

LESSON 9: Gideon, part 2 JUDGES 6-8

GOD'S THREE-STEP MODEL IN DEALING WITH ISRAEL'S OPPRESSION

Step 1: The person: Bring the individual into right understanding and relationship with God

Step 2: The person's house: Ideally, the individual brings their house into a right understanding/relationship with God. (This is not always possible. We talked about families where grown children, step-relations, or elderly parents have come home to live by necessity, and they bring with them Canaanite behaviors that can cause division and warfare within a believer's home. Even so, when a person enters battle and is under spiritual attack, his house should be with him so that he isn't fighting a battle on a second front.)

Step 3: The congregation/community/nation: The individual goes out to deal with the issues of the greater body and return it to a right relationship with God

Questions for Reflection:

Why follow this order?

- Why is it necessary to deal with your own sin before you start hacking away the Asherah poles in other people's lives?
- Why is it necessary to deal with sin in your own house before tackling the greater threat? What happens when a leader whose own life and family are out of control tries to deal with sin in the greater congregation?
- What happens when you try to end oppression by passing reforms on a national scale without addressing the condition of the man and his house?
- How does this model work out in the church? (Titus 1:5-9)
- How can you go about correcting the oppression you are experiencing?

Gideon is one man looking at this national threat that he has to contend with, and it is overwhelming to him. When we look at the chaos that our nation is in right now, it is equally overwhelming and seems beyond our control—which it is. And we can slip into the mindset of solving the issue on a national level only by voting in another party, by sending in the military, by starting a war . . . It isn't going to work. Whatever effect it has at the moment, it will not change the source of the problem that is our broken relationship with God. That is a problem that we as believers can tackle.

Begin with yourself. Get yourself in right relationship with God. Get your house in order. Then tackle the unbeliever living or working next to you, and help him get his house in order. Take your focus off the physical kingdom and pursue the making of the spiritual kingdom.

In this we diverge from Gideon's experience in that we are not Old Testament Israel. We are not mandated under the New Covenant to throw Canaanites out of the land, although we, too, contend with the physical effects of not protecting our physical borders and letting looters ransack neighborhoods.

GIDEON PREPARES FOR WAR **Read Judges 6:33 – 7:8**

On the heels of the confrontation with the men of the city, the Midianites, Amalekites, and people of the East make a thrust into Israel and set up camp in the Jezreel Valley.

1. **Who does Gideon call to battle?**

The Spirit comes upon Gideon, and he gathers Israel to him. His family (Abiezrites) gathers to him. He sends messengers to Manasseh, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali. The text does not mention any call to Ephraim or Issachar (odd, since the battle is playing out in Issachar's land).

The Sign of the Fleece (Judges 6:36-40)

2. **What was the sign Gideon requested and how long did it take to play out?**

Gideon gathers everyone together, then stops to wait for a sign from God. Note: This is Gideon, not Jerubbaal, doing this—the man who is just feeling his way through the crisis. It is all about him and God, and God works with him.

On the first night, Gideon puts a fleece on the threshing floor and says to God:

“If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.” (Judges 6:37)

Note, Gideon acknowledges it will be the LORD saving Israel, not himself. The next morning, he wrings a bowlful of water out of the fleece, but the ground is dry. So, that is God's confirmation.

On the second night, Gideon puts a fleece on the threshing floor and says to God:

“Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.” (Judges 6:39)

And God confirms it.

Can you imagine the pressure on Gideon as a leader through all this? The enemy has swarmed over the land, everyone is gathered, the battle is rapidly setting up, and Gideon has not yet launched into action. There is tremendous pressure on leaders to act immediately under such conditions, especially followers who are walking by what is right in their own eyes. Waiting for God's answer is a test of faith for Gideon.

The Calling of Israel (Judges 7:1-8)

3. **Why does the narrative lead with the name Jerubbaal instead of Gideon in verse 1?**

This is a clue as to who is getting the glory. Jerubbaal is the hero who the people follow out to the battle field and rally behind. But it is the man and not God who they have come to see.

