathe. It then drains out into a stream which flows through the valley of Jezreel, providing water for extensive plant life—trees, cereal and grain crops, and grasses. In fact, it is one of the most verdant, well-watered, and fertile areas of northern Israel.

5. *Why did Gideon take those who lapped? 7:7*

They were ready for battle and on guard. Those who were less alert must have put their faces down into the water so that they were unable to keep their eyes on the enemy. Some may have enjoyed the refreshing stream so much that they stayed too long, washing and splashing, and in general, giving in to the desires of the flesh for the enjoyment of the stream. These were certainly unfit for the battle which lay ahead of Israel. Only those who took just a bit of water in their hands, raised it to their mouths, and lapped it as a dog laps water were ready for the battle. These were the men whom God designated as the ones to fight the Midianites. They were only three

hundred in number.

6. *What victuals did the people take?* 7:8

The 300 kept the military equipment of the 9,700. The trumpets of the full army were taken so that Gideon could give the impression of a much larger force. They also took the necessary provisions from those who were turned back from the battle. They would thus have all the necessary supplies without having to forage for food. In this manner, they were free to give their undivided attention to the battle.

7. *Was Gideon afraid?* 7:10

God knew Gideon was facing overwhelming odds. He was thus willing for Gideon to be as well prepared as possible for the great task of ridding Israel of the devastating oppressors. Gideon had asked for repeated signs which gave him the necessary assurance to begin his work. In this instance, he was told that he might take his servant with him and go down to hear the interpretation of a dream which God was sending to an enemy soldier. Gideon impresses us as a man who would obey God's will implicitly, but he was a man who wanted to be as fully prepared and as completely confident as possible.

8. *Why was Gideon encouraged by a soldier's dream?*
7:13-15

The dream was of a very unusual nature. A barley cake was seen rolling down a hill. It rolled through the enemy camp and flattened a soldier's tent. The soldier knew what it meant. Evidently both the dream and the interpretation were given by God. It signified clearly to the soldier that God was going to defeat the armies of the Midianites, Amalekites, and the children of the East at the hands of Gideon, a man who was threshing grain to make cakes when God called him to be a judge.

The Lamps and the Pitchers 7:15-23

15 And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshiped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midjam

16 And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers.

17 And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do.

18 When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.

19 So Gideon, and the three hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands.

20 And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.

21 And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled.

22 And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Beth-shittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abel-meholah, unto Tabbath.

23 And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Mannasseh, and pursued after the Midianites.

9. *Why did Gideon divide his force? 7:16*

It was military strategy. It would be very unusual for three hundred men to have three hundred trumpets and three hundred torches. Such large numbers of this kind of equipment would indicate a much larger force. The great cry, the divided force, completely surrounding the enemy, and the many lights confused the Midianites. They believed that they were surrounded. In their confusion, they fled before a much smaller number of soldiers. They were so surprised and bewildered that they attacked each other thinking they were smiting the Israelites. God granted Israel a complete victory.

10. *Where were the trumpets and pitchers obtained? 7:16*

These were normal for an army of 10,000. These were the normal supplies for the commissary or kitchen crew of the army. No doubt, these were humble, earthen pitchers used for holding liquids of various natures. The trumpets would have been in the hands of those who signaled the marching of the army. The noise, the lights, and the divided attack routed the Midianites.

11. *What was the meaning of Gideon's battle cry? 7:18*

The word for *sword* does not appear in this verse, but it is in verse 14 and it appears again in verse 20. The main idea of the cry was that the victory would be to the glory of God. In addition, Gideon would gain the respect of the men of Israel and strike terror into the hearts of the enemy. Gideon was God's inspired leader and deliverer of the people of Israel. Only by God's power was Gideon able to win a war against the much larger force of the Midianites. God was working a mighty deliverance by a man who was following God's guidance. It was most appropriate for the soldiers to adopt this battle cry.

12. *How were the articles used? 7:20*

The lights were kept in the pitchers until they were

exposed by breaking the pitchers. The trumpets were

blown to indicate how many companies of soldiers were in the camp. In addition, the noise would be tremendous, striking terror into the hearts of the opposing soldiers, and at the same time, encouraging the army of Gideon.

13. *What additional factor affected the result of the battle?*
7:22

In the midst of the confusion, the Midianites, 'Amalekites, and the children of the East attacked one another. As the verse says, "And the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow." The Israelites had lights, but the enemies were fighting in darkness. The enemy was expecting many more soldiers than those bearing the lights and the trumpets and thought surely some of their own fellows were Israelites. As a result the victory was completely Israel's.

14. *What tribes rallied to Gideon's aid? 7:23*

The men of Israel out of the tribes of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh joined in the pursuit of the Midianites. Gideon also called men from the tribe of Ephraim to take the fords of the Jordan so that the Midianites would not be able to get across into the Transjordan area, from which they had come. Issachar was directly involved in the war since the battle was fought in her territory, and it may be presumed that they were also rallying to assist since there is no word to the contrary. Their tribes were in the northern part of Israel, and there is no mention of the tribes beyond the Jordan or the southern tribes coming to fight in the battle.

Gideon's Victory 7:24-25

24 And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan.

25 And they took two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb; and they slew Oreb upon the rock Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the winepress of Zeeb, and pursued Midian, and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side Jordan.

15. What were the waters of Beth-barah? 7:24

The name Beth-barah is a compound of two Hebrew words, *beth* and *barah*, and it means "house of the ford." Presumably, these fords were the outlets of the streams which ran down from the mountains of Ephraim in the vicinity of Beth-shan, where Gideon won his victory. It was at this place that Jacob crossed the Jordan on his return from Haran, and it was here that Jephtha slew the Ephraimites in a later episode. Van de Velde identified this spot as the crossing of the Jordan, which is on the road from Nablus in Israel to Es Salt in Jordan.

16. What were the "Rock of Oreb" and the "Winepress of Zeeb?" 7:25

They were west of Jordan where Ephraim possessed the fords. The winepress was probably in the vicinity. These locations were so named because Zeeb and Oreb were slain there. These memorials were probably well known in the days when Judges was written. The land of Israel abounds in rocks, stones, *winepresses*, altars, and other reminders of the way in which God blessed His people. These two memorials were of that nature.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 7

1. What was Gideon's other name?
2. Where was the army of Israel when they fought Midian?
3. How many soldiers did Gideon have at the outset of the

battle?

JUDGES

4. How many were fearful and returned home?
5. To what number was the army finally reduced?
6. What was the name of Gideon's servant?
7. What was destroyed by the barley cake in the soldier's dream?
8. What was the battle cry of the soldiers of Israel?
9. What were the names of the two princes of Midian slain by Gideon's men?
10. What other people were with the Midianites in the battle?