

Gideon's 300

Lessons from Judges 7

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Not long after my last sermon ["Against All Odds"; Sermon #842] about the 300 Spartans and their heroic stand at Thermopylae, it occurred to me that the Bible contained its own version of the 300. I thought that this episode in Israel's history, and the instruction that it contains, would make a good follow-up to the Christian soldier lessons contained therein. But after studying it more deeply, and thinking about it a bit more, I found that the lessons were very different. It is a rather long story, and we will not get to the whole story, but it will take the whole sermon time to tell this tale.

Our story of 300 Israelites occurs in Israel, not Greece. It happened about 700 years earlier. The battle of Thermopylae occurred in 480 ^{BC}, so this occurred about the early twelfth century ^{BC}. Scholars, of course, debate as to whether it was a hundred years either side of this date; but 1200 ^{BC} will suffice. If you remember your history and literature, you know that this was near the time of the Trojan War. It is quite a ways back there in history.

The specific geographical setting is in northern Israel in the land given to the western part of the half-tribe of Manasseh. If you will remember when the Israelites approached the Jordan River, half of the Manassites, along with Reuben and Gad, said, "We want our inheritance on this side of the Jordan." God said that this was fine. Just send your men across Jordan and I will give it to you if they fight. So they said fine and went across, and later on the other half of the tribe got their normal allocation of land which was in the northern tier of Israel. It was actually the biggest section of land in Israel, close in size to what Judah was given. Judah was given a big swath of land. This encompassed the area we now know as the Valley of Megiddo [what Revelation calls Armageddon], the Jezreel Valley, and that whole very fertile area all the way over to the Jordan River.

If you will remember some of the geographical markers, Mt. Carmel, on the west, was one of the richest areas of all Israel, and on the east, toward the

Jordan, was Mt. Gilboa, where Saul and his house fell. Jezreel Valley, the breadbasket of the western part of Israel, was between those two mountains.

If you notice your maps in the back of your Bible (the New King James Version is very good in this section), find one regarding the conquests of Israel. It might read "the conquest of Canaan." This area is just south of Galilee; Mt. Gilboa is near Beth Shan on the Jordan River; and you will see the Well of Harod is marked there on Mt. Gilboa. That will come into the story later. That is basically the area that we are talking about.

The Jezreel Valley goes from the Jordan River, because the River Jezreel flows into the Jordan, and on the other side, the River Kishon goes from the highlands westward along Mt. Carmel. Between the Kishon and the River Jezreel is the area we are talking about, in the Jezreel Valley. These are the areas where most of the story takes place. This gives you an idea of the setting.

This area is not like Thermopylae at all. It is wide open and hilly, near the mountains, with very fertile river valleys. It is very beautiful. I am sure at this time it was gorgeous.

The town of Ophrah, where the story begins, is near here, but we are not sure exactly where. It may be a couple of miles west of the Well of Harod. It would be almost halfway between Mt. Gilboa and Mt. Carmel—almost straight west of Gilboa.

With these clues that I have given you, you probably realize that our subject is Gideon, the judge of Israel found in the book of Judges, chapters 6 through 8. We are going to focus primarily on Judges 7, though we will start in chapter 6 to get the background information.

We are going to be studying Gideon himself, but really I am studying Gideon because he actually is, you could say, one of the 300. From him we can get an idea of what these 300 were required to do, and what the general characteristics of these 300 men were. I am looking most specifically at the 300 followers themselves, not necessarily Gideon, their leader. You probably

have never looked at the 300 specifically. I hope that this is something new and interesting that we can look at, and that there are good lessons that you can pull out of this.

As for Gideon himself, sometimes he is a type of Christ, the Savior, and at other times, he is a type of us. It will go back and forth as we see the analogies that pop up. Let us start in the last section of the last verse of Judges 5.

Judges 5:31 So the land had rest for forty years.

What had happened here is that the previous judge in the area was Deborah. She was from the tribe of Ephraim, which was just south of this area of Manasseh. She had her loyal general, Barak, who was the commander of Israel's army. He was from Naphtali, which was north of this area.

So this woman prophetess of Ephraim and the Naphtalite general joined forces and they brought both of their tribes, plus many of the other tribes, such as Benjamin, Manasseh, Zebulun, Issachar, and I would not doubt that there were a couple of others along with Ephraim and Naphtali. It was mostly a confederation of the northern tribes. Benjamin was the southernmost tribe here, from just north of Jerusalem, and just about every tribe north of them joined this confederation to kick these Canaanites at Hazor out of the northern portions of Israel.

