

# Deeper Discoveries

## Judges



### Lesson 5: Judges 7

#### **Gideon's 300 Men**

The assembled forces camp beside the 'spring of Harod', and *Harod* is translated as 'trembling, terror, fear' (7:1). The name of the campsite recalls the fearful aspect of Gideon and anticipates the elimination of 'Whoever is fearful and trembling' in the following episode. With the LORD's spirit and human reason, Gideon is finally ready to act. Speaking to a man of reason, the LORD explains his purposes in reducing the size of the army: 'lest Israel glorify itself' against the LORD and assume it has won deliverance by its own hand. ... the warning is clear. Gideon, the personification of Israel, should not glorify himself.

The LORD's first tactic is to send away those who are 'fearful and trembling'. This action considerably reduces the size of the army. Then, at the water's edge, the LORD instructs Gideon to separate those who lap water directly, as a dog laps, from those who kneel to drink (7:5) ... Only three hundred men both kneel and use their hands, and these men will constitute the fighting force to conquer the camp of Midian.

#### **Gideon Defeats Midian**

The final pre-battle stage, eliminating Gideon's 'fear', occurs during the night. The men who were 'fearful and trembling' are sent away from the Spring of Trembling, but Gideon's fear is sent away from *him*. In this instance, the proof is *not* logical: it takes the form of a dream overheard and interpreted in the Midianite camp, a dream which portends Gideon's success as due to the LORD's will. Gideon is convinced. He has only to enact his destiny—as he sees fit.

When the dream of the Midianite and its interpretation have been overheard, Gideon appropriately worships first and then goes into action, thus setting a model of behavior for subsequent adherence or deviance. Gideon apparently devises the trumpet-torch-and-pitcher tactic, and with it the Israelites create the panic characteristic of holy war (cf. 1 Sam. 14:15). His battle cry is 'For the LORD and for Gideon!' In deed (prayer) and word (battle cry), Gideon follows the LORD at this point in his narrative; but, unlike Deborah, he includes his own name as a leader—suggestive of subsequent actions.

Divine activity brings about the rout of the enemy. Nevertheless, in the very next passage (7:23), Gideon calls up the reserves. Even though the LORD has won the battle with limited forces literally standing still, Gideon proceeds logically from his point of view—which is, ironically, illogical. Forgetting the entire point of the elimination process which left him only

three hundred soldiers of an army of thirty-two thousand men, 'That Israel (Gideon) may not boast that her own strength has saved her' (7:2), Gideon fails to give thanks for the LORD's victory or to ask how to proceed. The coward has become confident; he directs far-flung mopping-up operations which are effectively carried out. But the voice of the LORD is stilled, not to be heard for the balance of Gideon's narrative. And the spirit of the LORD, which brought the courage to fight a far greater military force, seems to slip from Gideon's shoulders in the process. (Lillian Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*)

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**7:2 lest Israel boast.** God made it clear from the very beginning that the glory for this victory was to be all his. This makes all the more absurd the Israelites' request after the battle that Gideon rule over them because he had supposedly delivered them from the Midianites (cf. 8:22). (*ESV SB*)

**7:3 fearful and trembling.** Israelite laws of warfare allow for certain exemptions from military service (Deut. 20:5–9). One exemption is for the cowardly person, because timidity is infectious and can easily spread to other troops. This is the first test to reduce the size of Gideon's force. (*Ref SB*)

**7:4–5 Every one who laps ... as a dog laps.** The second **test** for reducing Gideon's forces involved a strange ritual: taking into account how men drank water from a brook. Neither way of drinking is singled out as the "right" way, so this may be simply a means of trimming down the number of men rather than a critique of either form of drinking. (*ESV SB*)

**7:10 if you are afraid.** God graciously granted to Gideon, who had been reluctant and afraid previously (6:17, 23, 27, 36–40), a preview of the coming victory by allowing him to enter the Midianite camp and overhear a Midianite's dream about Israel's triumph (7:10–14). (*ESV SB*)

**7:16–20** Dividing the small band **into three groups** created the impression of a much larger force. Surprise and deception took the place of a massive army. The war cry, the sudden blast of 300 trumpets, and the torches bursting into light created the impression of a large force. (*NLT SB*)

**7:20 A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!** The full war cry is now uttered in the event of battle (cf. the previews of this in vv. 14, 18). Ironically, no Israelite swords were used at all, only torches, trumpets, and jars—scarcely classic military weapons. (*ESV SB*)

Ironically, the swords of Midianite destruction are their own (v. 22). (*Ref SB*)

Gideon usurps God's glory (seeking glory for his own name, ignoring the LORD's warning in v. 2). By using a well-known form ("for god X and for king Y"), he lays the foundation for the offer in 8:22. (*NIV BTSB*)

**7:25 Oreb.** He is killed at a rock (cf. 6:20). **Zeeb.** He is killed at a winepress (cf. 6:11). (*NIV BTSB*)