

Judges

Chapter 7

Gideon's Three Hundred Men

Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. 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.' 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. 4 And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' shall not go." 5 So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink." 6 And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. 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." 8 So the people took provisions in their hands, and their trumpets. And he sent all the rest of Israel every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men. And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley. 9 That same night the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. 10 But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant. 11 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 outposts of the armed men who were in the camp. 12 And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance. 13 When Gideon came, behold, a man was telling a dream to his comrade. 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." 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." 15 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." 16 And he divided the 300 men into three companies and put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars, with torches inside the jars. 17 And he said to them, "Look at me, and do likewise. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. 18 When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon.'"

7:1-8 As supreme commander of Israel, the Lord reduced the army so that Israel would know that the victory was by his power, not theirs. (CSB)

7:1 *Harod*. Probably the spring still known by the same name on the northwestern flank of Mount Gilboa. The Hebrew verb form is translated "routing" in 8:12. (CSB)

spring of Harod. Located at the foot of Mount Gilboa. The Israelite army was barely 10 mi from the camp of the Midianite forces (TLSB)

hill of Moreh. Located across the Valley of Jezreel, approximately four miles from the Israelite army. (CSB)

“Teacher’s” Hill. (TLSB)

7:2 *too many.* After reassuring Gideon with a pair of signs, the Lord then severely weakened Gideon’s military power. These two apparently contradictory actions have the common goal of leading Gideon to place his trust in the Lord, not in himself or his troops. (TLSB)

lest Israel boast. If given an unexpected victory, the fearful may turn overconfident and arrogant. (TLSB)

7:3 Though 32,000 had answered Gideon’s call to fight, their morale was low. According to Dt 20:8, a man was exempted from military service if he was fearful of battle and would demoralize other soldiers. With the loss of more than two-thirds of their army, Gideon’s troops were outnumbered by more than 13 to 1. (TLSB)

return home. Those who were afraid to fight the Lord’s battle were not to go out with his army so that they would not demoralize the others (Dt 20:8). (CSB)

Mount Gilead. Perhaps used here as another name for Mount Gilboa. (CSB)

7:4 *test.* To “sift” or “purify,” as is done in purifying metals. (TLSB)

7:5 *laps ... as a dog laps.* Unclear. Apparently scooping the water to their faces as a dog scoops water with its tongue. Some have suggested that “lapping” the water in this manner indicated that these soldiers were more alert and ready for battle. The vast majority of the others—9,700 of the 10,000—went down on their hands and knees and would then, presumably, be slower to react. (TLSB)

7:6 *laps.* The 300 remained on their feet, prepared for any emergency. (CSB)

Possibly to keep their heads raised in alertness. (In contrast, Josephus wrote that the 300 the Lord selected were the least fit for battle, so that it would be obvious that this victory was the Lord’s doing [Ant 5:217].) At any rate, the lapping was the Lord’s mechanism to reduce Gideon’s army to a ridiculously small number: Gideon was now outnumbered 450 to 1! (TLSB)

7:7–8 *I will save you.* Gideon’s only hope now was to trust in God’s promise. (TLSB)

let all the others go. The very assurance Gideon hoped to gain with his two requests for a sign—that the battle would be successful—was now taken away by the Lord as He drastically reduced the size of Gideon’s army. (TLSB)

home ... tent. The men removed to camp or even their home territory. (TLSB)

7:8–14 The Lord provided Gideon with encouraging intelligence information for the battle. (CSB)

7:9–11 Gideon’s hesitancy continued. The Lord provided still another sign by what Gideon would hear in the Midianite camp. (TLSB)

Purah your servant. Detail from a secretive event. Purah may have been Gideon's armor-bearer, who kept company with the nervous leader. (TLSB)

7:13–14 Although revelations by dreams are frequently mentioned in the OT, here both dreamer and interpreter are non-Israelite. Contrast Joseph, who interpreted dreams in Egypt (Ge 40:1–22; 41:1–32), and Daniel, who interpreted dreams in Babylon (Da 2:1–45; 4:4–27). (CSB)

7:13 *cake of barley bread.* Since barley was considered an inferior grain and only one-half the value of wheat (see 2Ki 7:1), it is a fitting symbol for Israel, which was inferior in numbers. (CSB)

Probably a griddle cake. Barley was considered an inferior grain (2Ki 7:1). This lesser grain symbolized the inferiority of Israel's troops and the lack of courage of Israel's leader. (TLSB)

7:14 *no other than ... Gideon.* The Lord provided an interpreter for the ambiguous dream so that Gideon could not mistake the meaning. (TLSB)

