

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

JUDG. 7:9 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 sea side 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.

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

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 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.

Gideon Defeats the Midianites

Lesson Text: Judges 7:9-21

Related Scriptures: Judges 7:1-25; Isaiah 41:10-14;
II Chronicles 20:14-17; Leviticus 26:3-8

TIME: 1191 B.C. PLACE: near the hill of Moreh

GOLDEN TEXT—“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” (Judges 7:14).

Lesson Exposition

GOD’S PROMISE OF VICTORY—

Judg. 7:9-14

Deliverance determined (Judg. 7:9-10). Once convinced that God would deliver Israel from Midian by his hand, Gideon gathered a large army of some 32,000 men (cf. vs. 3). While we might think he would have been commended for such efforts, the Lord actually told him, “The people that are with thee are too many” (vs. 2). God did not want Israel to conclude that it was by their own power or military strength that they defeated Midian. Consequently, the Lord wanted to reduce the number in Gideon’s army. The first thing God told him to do was to let all the fearful return home, and 22,000 of them did so. With the 10,000 remaining troops, Gideon may have wondered if that was a sufficient force to defeat Midian; but again, God told him, “The people are yet too many” (vs. 4). Directing Gideon to take his men to a brook, God said, “I will try them for thee there” (vs. 4). The precise significance of how the

men drank the water is not stated. Whatever conclusion we come to concerning the brook, we know that God determined to secure victory using only the three hundred men He selected. If God could defeat Midian through an army less than 1 percent the size of the army Gideon started with, there would be no doubt that it was due to divine intervention, not human effort. We should never doubt what God can do with a few who are committed to Him. That very night after Gideon’s army had been reduced to a fraction of what it had been, Gideon was given another sign, though this was one he had not requested. The Lord told Gideon to descend into the valley where Midian was camped; there he would be assured of ultimate victory. Knowing Gideon’s propensity to fear, God told him to take his servant with him. Exactly how this would help we are not told. But as we all know, just

having someone with us can bolster our courage in a dangerous or difficult situation.

Doubt dispelled (Judg. 7:11-12). Gideon was going to hear something in the Midianite camp that would strengthen his courage. The Midianites and their allies had amassed a large army, numbering 135,000 (Judg. 8:10). There were so many encamped in the valley that they are described as “grasshoppers for multitude” (7:12) and “as the sand by the sea side for multitude.” Gideon and his servant came near to the Midianite camp.

Dream described (Judg. 7:13-14). Considering what we already know about the large Midianite army versus Gideon’s three hundred divinely selected soldiers, some might conclude this was going to be a suicide mission. Of course, things were going to turn out quite differently. Overhearing a couple of the Midianite sentries, Gideon and his servant learned that Israel’s victory had been predetermined by the Lord. One of the soldiers described a dream in which a “cake of barley bread” (vs. 13) had tumbled into their camp and crushed a tent. Of course, in real life a small piece of bread could not do much damage of any kind. Immediately, the other soldier interpreted the dream as a sign of Gideon’s defeat of Midian. This, the soldier said, was not because of Gideon’s superior military force but because God had ordained his victory.

GOD’S PLAN OF ATTACK—Judg. 7:15-18

Interpretation accepted (Judg. 7:15-16). Hearing both the dream and its interpretation emboldened Gideon. He now realized that victory was certain. This also led him to worship the Lord. With his faith bolstered by his visit to the enemy camp, Gideon returned to his men and called upon them to ready themselves for battle. He confidently told them, “The Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian” (Judg. 7:15). The plan for victory was simple. Each soldier in Gideon’s army was to take with him three objects: a trumpet, an empty pitcher (or jar), and a lamp (or torch) within the pitcher. We are not told at this point why Gideon divided the three hundred men into three companies. It eventually becomes clear, however, this was so they could surround and attack the Midianites from three different directions, giving the impression they were greater in number than they actually were.

Instruction offered (Judg. 7:17-18).

Though reluctant at the beginning, Gideon confidently took the reins of leadership of his small army. He told his troops they should follow his lead by doing what he did when they attacked Midian. “The soldiers may have been mystified as to the actual purpose of such unusual weapons, but their orders were to follow Gideon’s example carefully” (Barker and Kohlenberger, eds., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition*, Zondervan). Obviously, the men who were with

Gideon had not only volunteered for this mission but also had been selected by the Lord for this battle. But even if they were the bravest men in Israel, they were severely outnumbered by the enemy. Surely they could not help but wonder about the numerical disparity between Midian's army and their own small force. Under normal circumstances, only one trumpet would accompany a contingent of troops. When Joshua conquered Jericho, only seven trumpets were used (Josh. 6:6). The blowing of three hundred trumpets would seem to indicate a very large army, quite the opposite of Gideon's troops. In addition to blowing the trumpets, the men were to shout, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon" (Judg. 7:18).