They were very successful in this. They routed the Canaanites, under their King Jabin, and his general Sisera died with a tent peg through his temples at the hand of a woman named Jael (Yah is God). After this, God gave Israel forty years of peace. But you know, Israel's faithfulness really was always very brief.

Judges 6:1-6 Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years, and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains. So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them.

Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza [the future home of the Philistines], and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it. So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD.

Here are the Midianites, who used to be friendly with the Israelites. Now about 200 years have passed, and they have turned into enemies. They came up with their confederates, the Amalekites, and some tribe from the East, which most scholars think were either a Syrian tribe or an Arabian tribe. It does not say. Seeing that the Amalekites were from the south of Israel, near and below the Negev, while the Midianites were from southeast of Israel, below Edom down toward the Gulf of Aqaba, I would be certain saying that I think that the tribes of Arabia are more likely. They were the ones that they probably had more contact with than the Syrian tribes that were up to the north.

This was a very unusual oppression for Israel and the time of the judges. In fact, it is unusual oppression for any time period. There is no indication that the Midianites ever ruled over Israel. It was not a political oppression. All it says is that they came in and raided, and they destroyed their crops and took what they wanted, and then they left.

The Midianites and Amalakites and these other peoples were not necessarily settled people. They roamed around and migrated, coming in, taking what they wanted, beating off any resistance that the Israelites put up, and then fleeing with their booty. They timed their raids to come just as Israel was harvesting, so that the Israelites would do all the work, gather everything together, and then they would come in and take it. They would also take their sheep, it says, and oxen and donkeys and whatever it was so that the Israelites faced a very spare winter.

The Israelites were so scared that they started carving out the mountains. They would find natural caves and go in and widen them and make them into dwellings where whole clans could go to hide in safety. That is how scared they were of these marauding peoples of the east.

They were impoverished, not only in terms of food, but because they had no food to trade, which was probably their only source of income, trading with the caravans that came through, giving them food in return for whatever finished goods that caravans were taking through their land. They were without a source of income. They were not only starving, but they were poor and weak. There was very little they could do. Seeing their own state, they cried out to the Lord.

Judges 6:7-10 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD because of the Midianites, that the LORD sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land.' Also I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell.' But you have not obeyed My voice."

They cried out to God, and He heard, just as He heard their cries back in Egypt when they were being oppressed by the Egyptians. But God's reaction is surprising, or intriguing. I do not know which one is the better word. He sent a prophet to them—that is not surprising or intriguing at all. When He needs to tell His people something, He sends a prophet. But it is what the prophet says this time that is so intriguing.

He tells Israel three things. First, he reminds Israel of their bondage back in Egypt and how God had delivered them. He had worked miracles, and had done so much for them. He had even brought them into this land, cleared out the Amorites from before them, and out of the hands of all those who oppressed them, and said, "You are here because of what God has done for

you." That was the first thing he said. They were reminded of their history, and God's hand in that history. "Look, He's strong on your behalf. He can always be strong on your behalf."

Secondly, he tells them not to be afraid. "Do not be afraid of the gods of the Amorites." What this indicates is that they were worshipping the gods of the Amorites out of fear. They were in God's land, but they themselves did not consider it their own land to this point. It is almost as if they were still strangers in the land. And so, they came into the land and feared the "gods" that supposedly lived in the land. Out of this superstitious fear that they were going to disrespect these gods of the land, they began worshipping them on the side, giving them whatever tokens of respect that they thought were expected of them.

It was out of fear of these gods that they did this. They thought that they might come under a curse because these were gods native to this land. And God said, "There's no reason to fear these gods. Why should you fear these gods? They are no gods. There's nothing there. And besides, I am much stronger than these gods, so why fear them?"

Thirdly, he tells them that they had been disobedient. They had been unfaithful to the covenant. The reason why the Midianites were there was because they had disobeyed. They had not kept, particularly, the first and second commandments, the ones concerning idolatry. They had other gods before them, and worshipped and bowed down before them. And so, if they were disobeying those two commandments, they were disobeying every command, because those two are the ones that it all begins with.

Did you see anything strange in his message? Probably not. The strange part is what is not there. It is what God did not tell the prophet to tell the people. He did not give them any hope or a promise of a deliverer.