4. **What is God's assessment of the people? (7:2)**

The people are there to glorify themselves. God intends to send most of them home, “lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’” God needs Gideon to weed out those who are really there to fight from the looky-loos and thrill-seekers. So He sets up a testing ground for Israel.

The Fear Test:

5. Where does the battle set up? (7:1)

The Midianites, Amalekites, and people of the East set up camp at the base of the Hill of Moreh.

Moreh means “teacher.” Its root word, *yara*, means “to cast out, shoot out, throw, or pour out,” which can have different applications depending on who is doing the casting and what is being cast.

- An archer can *yara* arrows.
- God can *yara* rain on the earth (imagine Him flicking his fingers and casting water droplets).
- A teacher can shoot out a finger in making a point or showing a student something.
- Figuratively, a person can “throw out” an idea for others to consider and respond.

There is a cause and effect – you send something out and wait for the result.

The Hill of Moreh is the hill of the “teacher” – the place where a testing of Israel takes place.

Judges 7:12 tells us: *“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.”*

Meanwhile Israel assembles across the valley at the Well of Harod where they can look down and see the enemy sprawled in the valley below them. You can imagine Gideon pointing down into the valley and saying to the Israel, “There’s the enemy. Who is with me?” What response does he get?

Eyn Charod (Well of Harod) means “eye of trembling and fear.”

6. Out of the original 32,000 people who gathered to Gideon, how many passed the fear test?

10,000

7. Why exempt a person because of fear?

According to the Law, fear is a legitimate reason to be exempted from a fight.

“The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, ‘What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart.’” - Deuteronomy 20:8

According to 2 Timothy 1:7:

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

Fear makes a person feel powerless, and the natural reactions of fight or flight will kick in but without the control needed for an army to accomplish its objective. God’s army needs to identify with His power and act with control according to His direction.

It is out of His love for them that God sends this deliverer to save the people. If the people are still afraid, even with this tangible savior standing beside them, they will not be effective in dealing with the oppressor. (Feelings of unworthiness can also influence a person's willingness to fight.)

A fearful person does not exercise sound judgment because fear and panic drive his decision-making. It will make a person do what is right in their own eyes and seek their own personal good over the greater mission.

The Water Test:

"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 . . ." Judges 7:4

There are two kinds of people: Those who squat and carry the water to their mouth with their hand (keep their head up and lap out of their hand), and those who kneel and put their face in the water to suck the water up.

8. What makes the man who laps superior to the man who kneels?

In combat, the man who remains on his feet and semi-upright is less vulnerable and responds quicker to an enemy threat than a man who gets down on both knees. A kneeling man is easily overcome.

The physical body language bears witness of the inner heart God is looking for. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, the first thing he had Moses do was lift their heads (take a census, Numbers 1:1).

The man with a lifted head is a free man. He sees farther in terms of distance but also in terms of goals. The man with a bowed head is still a slave, if only subconsciously.

God wants the free man who will remain upright in battle. Only 300 make the cut.

Questions for Reflection:

- How long do you wait to decide on a course of action when dealing with a crisis?
- Have you ever sought some kind of confirmation from God that you were on the right path? If so, how long did you wait for it?

GIDEON GOES TO WAR Read Judges 7:9-25

The Vision of the Barley Loaf (Judges 7:9-15)

9. Why doesn't fear disqualify Gideon (v9-11)?

Gideon has a daunting enemy before him, and all these desperate people behind him waiting for guidance and expecting him to be fearless and bold. He is, after all, Jerubbaal the great hero in most of their eyes. But Gideon knows he is not the hero. He knows he is groping his way through this, but God has set him to this task, so he is going to do it.

To be afraid and yet remain obedient is a rare quality in a leader. Gideon has already passed the qualifying tests in God's eye. God knows the position Gideon is in and grants him the luxury of a face-saving moment to deal with his fear away from public eyes. He gives Gideon the command, "Arise, go down . . ." but adds the little "if" clause—not as a judgment against Gideon but as an added incentive.

He sends him down to the camp with just a servant and just to listen.

