



Gideon's Great Victory and Judgeship Judges 7-8

Introduction

Is it possible to achieve much with little? Does success in life depend upon our resources or upon God and His resources? Does God use "little" people? The story of Gideon answers "yes".

Outline of Judges Chapters 7-8

- I. Gideon's Preparation- Judges 7:1-15
- II. Gideon's Success- Judges 7:16-25
- III. Gideon's Aftermath of the Battle - Judges 8:1-21
- IV. Gideon's Judgeship- Judges 8:22-35

I. Gideon's Preparation - Judges 7:1-15

A. Reduction of Resources - Judges 7:1-7

1. Reason: to God be the glory - 7:1-2

Gideon and his volunteer army camped south of the Midianites. Although Gideon had thirty-two thousand men ready to fight, the Midianites still outnumbered them. In addition, the Midianites had many camels and chariots. In fact, according to The Narrated Bible, the Midianites were the first people to use camels in battle. Gideon may have sized up his situation and asked, "Lord, what do we do now?"

God's answer was, *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.* God would give the victory, but afterwards Israel must not be able to claim the glory for themselves. The victory had to be humanly impossible. It had to be obvious that deliverance was by God's hand.

2. The reduction tests - 7:3-7

God devised two tests for making cut-backs in Gideon's army.

a. None but the brave

In the first test, all those who were *fearful and afraid* were instructed to depart and go home. Twenty-two thousand left. The test was Biblical. *What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house lest he undermine his fellow soldiers* (Deuteronomy 20:8). J. Vernon Magee (Through the

Bible Commentary) wonders why Gideon did not leave. But he remained with ten thousand others. Have you ever wanted to leave a situation because you thought it could not possibly work, but stayed to see what God would do?

b. Down to the last lappers

God said there were still too many so a second test was needed. In obedience to God, Gideon marched his men to the brook where God would say who must go and who could stay. Given an opportunity to drink water, some stood, bent to scoop a handful of water and then lapped it like a dog. Others knelt to drink directly from the brook. God chose the lappers and the kneelers were sent home. No other significance is mentioned and nothing is said about how this test may have determined the men's ability as soldiers. However some have conjectured that those who knelt were placing themselves in a compromising position and could not have reacted as quickly to a surprise attack.

Only three hundred scooped and lapped the water. Gideon probably secretly hoped for the kneelers. God informed Gideon that with three hundred men He and Gideon would defeat the Midianites. Gideon was to send the others home. If you have ever stood helpless and watched your resources disappear, you know how Gideon must have felt.

B. Further reassurance - Judges 7:8-15

The three hundred took trumpets and provisions and camped above the enemy sprawled in the valley below like locusts. The enemy had Amorite allies and innumerable camels. God knows when we, like Gideon, need just a little more assurance for inner strength. Today we have His word available and open access to His presence (Hebrews 4:16). Gideon lay down to try to sleep when God said, *Arise, go down near the camp... take your servant, hear what they say, and afterward your hands will be strengthened.*

Overhearing the conversation concerning a Midianite soldier's dream was just what Gideon needed. The enemy was vulnerable. Not all of them were sure of victory. This gave Gideon further assurance. Not only had God promised victory, but even the enemy was saying, *God has delivered the whole camp to Gideon* (7:14). Gideon worshiped, returned, and shared the good news with his army, *Arise, for the Lord has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand.*

II. Gideon's Success - Judges 7:16-25**A. Strategy - Judges 7:16-21****1. Trumpets and Torches**

James M. Gray says, "If the smallness of the army is astonishing, what shall we say of the foolishness of the armaments?" (*The Home Bible Study Commentary*). Man's extremity is God's opportunity. Gideon had three divisions of one hundred men each armed with trumpets and torches inside clay pitchers. His command to them was, *Watch me and do likewise. When I blow the trumpet, you blow the trumpets and say, 'The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.'* Of course, Gideon had no sword. *But God has chosen the foolish things of this world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of this world to put to shame the things which are mighty* (1 Corinthians 1:27).

2. Shouts in the Night

How can we account for the victory which one Bible commentator has called, "One of the most remarkable conflicts in the whole history of the people?" There was the element of surprise at night as the stillness was shattered by three hundred and one blaring trumpets. The darkness was lit by as many torches encircling the camp. The erstwhile sleepers heard the shout echo on all sides, *The sword of the Lord and of Gideon*. They thought they were surrounded and being attacked by a mighty army. Perhaps the camels panicked first and rose to battle. The groggy soldiers, in total confusion, picked up their swords and in the darkness lunged at whoever was near. Then they all fled.

As believers, we are like clay pots containing a great light. However, we must be broken for the light to shine (2 Corinthians 4:7). Jesus told His followers, *Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven* (Matthew 5:16). How brightly is your light shining?

B. Success – Judges 7:22-25

Three tribes together, Asher, Naphtali, and Manasseh, chased the fleeing Midianites. Gideon sent word to the tribe of Ephraim to seize the watering places and the Jordan in order to deprive the Midianites of both water and escape. Responding to the call, the Ephraimites recognized two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. They pursued them, killed them, and delivered their heads to Gideon.