You might have expected God to say, "Look! I've done all these things for you, and did them for your forefathers, and there's no need to fear these foreign gods because they are no gods. You have been disobedient, and if you repent, I will help you, send you a deliverer, and everything will be

well." But, that is not what He did. He stops short of all that. He only told them that they were disobedient. He does not give them any hope that there will be any intervention on His part.

And why should He? In effect, God's answer through the unnamed prophet is, "You should have known better! You're only reaping what you have sown. Didn't I tell you that this would happen? If you forsook Me (Remember the blessings and curses chapter. He said it several times throughout Deuteronomy), then these curses would come upon you. It's just that simple. But if you will obey Me, I'm going to be there for you, and give you all these good things." And so He says to them, "You have only brought it upon yourself. You should have listened."

We must take this personally because we now stand in their place spiritually. Do we have a guarantee that God will step in to help us during our troubles when we have forsaken Him? Is He under any obligation to save us at every turn when it has been our own fault, and our own sins? Is it not part of the learning curve going through the bad times so that you learn the lessons? Does God pull us out of the fire every time we get singed?

No, He is under no obligation to do that, especially if we have broken our trust and pact with Him. He wants to help us, and to step in and bless us, and save us; but He does not have to. It is only through His grace that He often does that. It is out of the kindness of His heart and His love for us that He tries to pull us back from the brink.

To see another historical example of this, turn to the story of King Asa. What is interesting about this particular case is that Asa and his men had just defeated a 1,000,000 man army from Ethiopia, and God had delivered them spectacularly! And they were on their way home with all the booty, and they were high with excitement, and courage, and faith in God, and what does God do? He sends a prophet to dampen the mood.

II Chronicles 15:1-3 Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. For a long time Israel

has been without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law; . . .

That is how Israel was at this time of Gideon and the Midianite oppression.

II Chronicles 15:4-7 ". . . but when in their trouble they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them. And in those times there was no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in [just as in Gideon's day], but great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the lands. So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity. But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!"

That is a hint of what is coming up. We see here something that is said dozens of times throughout the Old Testament, and into the New Testament as well. If we want God to do for us, we had better hold up our side of the bargain. We have entered a covenant with Him, and He is going to go at it one hundred percent. He will give His all on His side of the bargain.

The slackers who are on the other side, they are the ones who forsake Him, who begin syncretizing out of fear of the gods of the land, who disobey because they are worried about fitting in. They are willing to compromise because they do not want to seem a little bit strange. They want to be like the other nations who forget the things that God has done in the past that should give us the faith and trust in Him to do what He says.

This was not something that had not been spoken about in Israel in a long time. If we go back to chapter 2, we would see that the Angel of the Lord Himself had delivered this same message to Israel just as Joshua was about to die.

Judges 2:1-6 Then the Angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: "I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you [and they could count on that]. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars. But you have not obeyed My voice [and this

was at the end of Joshua's reign]. Why have you done this?' Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.'" So it was, when the Angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. Then they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to the LORD. And when Joshua had dismissed the people, the children of Israel went each to his own inheritance to possess the land.

They were sorry, but the deed had been done. And here in chapter 6, we see a fulfillment of that. The people of the land had not been completely removed and thus, their gods had become a snare to the Israelites. They had disobeyed, and now they had been visited with a curse—the Midianites.

In a way, when God sent His prophet to the Israelites at the time of Gideon, He was saying, "If I've told you once, I've told you a hundred times—you are only hurting yourself."

But what could they do? They were weak. They were fearful. They felt themselves small and insignificant. Even though they should have known better, they felt themselves in a bind that they could not get out of. There was no hope. That is the way that they looked at it.

Now there was hope! But they did not have what it took spiritually to see that hope. That is how far down they had already come spiritually.

There is a New Testament example of this, believe it or not, and it ties in with my sermon series entitled "Themes of I Corinthians." Remember what the situation of the Corinthians was? They were a people who had recently been saved from their sins, and from paganism, but they lived in a city full of idolatry. They had begun compromising with it. And so, just a few years after the founding of their church, Paul had to tell them things like this:

II Corinthians 6:14-18 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial [Satan]? Or what part has a

believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore [here is the instructions] "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

II Corinthians 7:1 Therefore [another conclusion], having these promises [which the Israelites had under the covenant, they had certain promises] beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Like His prophet in Judges 6, the apostle Paul in II Corinthians 6 exhorts them and reminds them of their covenant with God. They had a covenant with Christ, not with Belial, nor any man. They had a covenant with other believers, but not unbelievers. They had a duty to them, and a duty to God.

