

1

(Series Overview Slide and Message Title)



2

There is a range of fear that most of us have experienced to one degree or another.

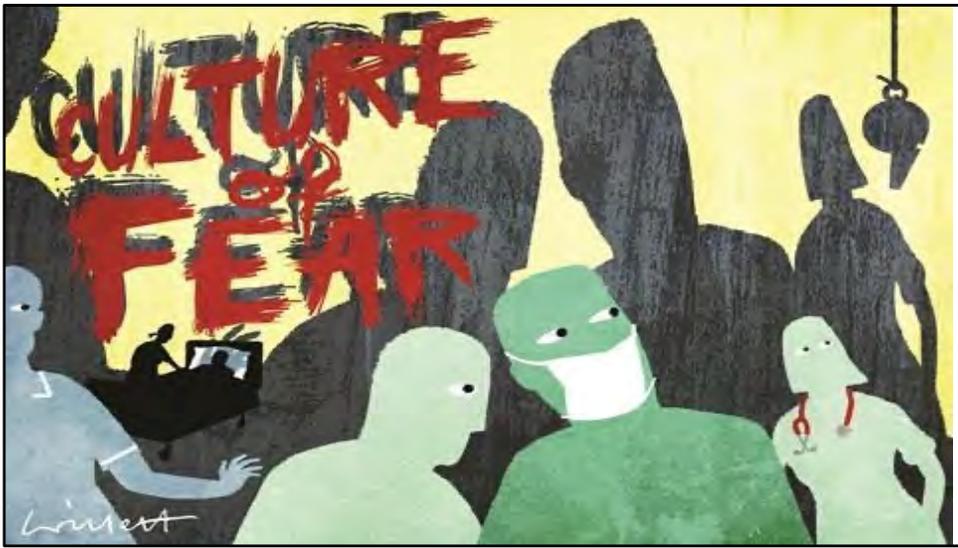
TR: There is even a scale of . . .

The Perceived Fear Scale (PFS)	
1 2	Slight discomfort
3 4	Butterflies in the stomach, accelerated heartbeat
5 6	Sweating hands, impaired temperature regulation (hot flushes/chills) and breathing pattern, dry mouth
7 8	Imperfect coordination, tremor and muscle rigidity, feeling of despair
9 10	Loss of fine motor control, various physical disfunctions

3

... perceived fear.

TR: The Covid-19 crisis, and now the riots sparked by the death of George Floyd, have created a ...



4

... culture of fear, as one artist captured in this graphic.

TR: There is godly fear, which is a good thing. But then there is fear
...



FEAR

... that grows in our hearts and pushes out our ability and desire to worship God through obedience to what He has said.

TR: Today, our text in Judges 6-7 addresses what we need, even some 3,000 years later, in order to squash our fear. But ...



**... what is it that can crush our fears?
-- The answer may not be what you think and assume.**

TR: Let's jump into the text, beginning at chapter 6:1

Judges 6:1

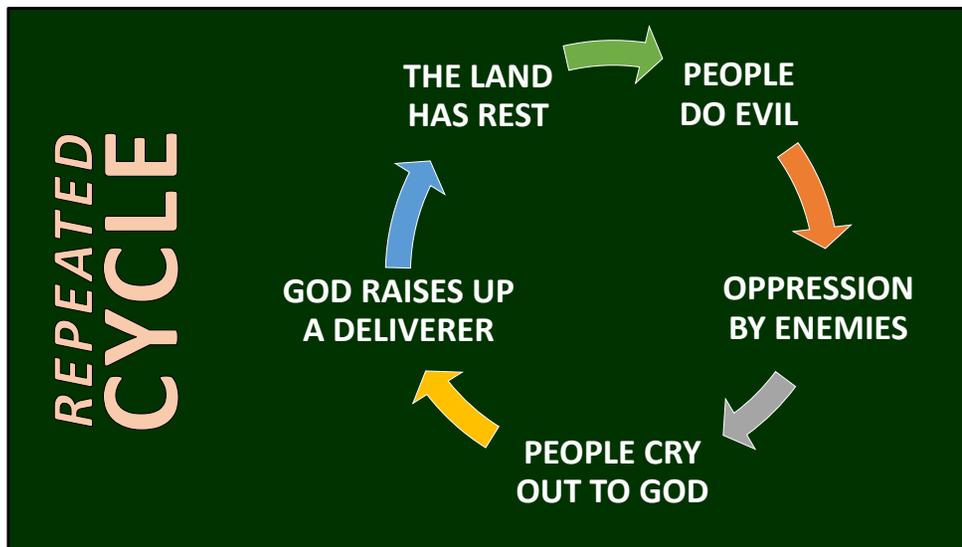
The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years.