7:15 *worshiped.* Bowed down. Gideon finally took courage. (TLSB)

7:16 *three hundred men.* A strategy adopted by Israel on several occasions (9:43; 1Sa 11:11; 2Sa 18:2). (CSB)

trumpets. Made of animals' horns, usually rams, for Israel's soldiers to signal one another. Cf Jsh 6:6. (TLSB)

7:17–18 Gideon's battle plan seemed crazy but was actually brilliant. For this night attack, swords would be an unnecessary encumbrance. Instead, trumpet blasts and the glare of torch lights would create mayhem in the Midianite camp. (TLSB)

7:1–18 After his army is reduced to a frighteningly low number, Gideon gains confidence when he overhears a dream in the Midianite camp. Gideon then devises a clever plan to create confusion. We are tempted to criticize Gideon's lack of decisiveness, but we, too, need repeated assurance that God will keep His promises. • Lord, help us leave our sinful mistakes behind us so we may look ahead with the confidence only You can give. Amen. (TLSB)

Gideon Defeats Midian

19 So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch. And they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. **20** 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!" **21** Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled. **22** When they blew the 300 trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. And the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah,^[a] as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath. **23** And the men of Israel were called out from Naphtali and from Asher and from all Manasseh, and they pursued after Midian. **24** Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites and capture the waters against them, as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan." So all the men of Ephraim were called out, and they captured the waters as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan. **25** And they captured the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at

the winepress of Zeeb. Then they pursued Midian, and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon across the Jordan.

7:19 *middle watch.* The Hebrews divided the night into three watches. The “beginning of the middle watch” would be after the enemy had gone to sleep. (CSB)

Between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. (Israelites at this time divided the watches into three shifts of four hours each; see p 1567); the darkness and the changing of the guard could confuse the enemy. Soldiers coming on watch would still be adjusting their eyes and ears to the darkness. (TLSB)

7:20 *A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!* Delightful irony! Gideon and his troops won the victory without ever wielding their swords. (TLSB)

7:21 *stood.* As the Israelite warriors stood their ground, Midianite troops tried frantically to escape. (TLSB)

ran ... cried out ... fled. Natural response of people roused from deep sleep—highly effective psychological warfare. (TLSB)

7:22 *three hundred trumpets.* Normally only a comparatively small number of men in an army carried trumpets. (CSB)

set every man’s sword against his comrade. A similar panic occurred among the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites (2Ch 20:23) and, on a somewhat smaller scale, among the Philistines at Gibeah (1Sa 14:20). See Eze 38:21; Zec 14:13. (CSB)

toward Zererah. Toward the southeast. (CSB)

They probably fled across the Jordan River toward the mountains of eastern Gilead. (TLSB)

Zererah. May be modern-day Tell el-Sa’idiyah, on the Jabbok River, east of the Jordan. (TLSB)

Abel-meholah. On the western side of the Jordan River, c 12 mi S of Beth-shean. (TLSB)

7:23 *were called out.* Encouraged by the turn of events, many of those who had departed now joined the battle. (CSB)

The men who returned to their tents (v 8) then came out in pursuit. (TLSB)

7:24 *hill country of Ephraim.* Gideon needed the aid of the Ephraimites to cut off the retreat of the Midianites into the Jordan Valley. (CSB)

waters...Jordan. Probably the river crossings in the vicinity of Beth Shan. By controlling the river the Israelites could prevent the escape of the fleeing Midianites. (CSB)

Beth Barah. Exact location unknown, but it must have been some distance down the river. Gideon’s pursuit of the enemy across the river took him to Succoth, a town near the Jabbok River (8:5). (CSB)

West and a bit south of where the Jabbok meets the Jordan, a considerable distance downriver from the Midianite camp. (TLSB)

7:25 *Oreb*. Means “raven” (see Isa 10:26). (CSB)

Zeeb. Means “wolf.” (CSB)

heads. Frequently parts of the bodies of dead victims, such as heads, hands (8:6) and foreskins (1Sa 18:25), were cut off and brought back as a kind of body count. (CSB)

Heads, hands, or even foreskins were brought back from campaigns, not only to facilitate a body count, but also to indicate complete defeat of the enemy. (TLSB)

7:19–25 In the same way the Lord fought for Gideon, so He also fights for us against seemingly insurmountable odds. He overcame our greatest enemy in the most improbable way: the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. • Almighty God, Lord of hosts, encourage us with the assurance that You are with us always and that with You at our side, we never need fear. In the Savior’s name we pray. Amen. (TLSB)