Like Israel, the church of God is to be separate from the world so that God can dwell and walk among us. He does not want to walk and dwell among dirty things, unclean things, but He wants to walk among pure things. He wants to deliver us from troubles as He is needed. He wants to do these things. But we are most often the barrier that keeps Him from doing so.

And so, what does He say? The solution to both the Israelites' problems and to our problems when these kinds of things occur is the same—repent, obey unto holiness, and put on the proper fear of God—not of men, not of idols, but of God Himself.

This means turning your attitude to have a proper understanding of what God can do, both for you and against you, and to know your place under Him—to fear, meaning to tremble in humility before Him. Understand that He is the One who can kill us body and soul, whereas men cannot, and Satan cannot. Did not Jesus say something like that? "Do not fear men, but fear Him who can both kill body and soul in Gehenna fire" [Matthew 10:28].

Their fear was misplaced. They were lacking in obedience, they were refusing to repent, and so, they had a curse upon them. It is very simple. It is cause and effect. We have laid out the Israelites problem here. We will learn a little about Gideon.

Judges 6:11-16 Now the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth [oak] tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!" Gideon said to Him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?" So he said to Him, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." And the LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."

Gideon is an interesting name. It means, "hewer," as in with an axe or a sword. Another way to put it would be "one who cuts down." It was a good name for him, because it prophesied what he would do. He, alone, cut down the Midianites. And it says here that he was a Manassite. He was the youngest son of Joash, who an old patriarch of a rather weak Manassite clan.

We know that Gideon, at this point in his life, was probably in his mid-thirties, right at the height of his manhood and strength, because chapter 8 tells us that he had a son who was in his mid-teens. So if Gideon got married in his late teens, or early twenties, and he had a son about 15 years old, that would put Gideon in his mid-thirties. He was not a young man. He was a fully grown, mature man.

He was threshing wheat. The fact that he was threshing wheat shows that this account takes place in late spring or early summer because the wheat harvest was done right about the time of Pentecost. As a matter of fact, as the

Hebrews called time (they put various seasonal references on it), the wheat harvest time was this April to June time period. This was late spring or early summer. Let us call it June.

He was not threshing wheat. I know that word is in there, but he was actually beating wheat. He was probably using a flail, or a stick of some sort, and he was doing it in a winepress, which is a hollowed out rock, normally, that is sloped. What they would do is dump the grapes in there, and mash them with their feet, and the grape juice would then run down the slope into another basin below. It was a slightly sloped, rather small, and rounded place. And Gideon was in there, cowering, beating out some wheat with a stick or some sort of a flail, because he did not want the Midianite bands that were roving about to see that he had some food, because they would immediately confiscate it, and most likely kill him.

He was in fear of his life for this little amount of grain. But he had to do the work, so he got it done in the winepress.

As a side note, how do I know that Joash was an older man? His son was 35 by this point. So if he was 20 when Gideon was born, that would make him 55. And we are told in chapter 8 that Gideon's older brothers had been killed at Mt. Tabor. Let us say that there were two years between the brothers; this would put his age up toward age 60 or so.

Age sixty, at the time, was pretty old. I do not know their lifespan was, but it was well south of what it is today in our fairly healthy Western region of the world. King David only lived to 70, although he lived a very hard life. He was pretty old at his time, and this took place 200 or so years earlier.

Judges 6:12 is one of the great ironic passages of the entire Bible. Here was this thirty-five year old man in the prime of his strength, and he is cowering in a winepress, flailing out some wheat, and the Lord walks up to him and says, "Hey strong man! How are you doing? God is with you!"—that probably made Gideon feel very small.

God calls things that do not exist as though they did. And so, He was looking forward to what Gideon would become, rather than calling him what he was. We know that since he was sitting in there cowering in a winepress, he was not the mighty man of valor at that time. He was rather weak and fearful.

As we go on, we notice that Gideon ignores this, probably taking the ribbing good naturedly, but immediately he launches into wondering out loud why God had forsaken them. "Oh my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened?" And he goes on and talks about these things. He echoes some of the things that the prophet said.

