

## EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

### Message #10

### Judges 7:1-25

Every now and then you will hear someone say to someone else “we really need to step out by faith and do this.” Two questions come immediately to my mind when I hear that:

1) What is your definition of “by faith”? 2) Whose faith should we step out on?

To many people the idea of faith is some warm fuzzy feeling about what one believes or thinks about something. When someone says we need to step out by faith, it is perfectly legitimate to say are you talking about your faith or my faith? The fact is God does want us trusting Him by faith. He wants us trusting totally and completely in His grace. However, real faith is not demonstrated by a bunch of fuzzy warm feelings, but by a belief in God that obeys His Word.

**One of the most important lessons we can ever learn in life is that everything we are, everything we have, and everything we accomplish is by the grace of God.** Sometimes in order for God to get His people to acknowledge this reality, He must knock us down to the bare level of things so we will actually believe that. We do not become a valiant warrior by confidence in ourselves, but by confidence in God. God does not want us depending on ourselves, He wants us to learn and know that we can depend on Him.

When this story begins, Gideon has an army of 32,000 (7:3) up against a Midian army of 135,000 (8:10). So the initial odds are that Midian outnumbers Israel by 4 to 1. However, for God to show His glory, those odds are too low. So Gideon will cut his army by 22,000 leaving him with 10,000 (7:3), and now Midian outnumbers Israel by odds that are 35 to 1. However, for God to really show Gideon His glory, those numbers are too low. So God cuts the number down to 300 (7:7), and now Midian outnumbers Israel by odds that are 400 to 1. These are impossible odds, which is exactly where God wants the odds because God wants to show Gideon that He is the critical factor for victory and not the numbers

**GOD BEGINS TO DEVELOP HIS PEOPLE BY PUTTING THEM INTO SITUATIONS THAT TEACH THEM THAT THEIR STRENGTH LIES DEPENDING ON GOD, AND OBEYING HIS WORD.**

Alan Redpath, the Bible scholar and former pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, said that he learned to truly depend on God after he had suffered a near fatal stroke. He said he fell into deep depression and actually became angry with God and asked God to take him home right then. He said later, what God taught him was that he was a wretched, sinful man and that is all he was except for God’s grace (Gary Phillips, *Judges*, p. 109).

Sometimes God has to put us in scary, intimidating, life threatening situations so we will learn to depend on His grace, and so that we will learn we can trust Him. That is exactly what God does here with Gideon.

**FAITH LESSON #1** – God shows Gideon that insurmountable odds mean nothing for Him, but mean His people need to learn to trust Him. **7:1-8**

**Verse 1** begins with Gideon and his forces setting up a camp “beside the spring of Harod.” This spring was located in the foothills of Mt. Gilboa in the Jezreel Valley and from this area you could look north and east for about ten miles. When Gideon and his forces took a look, they saw huge numbers of enemies who were against them, plus the scary camels (**7:12**). **Gideon at this point had 32,000 men on his side (7:3) and he is up against 135,000 Midianite enemies (8:10)**. Keep in mind that Gideon’s soldiers have not been active in more than seven years, so they are not highly organized or well disciplined. But this is all Gideon has. What God was about to tell Gideon would not be something you would expect to hear.

In **verse 2**, God tells Gideon **you have too many men for Me to win this battle**. Now keep in mind Midian outnumbers Gideon at this point 4 to 1; but for God those odds are too low. God wanted to cut the numbers of His side and raise the odds for the other side for two reasons:

**(Reason #1)** - He did not want His people to be able to boast about this victory in some self-gloating fashion. **7:2a**

One commentator observed if you can explain everything that is happening in your life and ministry, then God probably didn’t do it, you did. We must make certain that we never try to take credit or gloat about something God did. We may be certain that when we want to take credit for what God does, we will not see God do much of anything. People who truly live by faith really do sense more and more of their own weaknesses and depend on God’s strength.

**(Reason #2)** - He did want His people to realize that victory was by His power for His glory. **7:2b**

We need to grasp this point - God is not interested in simply giving us victory, He is interested that we learn to trust Him completely for the victory.

**Now let us remember that Gideon tested God on the fleece issue twice ; now God is going to test Gideon by cutting the numbers twice .**

According to **verse 3**, the first way God cuts the numbers is by inviting any who are afraid, to go home (**7:3**). According to the law of God, one law of warfare was to give those afraid an option to go home (Deut. 20:1-8). No questions were asked and no explanations were needed. When you are in a battle you need brave people because fear is contagious (Deut. 20:8). Now who wouldn’t be afraid? You are looking at 135,000 enemy soldiers and you probably think you will die.