ESV

7

READ SLIDE

TR: If you have been with us in our study, you already see the beginning of the cycle . . .



8

... that is repeated again and again in the time of the Judges.
-- REVIEW SLIDE

TR: The oppression covered in chapter 6 was particularly brutal . . .

**And the hand of Midian
overpowered Israel, and
because of Midian the
people of Israel made for
themselves the dens that
are in the mountains
and the caves and the
strongholds.**

Judges 6:2



9

READ SLIDE

-- The background of the slide is a picture I took in Israel of some of the underground dwelling places.

TR: The reason Israel hid in fear was . . .

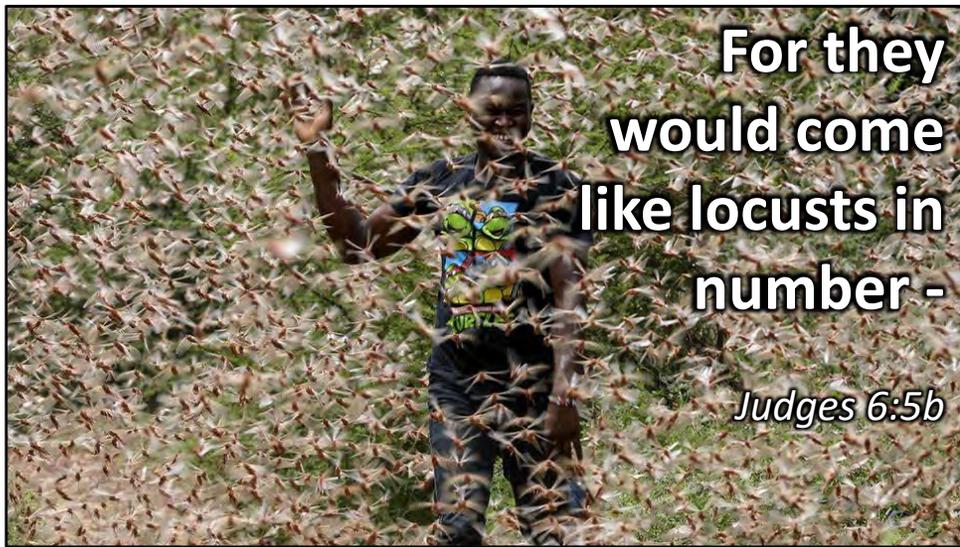


10

READ SLIDE

- Midianites from further south, close to the Red Sea.
- Amalekites = nomadic peoples
- People of the East = from the desert

TR: Every year when there should have been the harvest celebrations, there were the Midianite invasions.



**For they
would come
like locusts in
number -**

Judges 6:5b

11

They would come in force . . . READ SLIDE

TR: The desert peoples brought a new secret weapon to the oppression . . .



**both they and
their camels
could not be
counted -**

Judges 6:5c

12

. . . camels . . . READ SLIDE

-- Judges 6:7 says that the people cried unto the LORD, the third step in the cycle.

TR: But God's response this time was not to immediately send a deliverer, a judge, a leader. BUT . . .

. . . the LORD sent a prophet to the people of Israel. And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of slavery.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- cf. always going back to the beginning of being a people of God – like us going back to the cross.
 - If God never did another thing for us, never answered another prayer, we would still owe Him everything for the salvation He has purchased for us through the blood of Christ on the cross.
 - For the believer, the road back to true peace begins with remembering who we are in Christ.
- TR: The prophet's message ends with declaring why things are the way they are . . .

“And I said to you, ‘I am the LORD your God; you shall not **fear the gods** of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.’ But you have not obeyed my voice.”