Evidently Gideon had heard, or heard about the prophet, and was thinking about it. It was very clear that while he was beating out the wheat, he was meditating on the problem. He was wondering, "Look at this predicament Israel is in! It is really bad out there! What are we going to do? What kind of solution is there? Why has God forsaken us? What is He going to do?"

But God had not forsaken them. He was there with Gideon, was He not? He had not gone away and left them to their own devices. He was there. He was about to provide a savior, though Gideon did not know it, and he certainly did not realize it was him. Gideon had to realize that the people had forsaken God, and not the other way around.

These things that were going on with them through the Midianites were a way to wake them up, and also to punish them for their faithlessness. He had not truly forsaken them, but had given them over into the hands of the Midianites for a time. He was teaching them a lesson.

Going on to verse 14, it seems like the Lord's response to Gideon, and his wondering out loud about what was going on, is a total non sequitur. It just does not seem to follow. He says, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites." It is like one man was saying this, and the other man was saying that, and they were saying two different things, and not listening to what the other one said. But, actually it is the right response.

Like I said, Gideon's questions give the indication that he had been meditating on Israel's predicament, and he was trying to figure out what could be done about it. He had obviously reached the conclusion in his own mind (even though it is not said here) that Israel needed a savior—Israel needed a strong man that God would raise up to deliver Israel. He must have been thinking, "Well, it happened in the past."

What happened to Israel when they were in a bad plight? God raised up Moses. Obviously, God was trying to get Gideon to think about Moses, because the example given through the prophet was about Moses primarily. And then, if you think about Moses, you begin to think about other saviors which Israel has had—Joshua, by which they conquered the land. And then there were others that God had raised up—Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Barak, just fifty years before. God is going to have to raise up a savior. This must have been going through Gideon's mind. And God obviously knew what was on Gideon's mind.

My interpretation of verse 14 would be, "Bingo, Gideon! You figured it out! Israel needs a savior, and you are he. Now go in this wonderful knowledge that you have, and the might that I give you, knowing that you are the one that God has chosen to be the savior of Israel, and go and kill Midianites. That is your job!"

That is God's answer. It is not a non-sequitur. He was replying to his thoughts, rather than what was coming out of his mouth.

If we would go back to Exodus 3, we would see that God worked very much the same way with Moses. "You are the one who is going to go into Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let My people go."

Down into verse 16, after Gideon tries to protest much like Moses did ("Look, I'm not the right guy for this job. I am weak. I am young."), God says, "Surely I will be with you. Go!"

Notice also that it says here, "You (singular) shall defeat the Midianites as one man." God is saying, "You are the one I have chosen, Gideon, and here is the basic plan for what you are going to do. You are going to march up to

them alone and deliver Israel, one man against all the Midianites. That is our plan. See you. Have fun."

No, I am sure He did not get sarcastic like that, but He did tell him basically, "Gideon, you are a one man army, and with Me at your side, that is all you need. We will go out and defeat the Midianites, just you and Me. That is all that it will take."

God's power is sufficient. He does not need large numbers to do a work, to defeat an enemy, or to create the world. He speaks, and it gets done. He could take one man and put him up against all the people of the world and, if God is in that one man, he will win. That is all it takes.

Gideon's faith, then, had to be in God, and His promise of working through him, and His promise of unlimited power to do the job. And that is what God gave him. "I am going to make you a one man army and you are going to strike the blow that does it."

This, of course, has ramifications for us. There is a passage in II Timothy where Paul is writing to Timothy whom he was going to leave alone because he was about to die, and he knew it, and he was giving his last instructions to Timothy about his job in doing God's work at the time. He says:

II Timothy 2:1 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

"Be strong." Actually that word is passive. It is more like, "be strengthened," meaning that the strength was not going to come from Timothy's own resources, but that the strength was in the grace and the strength was in Jesus Christ who would give the favor and gifts needed to do the work.

Timothy, to do the same thing that Paul had done, only needed to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. He needed to realize that he had been called by Him, and because he had been called by Him, He would supply what he needed to get the job done. Whatever gift or favor it was that Timothy would need to do the job, it would be there for him. All he needed to do was trust in God and what He would supply and the promises He had given.

Paul could have written to Timothy, "Lean on the power of Christ that He is ever-willing to bestow on you. Be strong! Be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

But this is a double-edged sword here. It is both an assurance of the Source of power, and it is also a warning not to look elsewhere for help. It is said positively, but it could be taken as a warning, a negative, that we have to make sure that our faith is single, focused, and on the right thing—God Himself.