When God and Gideon gave Israel this option, 22,000 went home. Actually I admire their honesty. They admit they are afraid. G. Campbell Morgan said the problem today is that the fearful man insists on staying in the army rather than going home.

Gideon must have been a little upset when he saw two-thirds of his army go home. One commentator said I am shocked that when Gideon saw that he didn't say, "Wait a minute boys and I'll go with you." After 22,000 went home Gideon is left with 10,000. **So now the odds have just been raised to 35 to 1 in favor of the Midianites.** Those odds were still too low for God. So God decides to trim the numbers again.

In **verses 4-8**, God tells Gideon to take the 10,000 to get a drink of water and watch them all drink. I'll run a little test. Now keep in mind these 10,000 have just seen 22,000 go home because they are afraid. So you do have 10,000 willing men here, but 10,000 are way more than God needs. All 10,000 were thirsty. 9,700 of the men got down and put their faces right in the water and took a good drink. 300 men probably kept alert while scooping water into their hands and lapped it, drinking as they stayed on the alert, ready for battle. The enemy was about four miles away from this location and the 300 were always alert.

Whenever I have taken someone on an elk hunt, I tell them if you need to go get some water or go to the bathroom, always carry your rifle with you because you never know when an elk or some other predator animal may arrive, and you'll need your rifle. The man who taught me to hunt in the mountains taught me this principle. There was a man in our church who was hunting elk and it was the final day of the hunt. He decided to walk a little way from the tent and he did not take his rifle. As he walked on a trail, there was a six point bull elk. But he missed the opportunity and went home empty handed. He was not alert.

God said I'll take the 300 alert men and deliver you with them (**v. 7**) and the 9700 went home (**v. 8**). Now look carefully at their weapons which are described in **verse 8**, these 300 men each have their provisions and each have their trumpets. **The odds now are 400 to 1 in Midian's favor.** These are impossible odds. Your weapons consist of a sack lunch, a torch, a pitcher and a trumpet. You are about to go up against 135,000 fierce, trained military men with camels and you have a sack lunch and a trumpet, and there are only 300 of you. You have no chance at all in and of yourselves **UNLESS GOD IS ON YOUR SIDE.**

Numbers mean nothing to God. God said in the O.T. Law that if Israel obeyed God, one person could chase 1000 and two could chase 10,000 (Deut. 32:30). Based on these calculations, God could take out the entire Midianite army with twenty-seven men, but He gave Gideon 300.

**What God wants all of His people to understand is that you win by depending on My grace, not by depending on yourself.**

J. Vernon McGee said that when he was a student at Dallas Seminary, he visited a small church in Georgia. When he got to the church, an older woman wearing a sunbonnet came up to him and said, "Mr. McGee, we have here just a little Gideon's group." Dr. McGee said they were anything but a Gideon's group. They were the most discouraged, lazy people he had ever seen in his life. Gideon's group wasn't big in numbers but they were willing to trust God to get a job done for God. They were willing to go to war.

**FAITH LESSON #2** – God shows Gideon that He will give him victory . **7:9-20**

Gideon was on the right track, but God wanted to show him that victory was already his because God had decided to give victory.

So in **verses 9-11**, the same night that God has dropped the number to 300, God asks Gideon to take his trusted servant Purah and sneak down by the Midianite camp and eavesdrop on their conversations.

This in itself is an amazing demonstration of God's sovereignty; because He is actually going to direct the conversation of the Midianites in their own camp so Gideon can hear what God wants him to hear. God is actually going to control the speech of the enemies to show Gideon He has already given him victory.

**Verse 12** tells us the Midianite camp was huge, and according to **verse 13** when Gideon got within earshot of the camp, he hears a man relating a dream which is somewhat bizarre.

Now the dream is that a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the Midianite camp and toppled the tents. This is a crazy dream because tents are not toppled by a tornado or earthquake or rockslide or flood, the tents were toppled by a barley bagel. Now barley was the grain Israel was left to eat because the Midianites had looted the good wheat. The tents were literally the places where the Midianites lived. They were nomadic and they were making their annual looting trip into Israel.

Gary Phillips gives a good illustration here. He said just imagine that you go bowling and when it is your turn to bowl, instead of using a bowling ball, you pull a little BB out of your pocket and roll it down the alley and when the little BB hits the pins, it shatters them all to pieces. That is about as bizarre as this dream (*Judges*, p. 113).