ESV

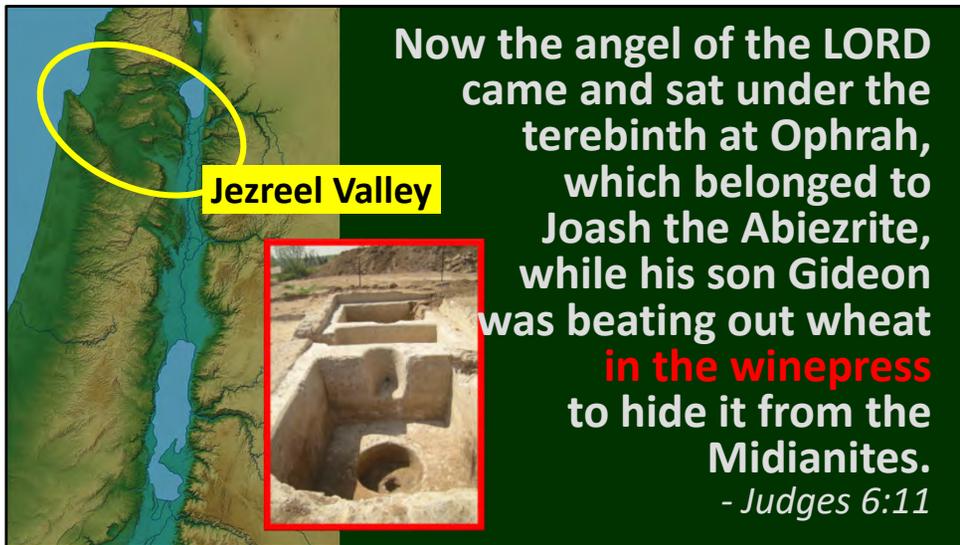
Speaking for the LORD . . . READ SLIDE

-- The people needed to do more than complain about the oppression, they needed to repent and turn back to God.

-- Their sin was **FEARING FALSE GODS**.

-- As God had warned them, the peoples they did not conquer would become thorns and snares to them.

TR: Our account picks up in verse 11 . . .



15

READ SLIDE (O-phrah; A-bi-zite)

- Gideon was probably in middle age, with teenaged son (8:20)
- He lived in the Jezreel Valley, sometimes later referred to by the Greek form of the Hebrew word as Esdraelon Valley.
- He farmed in this most fertile place. It was harvest time and he should have been on a breezy hilltop.
- BUT rather was found in a winepress, perhaps something like the one on the slide.

TR: So, fear of having the harvest of their hard work and their hope for the year to come taken away, led to this man . . .



. . . to not use the threshing sledge but the stick or flail to break open the wheat and reveal the kernel of grain.

-- To not be in the open where the wind could blow away the chaff, but in a pit.

-- He was probably “depressed in a depression.”

TR: But God had heard the cry of His people. He had sent the prophet and now . . .

And the angel of the LORD appeared to (Gideon) and said to him, “The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor.”

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Most see the angel of the LORD and the LORD as one in the same.
- It may well have been the Son of God appearing in a **THEOPHANY** before His incarnation as a human.
- He appeared human, but He had not yet taken on humanity for all of eternity, like He would in the womb of Mary.

TR: It seems Gideon did not recognize this person as a messenger from God. He had some pushback to the notion that God was with him or Israel.

Judges 6:13

And Gideon said to him, "Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian."

ESV

18

READ SLIDE

-- We know that the answer was already given by the prophet. God had given them into the hand of Midian because they forgot and forsook Him.

TR: Perhaps that's why the angel of the LORD, now called the LORD, does not even answer Gideon's question but says . . .

And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?"

ESV

19

READ SLIDE (Begin with "Go in this . . .")

-- The discussion has to change from why doesn't God do something . . .

-- . . . TO what does God want to do through you?

-- Are we still whining about God's seeming inactivity? Or are we listening for His call for us to go and do something?

TR: But fear raises its ugly head again . . . the fear that Gideon did not have what it would take. Read verse 15 . . .

And he said to him, “Please, LORD, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.” ¹⁶And the LORD said to him, “But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.”

ESV

20

READ SLIDE

-- God’s presence is the foundation of the promise that Gideon would strike the hordes, that were like the locust plagues, with their countless secret-weapon camels, like he was defeating a single man.

-- It would be a complete victory, not a mere “spit in their eyes” kind of thing.

-- Gideon needs time to think. He asks for time to prepare a meal.

-- He prepares a huge meal, A prized young goat and unleavened bread from flour. An ephah is 3/5 of a bushel. This would have fed his family for quite some time.

TR: He brings it back and then follows the instructions to put it on a rock and pour out the broth on top of it . . .

Judges 6:21

Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight.

ESV

21

READ SLIDE

- Gideon has a new fear . . . a correct fear . . . of God.
- He realizes he has been visited by the Angel of the LORD.
- It is a bit confusing that the messenger vanishes but then the LORD speaks to Gideon.

TR: Down in verse 23 we read . . .

Judges 6:23-24

But the LORD said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die."
²⁴Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.

ESV

22

READ SLIDE

-- The compiler of the book of Judges is indicating that this is real history not just legend. The altar is still there.

-- YHWH SHALOM = the LORD is PEACE

-- After worshipping, Gideon is told by the LORD to begin his work by tearing down the elaborate altar to Baal and the Asherah pole that belonged to his father.

-- Before taking on the Midianites, he needed to "clean house."

TR: Gideon obeyed but fear still had a grip on him . . .