Judges 6:27 So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the LORD had said to him [which was to strike down the altar of Baal and the Asherah, the wooden image of the female god]. But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do it by day, he did it by night.

Gideon, even though he had been reassured, he had been told he was a mighty man of valor, he would defeat the Midianites as one man, he witnessed the sacrifice miraculously go up in flames and the Angel disappeared, and he knew he had spoken face to face with God, he was still afraid. When God gave him a command, he took ten of his best friends, buddies who would keep a secret, and they went out under the cover of darkness. But they did what God said.

It was not that he disobeyed, but he, in weakness, did it when it was, to him, most convenient. He had moved along the line of faith a bit, but he was still shackled by his own fears. He was not frozen by fear, but he was still quite timid for the one who was going to strike the Midianites as one man.

By the way, just to throw this in, this theme of fear has been in here the whole time. I have not read every scripture, but it is very clear that what we are talking about here is overcoming fear.

Judges 6:33-34 Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; . . .

That last actual phrase there is, "clothed itself with Gideon." It is very unusual. The idea here is not that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, but that the Spirit of the Lord came *into* Gideon. It became one with him, just like it is with us—he was converted.

Judges 6:34 . . . then he [Gideon] blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him.

The first ones who came to his side were the men of his own clan.

Judges 6:35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh [his own tribe], who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

Now we have four tribes being gathered together to fight the Midianites. Even at this point, though we will not read it, he asks for another sign. And God gives it, the sign of the fleece. And then once that happened, he said, "That was too easy, let's do another sign, and make it harder this time." And God did it very patiently.

So we are moving forward here. I am not sure of the exact timing here, but there is some movement of time going on. We are moving through the summer, and I am wondering about the clues that have started appearing, that maybe we are approaching early fall, because the Midianites, Amalekites, and the people of the east are gathering together.

But why is that? What has their mode of operations been? The late summer harvests are coming in, and they are about to send out their bands of men and begin raiding again. So there are possible indications here that we are approaching the Feast of Trumpets. (But we do not know.)

Paul wanted us to learn something from the life of Gideon in Hebrews 11. He reminds us of the heroes of faith, from Abel to Rahab, and then in verse 32 he is saying that he is running out of time, running out of space, and then he says,

Hebrews 11:32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon . . .

And then he goes on and names a few others.

Hebrews 11:34 . . . quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword. . .

And the following may be about Gideon:

Hebrews 11:34 . . . out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

All three of these describe the work of Gideon. But what was his weakness? He was fearful.

Fear of one's life and reputation is a weakness before God. But it is one which can be overcome by faith—by trusting God, and having the right fear of the Lord; it is turning the fear of men, of Satan, or whatever it happens to be on its head, and instead fearing God. Not for the same reasons, though, obviously.

But it is changing that fear from a negative one to a positive one. Who would you rather disappoint *least*? We would least want to disappoint the Great God of the universe. And so, who deserves our fear the most? God, of course!

That has to be turned—from the fear of men, and the fear of adverse consequences to our life and to other's—into fear of God and His disappointment in us, and make it into a positive thing that we would work in faith to please Him so that He has no reason or justification for punishment, but instead has every reason for blessing.

Once that fear is tried—meaning, once that fear of men, and all those other things is tried, and we overcome it—out of it, as we see in the life of Gideon, comes mighty deeds of faith. As Paul says here, "out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

We have the assurance from God that He is with us so that we can, like Gideon, boldly put our spiritual enemies to flight and live obediently before Him. It can be done, and we have the life of Gideon to prove it.

In the last section in Judges 6, we saw that Gideon blew the trumpet of war, which he was commanded to do in Numbers 10:9 (which we often read on the Day of Trumpets as one of the uses for the trumpet), and, of course, the clans and the tribes began to respond.

What we are starting to see here is that Gideon is beginning to do things that were commanded of him by God. He is responding with obedience and his fears start to be allayed, little by little. That is a good principle to remember. If we obey in the small things, and begin to obey in the big things, our fears of those things that we should not fear begin to melt away.

Gideon had a name given to him because he contended with Baal; they gave him the name Jerubbaal.

Judges 7:1 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod [the well of trembling—the theme of fear], so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley.

What we have here is that the Well of Harod, a spring, was on Mt. Gilboa, on the southern slope of the Valley of Jezreel. And the Midianites were north of them on the other side of the valley on the slope there which was called the Hill of Moreh. They were facing each other across the valley, with the Midianites on the north and the Israelites on the south. They might have been able to see each other and their campfires as they camped there.