**GOD'S POWER—Judg. 7:19-21
Trumpets blown (Judg. 7:19).** Generally speaking, ancient warfare was conducted during daylight hours. The Midianites undoubtedly thought that any battle with Gideon's army would come by daylight, if indeed they even expected a military encounter at all. Obviously, the Midianites still had to guard against a night attack or enemy probing, so they posted regular sentries. But the majority of their troops had gone to bed. It was during the middle of the night that Gideon began his attack, just after new sentries had been posted. Even if these men sensed that something was about to happen, the bulk of the Midianite army was fast asleep. As most of us know, being awakened in the middle of the night can be very

disconcerting, whether it is from the ringing of the telephone or some unknown noise. Most of us cannot just jump out of bed and be ready to confront the unexpected, especially an intruder! Gideon's company followed his lead and blew their trumpets and broke the pitchers in their hands. This was all part of the element of surprise to throw the Midianites into confusion.

Triumph assured (Judg. 7:20-21). Simultaneously, the three companies of Gideon's army did as their leader had done. The blowing of the trumpets awakened the Midianites. Hearing so many trumpets in their semiconscious state led them to conclude that a vast army was attacking. The purpose of the pitchers was to conceal the light of their torches. Breaking the pitchers also may have caused the Midianites to think the battle had begun. While the lamps would have provided light for Gideon's men, they also served to frighten the drowsy Midianites. Seeing the lights on three sides of their encampment, they would have concluded they were surrounded by a large army. started fighting each other. In the darkness and confusion, they did not even know who the enemy was. With this initial success in putting the Midianites to flight, Gideon issued a call to arms to other Israelite tribes to pursue their enemies. Midian was defeated, and Israel enjoyed some forty years of peace (vs. 28). Later, the Israelites wanted Gideon to rule over them as their king (vs. 22). Wisely, Gideon rejected their request.

He said, "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you" (vs. 23). This was what God wanted. —

QUESTIONS

1. What was the point of God earlier telling Gideon to reduce the size of his army?
2. Why do you think Gideon was so fearful?
3. How are the Midianites and their allies described?
4. What was the substance of the dream of the Midianite sentry?
5. How was the soldier's dream interpreted? How did Gideon respond?
6. What items were given to each of Gideon's soldiers?
7. When did Gideon's troops attack? Why?
8. What happened in the camp of Midian when Israel attacked?
9. What were the long-term results of this battle?
10. What did the people later want Gideon to do?

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We can be confident in obeying God's commands because they are both for our good and for His glory (Judg. 7:9-11).
2. God will strengthen our faith during our time of testing as we rely on Him (vss. 12-14).

3. Our faith is strengthened when we realize that God is in control (vs. 15).
4. Our commitment to the Lord assures us of ultimate victory over evil (Judg. 7:16-18; cf. Ps. 23:4).
5. God will fight for those who trust and obey His Word (Judg. 7:19).
6. Satan's weapons cannot harm the righteous (vss. 20-21).

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why is it important for us to obey God's Word in times of discouragement (Judg. 7:9; cf. Gal. 6:9)?
2. The righteous are commanded to walk by faith and not by sight (Judg. 7:10-11). Does this mean we should completely disregard earthly obstacles?
3. How important is it for spiritual leaders to lead by example (vs. 17)?
4. What happens when believers disobey God's Word?
5. How is the power of God proved in the midst of human weakness?
6. Why is failure impossible when we follow God's plans (vss. 18-20)?
7. How has God worked in your life during a time of despair? — Wardell Miller.

Golden Text Illuminated

“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” (Judges 7:14).

It is indeed amazing to consider the lengths that Almighty Yahweh was willing to go to in order to encourage and reassure the timid and reluctant Gideon. His compassion on Gideon was evident as he neared the time of his small band's attack on the overwhelmingly larger armies of Midian. The context here is one Midianite soldier's interpretation of his fellow soldier's dream. The two had been sleeping, and the one who had had the disturbing dream awoke and decided to share it with his comrade. All these things were spoken within the hearing of Gideon and his companion, who had sneaked down into the Midianite army camp during the night at the command of the Lord. The exchange has a comical aspect to it, although it probably did not seem so at the time. The Lord tells Gideon to go down to the camp to hear for himself the emotional and mental state of the Midianites. He arrives just in time to overhear a soldier's dream about an enormous barley cake that rolls into the Midianite camp and utterly flattens a tent. Then the man's comrade interprets the dream—it can be nothing other than the sword of the great warrior Gideon, who is coming with God's army to annihilate them! If

that did not embolden Gideon, fainthearted as he may have been, nothing would! —