10. Why does God send Purah with Gideon? What is Purah's significance as part of the bigger picture?

Purah, Gideon's servant, is a minor character in the narrative and acts as Gideon's moral support and back-up in this precursory expedition. But the meaning of his name alone adds tremendous detail to bigger picture of what God is preparing to do to the Midianites.

Purah is a proper name derived from the root word *pe'orah*. What does *pe'orah* mean?

"Leafy bough" in the sense of an exalted, high, spreading branch of a tree full of lush leaves.

Look at the verses where this word is found in the rest of Scripture (Isaiah 10:33, Ezekiel 17:6, 31:5-6, 8, 12-13). This word is only used figuratively. Of what is it figurative?

Pe'orah is figurative of a great nation God is getting ready to cut down (in context with Midian, Israel, Assyria, Egypt).

God sends Purah as an encouragement to Gideon, but for us, reading this account at a later date, it is a clue to the bigger picture. **Remember:** Hebrew words are keywords. They connect passages, and their contexts help clarify and expand the bigger picture.

The name **Purah** is the first introduction of the *pe'orah* imagery into the Scripture. This particular battle between Gideon and the Midianites will be a benchmark for similar "cutting downs" and is recalled as a particular example in a future engagement with Assyria, as it says in Isaiah 10:26, 33:

"And the LORD of hosts will stir up a scourge for him like the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb; . . . Behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, will lop off the bough [pe'orah] with terror; those of high stature will be hewn down, and the haughty will be humbled."
- Isaiah 10:26, 33

Dig deeper. The root verb for *pe'orah* is *pa'ar*. What does *pa'ar*, mean?

To glorify, beautify, adorn (as leaves adorn a lofty tree branch); depending on who is getting the glory, it can also mean to embellish or be boastful (self-glorification).

- **To whom do the Midianite men give glory for the take-down? (v14)**
The Midianite guard names Gideon as the victor, but does not neglect to mention that it was God who delivers Midian into Gideon's hands.
- **To whom does Gideon give the glory? (v15)** God

Note: the tree motif is going to carry through into the narrative of Abimelech, Gideon's son in Judges 9.

11. How does the barley loaf imagery add to the picture? (Look up the Hebrew word for barley and its root word.)

To use the imagery of a barley loaf is particularly poignant, considering what the barley loaf represents.

Barley often figures in times of judgment (Exodus 9:31, Numbers 5:15, 2 Samuel 21:8) and is used for offerings made by fire and as repayment of debts. The Midianites had come to consume the wheat and barley of the Land, but now the barley, as an agent of judgment, will destroy them.

Barley: *Heb. sehora*, from the root *sa'ar* meaning to bristle with horror over a coming violence and to sweep or whirl away as if taken by storm. It carries intense negative emotion paired with an experience of violence.

A bristling horror is going to sweep into the Midianite camp, yet it will be like an imagined horror—a bad dream—because no physical combatant will enter the camp. Gideon and his men will stay outside.

In the guard's dream, this bristling horror knocks over a tent. **Think about the sounds made by a tent falling over.** There is an initial clacking as the structure collapses, followed by the usual scramble of human occupants to set it right, and a moment of (relatively mild) chaos. The sound that the barley loaf makes is as much a part of the picture as the sight of the barley loaf.

The Battle (Judges 6:16-25)

12. **With what does Gideon arm his men?** A trumpet, a pitcher with a torch inside

13. **What does Gideon tell them to do?**

- Divide into three companies, surround the camp
- Wait until the dark of the night
- Wait for the changing of the guard (a moment of distraction)
- Hit the enemy with the sounds: trumpets, pitchers breaking, battle cry of *"for the LORD and for Gideon!"*
- Let the torches (*lappidoth*) shine out
- Stand and listen

Gideon and his men engage the Midianites at the middle watch—around ten o'clock at night when it is hardest to see. This makes sounds unnaturally loud and torches exceedingly bright, which would be all the more terrifying to a superstitious people. It is also the time of the changing of the guard, when the guards would be drowsy, distracted, and least attentive to an attack. The attack relies heavily on the use of sound—what is being heard as opposed to what is seen with the eyes.