Judges 7:2-3 And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.' [This should say Mt. Gilboa. I do not know how that got in there. It is probably a scribal error somewhere in the distant past. There is no Mount Gilead in the western part of Israel. Mount Gilead is on the eastern side of Jordan.] And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained.

So what did God do? Thirty-two thousand men converged on Mt. Gilboa, and God says to get rid of the ones who are afraid and two-thirds of them left, which gives you an idea of the state of Israel at that time. Two-thirds of them were afraid. Only one-third of them were willing to remain.

This, by the way, is a bit more obedience on Israel's part. This is some of what God told Israel to do before every war—to remind them that all who had just married to go back home, and all who were afraid to go back home. We do not need you in the ranks. And so, that is what he did.

Judges 7:4-8 But the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, that of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' the same shall not go." So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink." And the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. Then the LORD said to Gideon, "By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place." So the people took provisions

and their trumpets in their hands. And he sent away all the rest of Israel, every man to his tent, and retained those three hundred men. Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

What just happened? We had 10,000 men against 135,000 Midianites, which we get from the next chapter. That is more than 13 to 1 odds against Israel.

God said that He likes worse odds than that! "Let's get rid of 9,700 more men, down to 300. That is about 450 to 1. This is more like what I want."

Gideon is to choose only the men who "lapped like a dog." While this is still being disputed by scholars, it seems that God wanted only those men who, when they went down to the stream or to the pond to drink, took water with their hands while still standing, and lapped it out of their hands while they were still upright and looking around.

It was not necessarily those who lapped versus those who did not lap. It was actually those who stood, and not those who did not stand, who either lay down or kneeled. This is what He was looking for. He was looking at their stance.

The tongue action was not what was being observed. What God wanted was how a dog acts when he drinks. Have you ever watched a dog drink? It does lap, but his eyes are up, always watching what is going on. My dog does this. She does not stick her whole head in the bowl and gorge herself on water. She does not like us to be around at all. We have to step away and say, "Go ahead." She will keep her head up as much as she can while she is lapping. It is that instinct to watch for predators and prey, being aware of what is going on around them.

God wanted men who were alert, who had their eyes wide open to reality, you might say. God wanted the men with Gideon to be the very best, the watchful, the careful, and the aware who kept their eyes open. And it was these 300 men who were outfitted with trumpets and provisions. These provisions were probably the pitchers or pots that they later broke later on in the story.

Jesus Christ is forming another Gideon's army.

Luke 21:36 "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

In a way, this is an allusion to the same type of thing. He wants His disciples to be standing and alert—watching.

He wants us to recognize the "lay of the land." He wants us to take proper precautions. He wants us prepared for what is coming. He does not want us surprised. He wants us to see it afar off, and be ready for it when it comes. He wants people whose eyes are wide open to reality, and especially to what God is doing.

In Gideon's day, the work He was doing was ousting the Midianites. And He found 300 men who had that on their mind the whole time, even while they were safely in their own camp—they were always watching for signs of the enemy.

God is doing the same thing now. In our case, He is preparing sons and daughters for His Kingdom, and He wants His people accompanying His Savior to have the same mind, to be on the same page, to have the same goals, and to be just as devoted as the Savior is. Going back to Israel at this time, the savior was Gideon. He was going to do this job for God, and God wanted 300 men just like him to go out and face the Midianites.

In the same way, God is fashioning a special company to do His work, to work in unison, to stick together, to obey Him, and finish what has been started.

Judges 7:9 It happened on the same night that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand."

Just a simple statement; it has been done.

Judges 7:10-11 "But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, and you shall hear what they say;

and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp . . .

God knew Gideon, and that He needed to get him slowly into this to take away his fear. So He said, "Go down with your servant." Now he is only taking one man this time, instead of ten. He is growing.

Judges 7:11-13 ". . . and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who were in the camp. Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude. And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, "I have had a dream: To my surprise, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed."

That is a strange dream to see this big loaf of barley bread tumble down the mountain and striking a tent.

Judges 7:14 Then his companion answered and said, "This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp."

I have no idea how he got that out of it. But it was put into his mind that this is what it meant. Actually, there is some word-play here between Gideon and this barley loaf seen in the dream. But God gave the man the interpretation so that he could say it out loud in the hearing of Gideon. And his servant with him could verify it.

