

Week #:	182	Series:	God's Judgment	Title:	Gideon – The Battle
Scriptures:	Judges 7:9-25				
Songs:	Blow The Trumpet In Zion				
	Battle Belongs				
	PRAYER:	Another In The Fire			
Videos:	Judges Song – What's in the Bible #4 (Time- 31:31-33:25)				

Judge #5 - Gideon: The Battle

The first four judges in our study have been:

1. Othniel: He was Caleb's nephew. Israel lived in peace after him for 40 years
2. Ehud: He was known for the physical feature of being left-handed. Israel lived in peace after him for 80 years.
3. Shamgar: He was known for killing 600 Philistines with a farm tool, an oxgoad.
4. Deborah: She was a female prophetess, whom God used to free the people from Jabin [Yavin], King of Hazor, and his commander Sisera.
5. Gideon: Called God's valiant hero.

We left off last week with Adonai choosing the army for Gideon. The Lord said that Gideon had too many troops at his disposal to fight against the invading Midianites and Amalekites. It was cut down from 32,000 to 10,000. In the 2nd round of cut-downs the number was further reduced to just 300 men, or less than 1% of all the Israelite tribesmen who had answered Gideon's call to war.

What makes this puny number all the more astounding is that the size of the forces they were going to face was about 135,000, a ratio of more than 400 Midianites to every Israelite soldier. Now, the reality is that probably of that 135,000 something around an additional 100,000 were women and children because that's how the nomadic armies from the eastern desert regions traveled and fought: their families traveled with them and they all moved around as a cohesive group.

The Lord insisted on this seemingly outlandish tactic (7:2):

"There are too many people with you for me to hand Midyan over to them, because I don't want Isra'el to be able to boast against me, 'We saved ourselves by our own strength.'

The Lord wanted to make this idolatrous generation of Israel acutely aware that He's still there, He's still watching, He's still acting, and He's still saving. He's still Israelite's God, He still loves Israel (despite their unfaithfulness towards Him) and there is no other like Him. That Gideon obeyed God on this (even though we find that he is certainly skeptical about it all) should be seen as to his merit. When we step out of our comfort zones at the leading of the Lord, He doesn't expect us to remain comfortable; that's the whole point. If it wasn't uncomfortable then we've merely stepped from one comfort zone into another. The idea is that we do UNcomfortable things in faith. So don't ever think that you aren't demonstrating sufficient faith when facing a grueling challenge and you have fears and worries along the way. Ask any soldier who has ever been in combat if they were afraid and they'll tell you "absolutely!" The issue is CONTROLLING that fear and still functioning, not dismissing it.

Even so, Gideon would have to appear sure and confident among his men; nothing frightens troops more than a wavering leader.

Judges 7:9-12

⁹That night *ADONAI* said to him, "Get up and attack the camp, because I have handed it over to you.

¹⁰But if you are afraid to attack, go down with your servant Purah; ¹¹and after you hear what they are saying, you will have the courage to attack the camp." So with his servant Purah he went down to the outposts of the camp.

Well, it seems the nervous Gideon needs yet another sign and the Lord was merciful to provide it since obviously He knew every thought that Gideon harbored deep within. So, Adonai tells Gideon that if he's STILL concerned about what lay ahead he should take a man named Purah with him, sneak down the hillside below where the enemy was camped, and listen in to what was being said.

Judges 7:12-14

¹² Now Midyan, 'Amalek and all the others from the east had settled in the valley as thick as locusts; their camels too were beyond counting, like the sand on the seashore. ¹³ Gid'on got there just as a man was telling a comrade about a dream he had had: "I just now dreamt that a loaf of barley bread fell into the camp of Midyan, came to the tent and struck it so hard that it overturned the tent and knocked it flat." ¹⁴ His comrade answered, "This can only be the sword of Gid'on son of Yo'ash [Joash], a man of Isra'el. God has given Midyan and all its army into his hands."

We're told that they went to the outermost area of the Midianite camp; this was where a guard of watchmen would have been set up because surely the enemy were aware of the thousands of Israelite troops that had come to aid Gideon and knew that something was up. And what Gideon overheard was one guard talking to another, telling him about a dream he had.

