

Judges

Chapter 7

Gideon Defeats the Midianites

Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. ² The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, ³ announce now to the people, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.' " So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained. ⁴ But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." ⁵ So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink." ⁶ Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink. ⁷ The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place." ⁸ So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others. Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley. ⁹ During that night the LORD said to Gideon, "Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. ¹⁰ If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah ¹¹ and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp." So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp. ¹² The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore. ¹³ Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. "I had a dream," he was saying. "A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed." ¹⁴ His friend responded, "This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands." ¹⁵ When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped God. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, "Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp into your hands." ¹⁶ Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside. ¹⁷ "Watch me," he told them. "Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. ¹⁸ When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon.' " ¹⁹ Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. ²⁰ The three companies blew the trumpets and

smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"²¹ While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled.²² When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath.²³ Israelites from Naphtali, Asher and all Manasseh were called out, and they pursued the Midianites.²⁴ Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters of the Jordan ahead of them as far as Beth Barah." So all the men of Ephraim were called out and they took the waters of the Jordan as far as Beth Barah.²⁵ They also captured two of the Midianite leaders, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued the Midianites and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, who was by the Jordan.

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)

may turn back. 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 *lapped*. 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 *round loaf 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 companies.* A strategy adopted by Israel on several occasions (9:43; 1Sa 11:11; 2Sa 18:2). (CSB)

trumpets. Rams' horns (see Ex 19:13). (CSB)

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)

7:19 *middle watch.* The Hebrews divided the night into three watches (see note on Mt 14:25). 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)

turn on each other. 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; see also note on Jdg 4:15. (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 of the 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 (see note on 3:28). (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)