III. Gideon's Aftermath of Battle - Judges 8:1-21**A. Diplomacy with the Ephraimites – Judges 8:1-3**

The toughest fights may come after a great battle. The Ephraimites rebuked Gideon for not enlisting them to fight. By overlooking their reprimand and complimenting them, Gideon wisely gave a soft answer which turned away their wrath (see Proverbs 15:1). *Are not the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?* Gideon used an image from grape horticulture to imply that Ephraim's role of doing away with Oreb and Zeeb was superior to his own role in leading the battle. Gideon was from the family of Abiezer. *God has delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. And what was I able to do in comparison with you?* Thus, their anger was calmed and peace was maintained.

B. Gideon's Vows of Revenge – Judges 8:4-13**1. Two hard-hearted cities - 8:4-9**

Meanwhile, Gideon's exhausted army pursued the enemy across the Jordan. Coming to the town of Succoth, Gideon asked the leaders of the city to provide food for his men. The Succothites refused. They preferred to play it safe and make sure they helped the winners, not the losers. Gideon promised to return and teach them a lesson in generosity, with thorns and briers.

Penuel's similar refusal to help made things more desperate, so Gideon vowed to destroy their tower when he returned with peace secured.

2. Two kings caught - 8:10-12

The two Midianite kings, having lost 120,000 soldiers, were at Karkor with 15,000 survivors. Gideon attacked while the camp felt secure, pursued, and captured the two kings.

3. Vows kept - 8:13-17

Returning from battle, Gideon found a youth from Succoth who wrote for him the names of seventy-seven leaders of the city. Gideon displayed the kings to the men of Succoth saying, *Here are Zeba and Zalmunna*. Then he beat Succoth's leaders with thorns and briers, teaching them the lesson he had promised. He also razed the tower at Penuel and killed the men of the city.

C. Zebah and Zalmunna - 18-21

Next, Gideon turned his attention to Zebah and Zalmunna. In questioning them, he discovered that they

had killed his brothers at Mt. Tabor. Gideon instructed his young son, Jether, to kill the kings in bloodguilt revenge. It would have been considered a great honor for Jether to kill the enemies of God and Israel, but he did not have the heart for it so Gideon executed them himself. As a battle trophy he took their camels' ornaments. Never again were the Midianites a threat to Israel. Some victories are final.

IV. Gideon's Judgeship - Judges 8:22-35

A. Gideon's Refusal of a Dynasty – Judges 8:22-23

The people of Israel received Gideon as a deliverer and hero. They spontaneously asked him to be their king and head a dynasty. *Rule over us, both you and your son and your grandson also.* Gideon said, *I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you, the Lord shall rule over you.* Gideon's modesty and greatness are noteworthy. Ambition was not his vulnerable point.

B. Gideon's Blunder from Plunder – Judges 8:24-27

For some reason, perhaps with no intent other than to memorialize the battle, Gideon asked the Israelites to give him the golden earrings they had taken as plunder from the Ishmaelites (synonymous with Midianites). A garment was spread out on the ground and 1700 shekels worth of gold was collected. From these Gideon made an ephod, a vest worn by the high priest when doing his duties of prayer and discerning the will of God. Whether Gideon intended to wear it or only to display it, the people used it as an idol. They definitely had a weakness for such things. Do you know your weaknesses? Are you careful to avoid anything that could tempt you in those areas?

C. Gideon's Judgeship – Judges 8:28-32

1. A Peaceful Time

With the Midianite threat gone, the country was quiet for forty years while Gideon judged Israel. Verse 29 says, *Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his*

own house. Jerubbaal was Gideon's local name, given by his father after Gideon had torn down the altar of Baal (Judges 6:32).

2. A Prolific Time

Gideon produced seventy sons from many wives, and a concubine in Shechem bore him Abimelech. Polygamy was a sign of wealth and power in the East and in some areas it still is today. But it is a sad thing to see Gideon succumb to the temptations of the world around him. Great men and women can also make great mistakes.

Gideon died in old age and was buried in Ophrah. He is mentioned in the New Testament's Hall of Faith. Indeed, he leads the list of judges (Hebrews 11:32).

D. Israel's Regression – Judges 8:33-35

After Gideon died, the people strayed again from God and went after Baal. They forgot the Lord their God who had delivered them. Nor did they show kindness to Gideon's house in return for all he had done for them.

Applications

1. What steps will you take to insure a steady and true walk with the Lord to the end of your life?
2. In what ways are you tempted to be like the world around you? Are you obsessed with obtaining material things or climbing the corporate ladder? Are you preoccupied with your physical appearance and the clothes you wear? Perhaps you are "addicted" to the television or to the lure of movies and movie stars. Whatever worldly thing draws you away from God and giving Him glory in your life is a stumbling block to you and your children, as Gideon's polygamy was to him. What worldly pursuits do you need to eliminate from your life?
3. What is there in your life that could be a stumbling block to someone else who may be a weaker or newer Christian than you? Will you ask God to reveal it to you now? The apostle Paul wrote, *If food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble* (1 Corinthians 8:13).