So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had told him. But **because he was too afraid** of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night.

ESV

Verse 27 . . . READ SLIDE

- The text makes clear that they found out who did it.
- When the men of the city wanted to kill Gideon, his father seems to switch sides.
- He says that Baal should defend His own honor if he really is a god.
- This is like Elijah would say on Mount Carmel many years later.

TR: Dad's word carries the day. But ultimately it was God raising up Gideon by changing his reputation. In verse 32 . . .

Judges 6:32

Therefore on that day Gideon was called **Jerubbaal**, that is to say, “Let Baal contend against him,” because he broke down his altar.

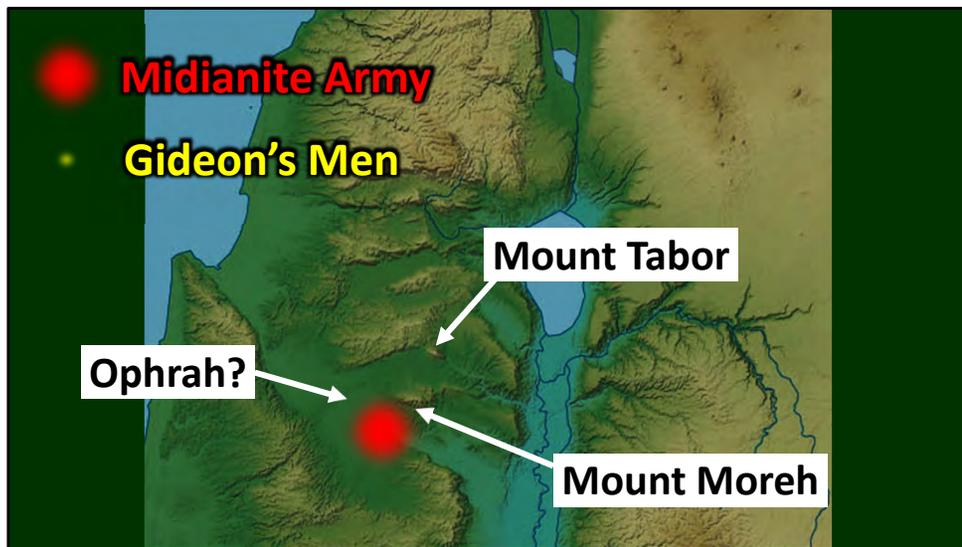
ESV

24

READ SLIDE

-- Nicknames can be powerful. EX: Simon called THE ROCK.

TR: Soon afterward the enemy horde came, as they had for years, and took over the valley of Jezreel.



25

On a map that zooms in to the northern part of Israel, we identify where the enemies and their countless camels are.

-- This is in the backyard of our hero.

-- God has been working in Gideon's heart and soul.

TR: And now it seems the time had come . . . verse 34 . . .

Judges 6:34

But **the Spirit of the LORD** clothed Gideon, and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him.



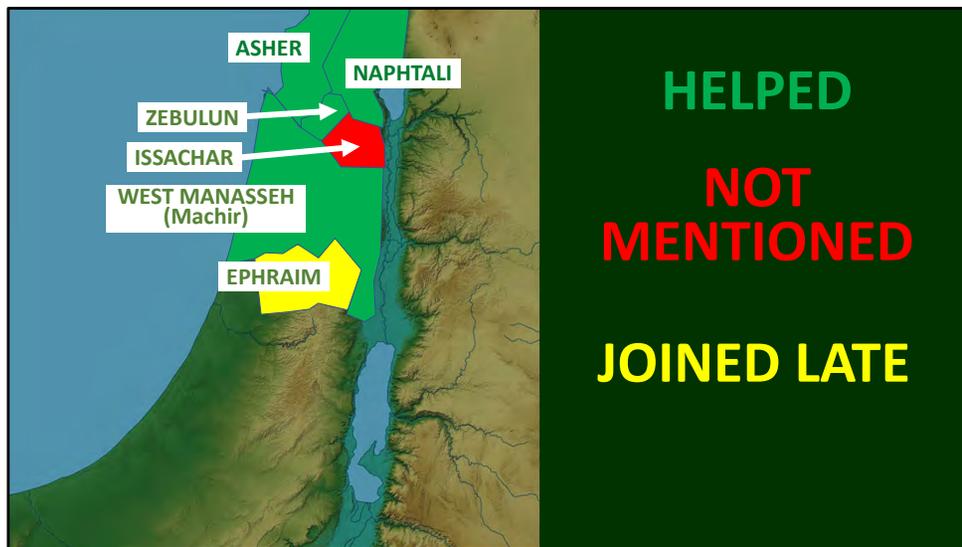
ESV

26

READ SLIDE

- The Spirit of the LORD took possession of this man.
- He blew the shofar and his relatives responded.
- Abiezrites = related to the eldest son of Gilead and descendent of Manasseh
- Those who were ready to kill him were now ready to follow him.