In this time, dreams were considered very important and taken extremely seriously. The Midianite soldier says that he dreamed that a barley cake fell into the midst of their encampment and hit his tent such that it fell down. The other Midianite soldier interpreted the dream as meaning that the Gideon-led Israelites were about to attack in the name of the God of Israel and that Israel would prevail.

Why would the soldier interpret that dream in such a fatalistic manner and why does he see Israel as being symbolized by the barley cake?

First, they were well aware of the many thousands of Israelite tribesmen who had answered the call of Gideon (around 32,000). That meant that there was around a 4 to 1 advantage for Midian, but that still didn't seem comforting to this Midianite soldier.

Second, barley was in that era used to make the bread of poor people. Barley was much less desired than wheat for making bread (and if you've ever tried barley bread you'd know why). Yet, of course, much barley was used simply due to the reality of growing seasons. Barley naturally ripens in late winter to early spring and wheat was a summer crop. Barley is at times used to symbolize Israel in the Bible; and in this particular case notice what season the nomads came. We're told back in Judges 6:11 that the Angel of Adonai first commissioned Gideon when Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress. They came to confiscate the wheat harvest, not the barley harvest.

The Hebrew word translated for "barley cake" is *tselil*, which means a round or circular loaf. It's the shape of Bedouin bread that is cooked not as a square baked loaf like we do today, but as a flat bread cooked on a griddle (much like our pita bread). It is a word play that works with the Hebrew word *haphak* that is properly translated as "tumbled". So, we have a rolling or round batch of barley tumbling into a tent.

Judges 7:15

¹⁵ When Gid'on heard the dream and its interpretation, he fell on his knees in worship. Then he returned to the camp of Isra'el and said, "Get up! because *ADONAI* has handed Midyan's army over to you."

When Gideon heard this, it greatly strengthened him, and he fell on his knees in both relief and worship. Now he was ready to stake his life on the Word of God. So, he told his men to arise for the moment has come that the Lord will deliver Israel from the hand of their oppressor.

Judges 7:16-18

¹⁶ He divided the three hundred men into three companies. He put in the hands of all of them *shofars* and empty pitchers with torches in them. ¹⁷ Then he said to them, "Watch me, and do what I do. When I get to the edge of the camp, whatever I do, you do the same. ¹⁸ When I and everyone with me blow the *shofar*, then you blow your *shofars* all around the whole camp, and shout, "For *ADONAI* and for *Gid'on!*"

It was nighttime and a surprise attack was planned. We see throughout the Bible Israel using deception and the dark hours to gain an advantage over the enemy in wartime. Gideon's strategy was to divide up his troops into 3 groups of 100 each. Now we find out why Gideon had those Israelites who had been dismissed to leave their shofars behind; because every one of his 300 men now was armed with one (it was, of course, not usual that every man would have a shofar; usually it was only the leaders). Each man was also given a torch and a clay pot of some kind that they could hold over the torch so that it would conceal its light.

Judges 7:19-22

¹⁹ *Gid'on* and the hundred men with him arrived at the edge of the camp a little before midnight, just after they had changed the guard. They blew the *shofars* and broke in pieces the pitchers that were in their hands. ²⁰ All three companies blew the *shofars*, broke the pitchers and held the torches in their left hands, keeping their right hands free for the *shofars* they were blowing; and they shouted, "The sword for *ADONAI* and for *Gid'on!*" ²¹ Then, as every man stood still in place around the camp, the whole camp was thrown into panic, with everyone screaming and trying to escape. ²² *Gid'on's* men blew their 300 *shofars*, and *ADONAI* caused everyone in the camp to attack his comrades; and the enemy fled beyond Beit-Sheetah near Tz'rerah, as far as the border of Avel-M'cholah, by Tabat.

They move into positions around the Midianite encampment. Gideon tells his men that they are to follow his lead, and when he sounds the shofar, they are to suddenly and in unison begin to blow their shofars. After blowing the shofars for a few moments, they are to shout the words:

*"The sword for ADONAI and for *Gid'on!*"*

Why those words? Because it fulfilled the dream of that soldier using his own words:

"This can only be the sword of *Gid'on* son of Yo'ash [Joash], a man of Isra'el. God has given Midyan and all its army into his hands."