Judges 7:15 And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped . . .

What a wonderful response! That was exactly what Gideon needed to do. It was the best, most proper thing at that time. God had given him assurance, and he worshipped; he praised God, and honored Him for His inspiration and help. But it did not end there. He did not just sit there on his knees, and continue to worship God in a formal pose.

Judges 7:15-19 He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "Arise, for the LORD has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand." Then he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. And he said to them, "Look at me and do likewise; watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp you shall do as I do: When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and say, 'The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!'" So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, . . .

This was probably about ten o'clock at night, the guards had just changed, and the ones who had come off their post were walking through the camp. This is important. The ones who just went on their post probably came from sleep, or their dinner, and were settling in.

Judges 7:19 . . . just as they had posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that were in their hands.

This was a very noisy thing. There was havoc.

Judges 7:20 Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers. . .

So it happened here, and then there, and then over this way! It was happening all around them.

Judges 7:20 . . . they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing—and they cried, "The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!"

Three hundred men with their strong voices!

Judges 7:21 And every man [the Israelite] stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled.

What has just happened? The Midianites are just settling down for the night—men coming off their position down into the camp—and they see these fires going up all around them, and this noise of trumpets and shouting; they are waving their torches. It looks like they are being attacked by 1,000,000 men, because usually one company had only one trumpet. But they had 300 trumpets, and the Midianites imagined thousands of men behind each trumpet. This is the noise of a huge army! And the breaking of pitchers would sound like the clashing of arms, and the marching of men as they are coming; and all of them shouting at the tops of their lungs! When in confusion, it would sound like how many more voices?

So, these 300 men seemed like 1,000,000 to them. And they were groggy, and the Midianites stand up, and they look around them, and what do they do? They are afraid!

And it says, "The whole army ran, cried out, and fled." They were scurrying about. And they see their fellows coming in from their post in the dark, and they think that they are the enemy. They are confused. The light is behind these men. They think that these Midianites coming back into camp are actually the Israelites descending upon them! They pull their swords and begin fighting their own guards.

General mayhem ensues. Midianite against Amalekite, against people of the East—against each other—and they slay, and slay, and slay in the darkness. One hundred and twenty-thousand men are killed, and it is recorded in Judges 8:10. And the Israelites did not have to lift the swords that they had with them. God did it all—the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.

Now, it is interesting what they had—a torch, a clay pitcher or pot of clay, a trumpet, and a sword. Think of them spiritually. In other words, they had a light, a vessel, a noise-maker, and a weapon. It does not take much thought to see the spiritual parallels of these things.

I wondered this morning, as I was preparing this, if the pitchers contained oil for lighting the torches, because it says the torches were in the pitchers, and with a little bit of spark, they would blow up.

So, the 300 men did not have to fight physically. God did this by tricking their enemies to fight each other. What the 300 did was to make a witness through standing firm, and holding forth their lights, by making a great deal of noise with trumpets and shouting. And God did all the work for them.

Like God says of the Satan the Devil,

James 4:7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil [the enemy] and he will flee from you.

That is all they did!

I Corinthians 16:13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

That is the lesson of Gideon and his 300 men. To finish off today, here is a Feast of Tabernacles message that also applies to us as we approach the Day of Trumpets.

Haggai 2:1-9 In the seventh month, on the twenty-first of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying: Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people [the 300 men], saying: 'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing? Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the LORD; 'and be strong,

Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,' says the LORD, 'and work; for I am with you,' says the LORD of hosts. [Did He not say the same things to Gideon? "I am with you. Do not fear."] 'According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!' [Overcome it! Turn it into the fear of the Lord.] For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations [Jesus Christ], and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts."

One thing that I did not go over in the story of Gideon is when he made his offering, and the offering was accepted. What did he call it? "Peace." That place was called, "God [or Yah] is Peace." The end of war is peace. That is what God promises to give us.

So remember, do not fear! Be strong! Remember that God is with us. Work! Work on yourself. Work on overcoming those fears. Work on destroying the enemy within. Work on building the temple of God's Spirit within you, as it says in I Corinthians 3:16.

The return of Christ is not that far away. That is what He meant, "It is a little while." It is not that far off. There is no time to lose. If we, like Gideon and the 300, want to defeat the enemy and help bring about the millennial time of peace to this earth, then let us watch and work in strength and courage—for God is with us!