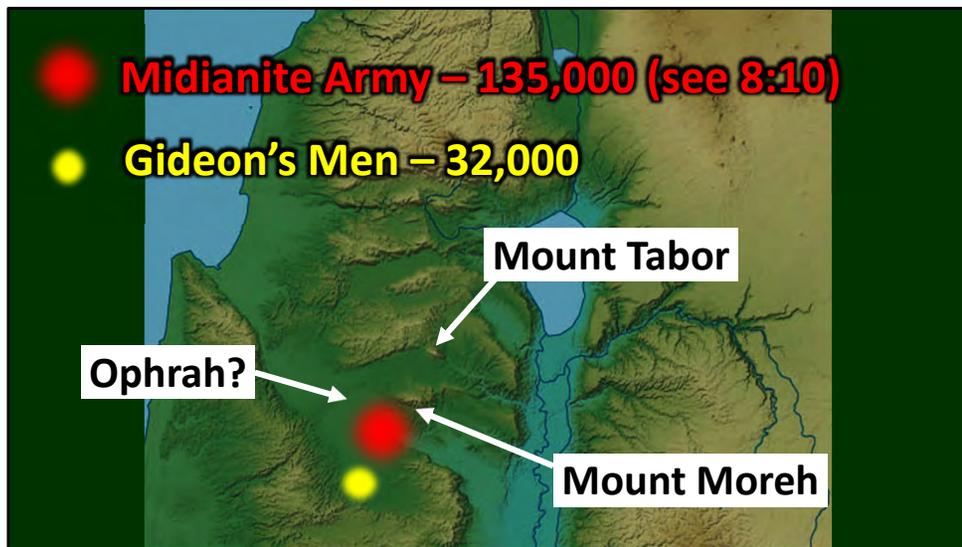
TR: Messengers are sent out . . .



27

- ... and we see a response from most of the northern tribes.
- Though Issachar is suspiciously absent.
 - And we'll see that Ephraim may not have been called on till later.

TR: So "Contends with Baal" has mustered his troops. On the map we see ...



28

... their relative positions.

-- But the odds are not good. Over 4:1 against.

-- Is it any wonder that fear still had a grip on Gideon? He knows what the will of the LORD is. He has already been promised victory.

TR: BUT fear has its talons in his soul. So he asks for a sign of confirmation.

Judges 6:36-37a, 39c-e

Then Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, ³⁷behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor."

"Please let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew."

29

Actually, he asks for two.

-- READ SLIDE

-- Many casual Bible readers have taken this "laying out a fleece" as a way to determine the will of God. This is the danger of misapplying a historical passage that is descriptive of what God has done at a certain time.

-- God had already made clear what to do and what He would do.

-- The issue was the fear in Gideon's heart . . . a fear that comes from years of oppression and overwhelming odds against you.

TR: God graciously confirms His promise and Gideon is ready to go to battle. Then . . .

Judges 7:2

The LORD said to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, **lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’**”

ESV

30

... in chapter 7 we read ... **READ SLIDE**

TR: As A.W. Tozer said ...

“All God’s acts are done in perfect wisdom, first for His own glory, and then for the highest good of the greatest number for the longest time.”

- A.W. Tozer

31

READ SLIDE

-- We forget that the highest good is that God receive the glory due His name, His character, Who He is.

TR: So to prevent potential bragging that they had overcome huge 4:1 odds, the LORD told Gideon . . .

Judges 7:3

**“Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.’”
Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained.**