The attack is launched in earnest at the start of the middle watch, meaning around 10 pm. The whole camp (soldiers, their wives, and children) would have been asleep for a while and only the sentries were left to fend for the camp. At the same moment Gideon and his men blew those horns, they broke the clay covers over their torches and held them up high in their left hands, leaving their right hands free to hold their shofars and continued to blow them.

I can't even imagine the racket and the confusion it caused. Can you picture being in a deep slumber from a hard day when suddenly this shattering din of 300 shofars interrupts the quiet desert night and startles you awake, and you look out of your tent and in the pitch black darkness you see hundreds of torches that obviously belong to the enemy surrounding you? And that the last you knew 32,000 Israelite soldiers had arrived for the battle?

Up to this point Gideon's 300 men hadn't even drawn their swords (in fact both hands were busy, one holding a torch the other a shofar); they simply scared their enemy into a panic. Verse 21 says that every Israelite man stood in his place. From there they watched as men grabbed up their wives and children and started running for their lives. The camels would have stampeded. Some of the soldiers began lashing out in the dark at any silhouette that moved, killing countless numbers of their own, certain that hordes of Israelite fighters had

descended upon them. These human locusts took flight and instinctively began to race back towards where they had come from, across the Jordan River to the east and south. All 3 towns mentioned in verse 24 as their exit route were in the general area of Jabesh-Gilead.

Now let's stop for a minute and forget that we're reading Scripture and focus instead on the tale. These nomads were real people responding to a dangerously real situation. They reacted just like people from any society in any era would react. The same went for the Israelites. You don't keep the existence and whereabouts of 32,000 Israelites or a quarter of a million invaders secret. The Hebrew (and Canaanite for that matter) inhabitants of the hill country to the north and south of the valley of Jezreel (where this was taking place) had been carefully watching this situation because they knew that in one way or another they would be affected by the outcome. Unlike in our modern times when we sleep soundly because we trust our police and our military to protect us, no such condition or thought existed in that day. Tribal and clan leaders watched over their territories 24/7 with a jealous and wary eye at all times. That watchfulness was not only for the foreign enemies, but also for their own brethren from other clans and tribes who often sought to take advantage of a situation for their own benefit.

Judges 7:23-25

²³ Then men of Isra'el were summoned from Naftali, Asher, and both regions of M'nasheh; and they pursued Midyan. ²⁴ Gid'on sent messengers through all the hills of Efrayim, with the message, "Come down and attack Midyan; and capture the rivers before they get there, as far as Beit-Barah, and also the Yarden." So all the men of Efrayim came together and seized the rivers as far as Beit-Barah and the Yarden [Jordan]. ²⁵ They also captured two chiefs of Midyan, 'Orev and Ze'ev. They put 'Orev to death at the Rock of 'Orev and Ze'ev at Ze'ev's Winepress; then, as they kept pursuing Midyan, they brought the heads of Orev and Ze'ev to Gid'on, who had crossed to the far side of the Yarden [Jordan].

The initial summons by Gideon to Holy War was to Manessah, Asher, Zevulun, and Naphtali. Even though they were dismissed, they were now recalled. In verse 23 the flight of the enemy led to a general call of Israel to arms. And as one can imagine, everybody loves to join in a rout and take some credit and vengeful enjoyment from it; so, Hebrews from several of the tribes started pouring out of the woodwork, but now another tribe was specifically solicited to join in the action: Ephraim. Partly this was due to the paths the fleeing Midianites would have taken through Ephraim's territory as they attempted to get back to home and safety. But it was also due to Ephraim's great status at this time.

The men of Ephraim were prepared and ready to pounce at a moment's notice because they had been observing. So, they took up position along the many tributaries and forks of the Jordan River at the fording points in order to intercept the marauders from the east and trap them. Two of the key Midianite leaders were captured: 'Orev and Ze'ev and only their lifeless heads were turned over to Gideon. Notice the names attributed to the two places where they were executed: the Rock of 'Orev and the Winepress of Ze'ev. Probably these two places had no recognized names before these events, but later they were referred to by the actions that took place there. So many place names in the Bible happened in exactly that way, often replacing an earlier place name.