14. What sounds do the enemy hear and what do Gideon's men hear?

In the guard's dream, this bristling horror knocks over a tent. **Think about the sounds made by a tent falling over.** There is an initial clacking as the structure collapses, followed by the usual scramble of human occupants to set it right, and a moment of (relatively mild) chaos.

The attack happens at night. Visibility is low, so sounds are going to amplify. The sound of a pitcher breaking can easily mimic the clack of a tent falling over, the clatter of weapons, and the tramp of feet. The sound of a trumpet and battle cry universally herald an approaching army.

What Gideon's men hear is the enemy's cry of fear, the clash of swords, and running feet.

15. Once God routes the Midianites, how does the battle play out— what path of retreat do the Midianites take, and who else from Israel gets into the fight?

The LORD routes the Midianites and they retreat from Beth Shittah to Zererah all the way to Abel Meholah by Tabbath.

The men of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh pursue them with Gideon and the 300, but the enemy army splits at the ford. Gideon and his men will cross the Jordan in pursuit of one half, but Gideon needs help to head off the other half, so he calls Ephraim.

The Calling of Ephraim (Judges 7:22-25)

16. What do the men of Ephraim accomplish?

Secured the fords at Beth Barah and upward, and captured two Midianite princes, **Oreb** (the raven) and **Zeeb** (the wolf).

They kill Oreb on the rock of Oreb. They kill Zeeb in the winepress of Zeeb. They take the heads to Gideon.

Question for Reflection:

- Is the battle won more by seeing or hearing? What lesson do we take from that?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:5-10. Paul describes us as empty pitchers with torches inside, except the torch is God's light inside us. Sometimes, our earthen vessels must endure breaking as part of the battle—even a taking down of our earthly "tent" or body.

- What is the purpose of the breaking?

The Sounding the Trumpets: A Prophetic Picture of Christ

The imagery of the trumpets is a prophetic picture that I will explain here, but we will review it again when we get to the end of Gideon's narrative.

The sounding of trumpets is an important picture in the Scriptures. Israel was commanded to keep this picture alive through the ages by celebrating the Feast of Trumpets (aka Rosh Hashanah) year after year, in accordance with Leviticus 23:24.

"In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation." – Leviticus 23:24

On this feast day, Israel is commanded to blow the trumpets as a memorial. A memorial of what? To find that answer you have to consider why trumpets are blown in Scripture.

Gideon's narrative is only one example of trumpets being blown. Gideon himself blows the trumpet twice—once to assemble Israel for war and once at the start of the battle (Judges 6:34, 7:20). Those are two reasons, but there are others.

When you compile all the Scriptural reasons for blowing the trumpets—of which Gideon gives us two—you get a picture of the End Times events portrayed in the book of Revelation.

You also get a picture of Gideon's narrative. Even though Gideon blows the trumpet for only two reasons, the other reasons are also illustrated in his narrative in various ways, which means that **Gideon's narrative, overall, is a rough depiction of End Times events.**

In the following chart, I have outlined the reasons for blowing trumpets drawn from Scripture. Beside each reason, I have matched its parallel in Gideon's narrative, and its projected fulfillment in the End Times. (Go thru the chart.)

As you can see, Gideon's narrative encompasses much of the End Times picture. It is not in a particular timeline order, but the pieces are there.

Just as the narrative of Gideon's battle focuses heavily on the sounds being heard, the memorial feast focuses on the trumpet (*shofar*) being sounded in different ways. **There are four distinct sound effects created by the shofar blower, and each of them illustrate an element of Gideon's narrative.**

These are the four types of blasts:

- 1) There is a single blast to call the assembly to gather, to battle, and advance. In that we hear Gideon sounding the trumpet to gather Israel to war.
- 2) A second set of broken, mournful notes simulates the sound of wailing and repentance, which reflect Israel's cry for relief from their Midianite oppressors.
- 3) A third set of sharp, staccato notes are meant to simulate the clattering sound of tents coming down, the tramp of feet, and an army breaking camp—or the clatter of pitchers being broken.
- 4) A final great blast signals the victory and coming of the King, which is Gideon and the 300 blasting out the trumpets as the LORD sets the enemy's sword against itself and routes them.