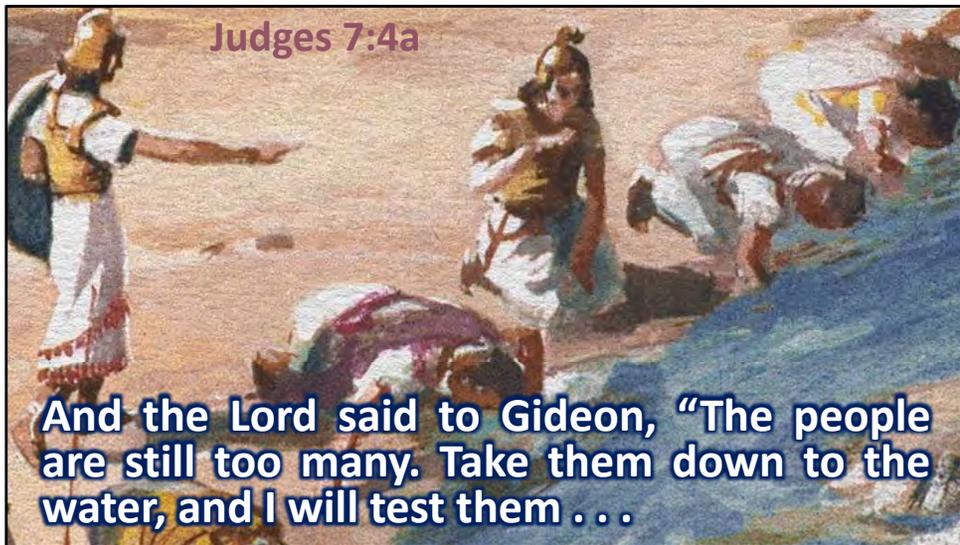
ESV

32

READ SLIDE

- As Deuteronomy 20:5-8 said, the fearful should go home.**
- And they did . . . a lot of them.**

TR: But God was not satisfied that 13:1 odds were long enough for His glory to be manifest as He wanted it to be. So . . .

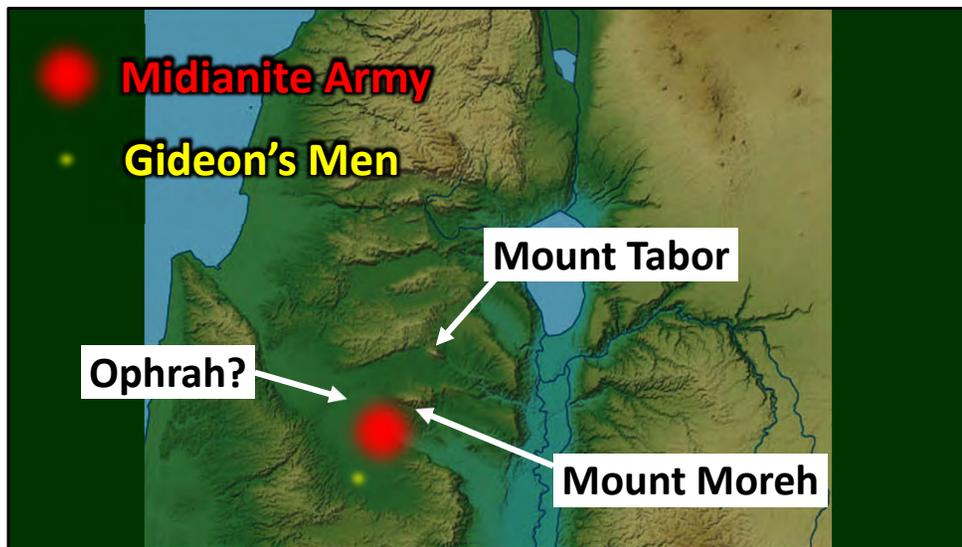


33

READ SLIDE

- Of the 10,000, most just bent down to drink. 300 lifted the water up.
- Debate if the 300 were most ready for battle, being aware of their circumstances.
- Though some thought they were less fit.

TR: Either way, Gideon's yellow dot on the map is growing dim.



34

From 32,000 to 10,000 to 300.

TR: Gideon's trust in God continued to grow. He had obeyed and now God repeats the promise.

Judges 7:7

And the LORD said to Gideon, “With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home.”

ESV

35

READ SLIDE

TR: It is not amazing that fear still had a toehold in Gideon’s heart. But it IS amazing that God graciously deals with it, even without the “Mighty Man of Valor” asking anything.

Judges 7:9-10

That same night the LORD said to him, “Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. ¹⁰But **if you are afraid to go down**, go down to the camp with Purah your servant.

ESV

36

READ SLIDE

TR: Gideon doesn't pretend he has no fear left. He avails himself of God's offer and sneaks near the enemy camp. There he overhears two men talking.

Judges 7:13b

And he said, "Behold, I dreamed a dream, and behold, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell and turned it upside down, so that the tent lay flat."

ESV

37

READ SLIDE

-- 14 And his comrade answered, "This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp."

TR: What did Gideon do when he heard this providential confirmation . . .

As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped. And he returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for the LORD has given the host of Midian into your hand."

ESV

He worshipped . . . READ SLIDE

-- He worshipped and went forth to do the will of the LORD, against not 4:1 or 13:1 but 450:1 odds.

TR: How could this happen? The men were provisioned with a pitcher with a torch inside, a horn, and a sword. Standing on the hillsides around the enemy horde, probably at about 10 pm as the middle watch of the night was taking its shift . . .

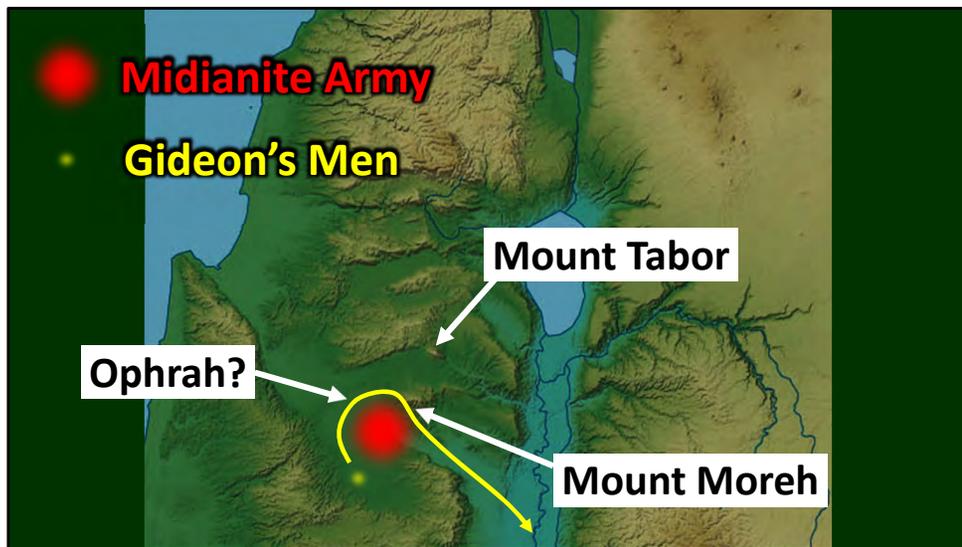
Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Verse 22 says among the army of Midian the LORD set every man's sword against his comrade.
- In the panic and confusion, friendly-fire became the LORD's means of victory.

TR: The Midianite horde and its allies stampeded back toward home.



40

Gideon called out the rest of the troops, certainly the rest of the 10,000.

-- Probably many more joined in.

-- It is always easier to recruit when you are already winning, isn't it?

TR: This is a great story. I understand why kids love it. And why grown men would want to be called "Gideons." But it is more than a story. It is . . .



. . . the Word of God written for our instruction.

-- It may illustrate many things, but I believe the key lesson is for us to know what it takes to crush the grip of fear we all feel in our hearts from time to time.

-- At first, I was going to say that what conquers fear is FAITH.

-- But at times we tend to exalt ourselves because we give credit to our faith and the strength of our faith . . . perhaps like the danger of 32,000 men thinking, "MY OWN HAND HAS SAVED ME."

TR: Our faith is a part of the answer, but I believe the only true antidote to fear is God's . . .



GRACE
FEAR

... GRACE.

- The hero of the story is not fearful Gideon but faithful God.**
- The means of victory is not primarily Gideon's faith but God's unmerited favor, His grace.**

TR: We see His grace in responding . . .



43

... to when the people cry out to Him.

-- We grow weary when others continue to make bad choices, showing themselves fickle.

-- But God's grace, rooted in His love for His people, is such that He will always turn to us if we turn to Him.

-- As we have said week after week in this study, isn't it time to stop complaining and grumbling and cry out to the LORD in prayer? Return to God and He will return to you as Zechariah 1:3 says.

TR: That insight is not new this week, but it is the backdrop to 6 fresh insights into how God uses grace to crush our fears.

The GRACE

- of a Rebuke

44

First insight is seen in THE GRACE OF A REBUKE.

-- The children of Israel cried out . . . but before a deliverer is sent, God sends a prophet who reminds them Whose they are and what they need to repent of.

-- Contra thinking preaching about sin is mean. It is a means of God's grace.

-- C. Spurgeon: "The Lord does not permit His children to sin successfully."

TR: Gideon wasn't seeking God but God, in His grace, sought him.

The **GRACE**

- of a Rebuke
- of being Called

45

The second insight is THE GRACE OF BEING CALLED.

TR: I've walked into various men's groups over the years and greeted the guys with . . .



46

... “Good morning, mighty men of valor.”

-- The faces of guys is usually the same . . . delight and yet disbelief.

TR: In the past I’ve hosted gatherings of men called “A Gideon Moment.”



47

Others have spoken of "Doing the Gideon."

- God does love to make His strength known through weakness.**
- He will not share His glory with anyone, for no one else is worthy of it.**
- Courage to follow God does not come from us compiling titles or degrees or resume-padding accomplishments. It comes from knowing He has called me to Himself.**
- It comes from knowing "The LORD is with us."**
- Cf. Missionaries lasting on the field IF they know they are called.**

TR: God's grace is also seen in . . .

The

GRACE

- of a Rebuke
- of being Called
- of Tests to Pass

48

THE GRACE OF TESTS TO PASS

-- most of us hate tests, but it is knowing we have passed hard tests in the past, that help us to trust in God's provision in even more challenging situations.

-- When we've pushed ourselves hard in practice, we know we can do the same in a game.

-- God asked Gideon to "clean his own house," so to speak.

-- Elders are required to manage their own household well before they have a leadership role in leading the local church household of God.

TR: I doubt any of us missed the insight to God's grace that came through the laying out of the fleece.

The

GRACE

- of a Rebuke
- of being Called
- of Tests to Pass
- of Assurance

49

THE GRACE OF ASSURANCE.

-- Jesus warned that an evil generation demands a sign. So what was different here?

-- I believe Gideon did not question the LORD as much as he doubted himself.

-- He knew he was crossing the line when he asked a second time for the reverse of the fleece and ground being wet.

-- Why didn't God smite him right then?

TR: Because God is amazingly gracious. As Psalm 103 says . . .

Psalm 103:13-14

**As a father shows compassion
to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion
to those who fear him.**

**¹⁴For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.**

ESV

50

READ SLIDE

TR: Remember what we studied earlier this winter, the Apostle Paul heard from this same LORD . . .

2 Corinthians 12:9

But he said to me, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”** Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

ESV

51

READ SLIDE

-- **“God’s will shall not lead you where His grace cannot sustain you.”** (Something hanging in my mother-in-law’s kitchen)

TR: So far the insights into God’s fear-crushing grace seem reasonable. We may want to imagine that such grace was needed to deal with the insane level of obedience God was expecting . . . changing the odds from 4:1 to 13:1 to 450:1.

The GRACE

- of a Rebuke
- of being Called
- of Tests to Pass
- of Assurance
- of God-sized Adventures

52

But I've come to see THE GRACE OF GOD-SIZED ADVENTURES.

-- There is no higher good than to know God.

-- And crushing underfoot one or two "grasshoppers of fear" does not help us very much to know God's awesomeness.

-- But facing a giant or getting out of the boat or waking up a countless horde of locusts with their secret-weapon ships of the desert, as camels are sometimes called . . . that is the stuff that rock stories are made of.

-- We pray for easy lives. We should pray for God to reveal His glory in such measure that we need BIGGER ROCKS on which to capture His great stories.

TR: Are you still afraid? Does fear still have a hold on your heart? Be amazed at . . .

The

GRACE

- of a Rebuke
- of being Called
- of Tests to Pass
- of Assurance
- of God-sized Adventures
- of Unsought Confirmation

53

THE GRACE OF UNSOUGHT CONFIRMATION.

- God's grace is seen throughout.
- His grace initiates.
- His grace strengthens.
- And, His grace knows when our hearts still have an infection of faithless fear.
- When it is hard for us to admit . . . and perhaps when we even lack the courage to ask for more assurance and confirmation . . .
- God's grace is willing to give us exactly what we need.

TR: What crushes fear?



54

... GRACE.

TR: What are we to do? The same thing Gideon did again and again.

WORSHIP THE GOD OF

GRACE

55

READ SLIDE

-- The Angel of the LORD made the rock an altar but then Gideon made an altar called YAHWEH SHALOM, THE LORD IS PEACE. He worshipped!

-- Gideon tore down the altar and pole to the false gods, and built an altar to the LORD his God. He worshipped!

-- Gideon obeyed and obeyed again and obeyed again.

TR: When God ministered to his remaining fears through the overhearing of the dream and its interpretation . . .

As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, **he worshiped**. And he returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for the LORD has given the host of Midian into your hand."

ESV

... Gideon worshiped.

-- The way to crush fear is to worship the God of Grace.

-- To marvel that He has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

-- To delight in His sufficient, amazing, abounding grace that will complete what He has started in us.

-- To bow down at the altar called YAHWEH SHALOM.

-- It is not a matter of the size of our faith. Jesus said faith the size of a mustard seed would do. It is a matter of the size of God's grace.

-- Won't you thank Him right now for His grace? Perhaps it has come in the form of a rebuke. Perhaps He is giving you a clear

calling or reminding you of when He did that previously.⁵⁶
Perhaps it is the grace of a test to pass or of assurance to take
on the God-sized adventure? Perhaps it is that little extra grace
that you need to quash your fear.

-- Won't you join me in worshipping the God of Grace?