In **verse 14** when the Midianite friend heard this, he said I'll tell you what this means; it means that God has given Gideon total victory over us. **This fear had been planted into their hearts by God.**

Just imagine someone listening to a conversation in our military and they hear our highly trained soldiers say, "I'm so afraid that the United States is going to be overthrown by Croatia." The response would probably be are you insane. They don't have enough people or military to have a chance of doing that. In order to actually be afraid of that little country, God would have to make you afraid. That is exactly what happened with the massive Midianite army. God had already put defeat into the hearts of the Midianites and he had already given victory to Israel. God had done this.

Now Gideon and his servant Purah are standing in the shadows listening to this and as soon as he hears this there are five responses:

**Response #1** - Gideon bows and worships God. **7:15a**

**Gideon realized that this battle is not about 135,000 Midianites fighting 300 Israelites, this battle is about 135,000 Midianites fighting God.** Right then and there beside a Midianite camp, Gideon bowed down and worshipped God. God is a sovereign God who controls the dreams and speech of even His enemies. You will not ever worship God properly until you come to believe in the sovereignty of God.

**Response #2** - Gideon returns to Israel's camp and announces victory. **7:15b**

Gideon goes back and he announces to 300 men that God had given them victory. He said to his men, arise and get up because God has given us victory. Notice we don't give ourselves victory; Gideon is not giving victory, God is giving the victory.

**Response #3** - Gideon divides the 300 men and gives them the war weapons. **7:16**

Gideon divides the men into three companies of 100 and they are armed with four weapons: 1) Trumpet (probably a ram's horn), 2) Empty pitcher, 3) Torch to go inside the pitcher as they surrounded the Midianite camp, and 4) Their voices for shouting purposes. What you do not have are any swords or spears. You do not have any bows and arrows. You have a trumpet, a pitcher, and a torch.

**Response #4** - Gideon gives them the plan for victory. **7:17-18**

Now just imagine you are a military commander and here is the plan: Gideon says we will surround the camp and you watch what I do, and then do what I do. They were to:

- 1) Blow their trumpets; 2) Shout for the LORD and for Gideon; 3) Smash their pitchers;
- 4) Shine their lights.

**Response #5** - Gideon's plan is followed by the 300. **7:19-20**

Notice **verse 19**, it was the "middle watch" which means it was somewhere around 10 p.m. Some of the men were sound asleep and others were on duty.

They blew their trumpets, broke their pitchers, held up their torches and cried out "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon." This is so funny because Gideon doesn't even have a sword. The sword is in the LORD's hand. God is the only weapon we need to have on our side in any war.

Here is something very critical for us to learn. Our job is to obey God. We do not have to know how God is going to give victory or what God is going to do. Our job is to trust God and obey God.

**FAITH LESSON #3** – God shows His people that when you obey Him, He gives victory.  
**7:21-22**

**We get real confidence in God when we learn real dependence on God.**

Each man stood his ground and the Midianite army started running around in total panic. The camels would have spooked and stampeded and you had total chaos in the Midianite camp. **Now keep this in mind; the men of Israel are basically just standing there doing nothing so they cannot possibly take credit for this victory, it all goes to God.**

**According to verse 22, God set a sword against each other so that the Midianites in a panic started killing each other.** God directs their thoughts, their actions and their reactions. Truth is God could have done this without using any man. In fact, He did do something like this in Hezekiah's day to 185,000 Assyrians.

But God wanted His people to learn to trust Him and believe in Him. Dr. Warren Wiersbe said "a faith that cannot be tested is a faith that cannot be trusted" (*Be Available*, p. 74).

Notice in **verses 23-25** that others began to rally around Gideon. Men of Israel were summoned and they responded. Gideon called some of the men who had gone back to their tents, plus he recruited some forces from Ephraim because the fleeing Midianites were headed straight toward them. They captured two Midianite leaders, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed them and brought Gideon their heads.

God had completely routed the Midianites.

What Gideon learned was critical; if we will obey God we can depend on Him for victory. It was ridiculous to think that 300 men armed with jars, torches and horns could defeat 135,000 trained military professionals. But when God is with you, victory is yours.

The Apostle Paul said in II Corinthians 10:3-4 that we are in war against a non-flesh enemy. What possible chance do we have to win in a war against Satan and his forces? We have God on our side and that is all we need. Through our trust in God and our obedience to God, the victory is ours.

You may find yourself up against incredible odds. You may be surrounded by forces that you cannot defeat yourself. What you can do is trust in your God every single time. Believe in Him, purpose to obey His Word and God will give you great deliverance.

#### **PARTING THOUGHTS:**

- 1) If we are to have great victory, we must learn that it comes from God, not us.
- 2) If we are to have great victory, we must believe completely in God's sovereignty.
- 3) If we are to have great victory, we must not quit because odds are against us.
- 4) If we are to have great victory, we must give the glory to God, the One who deserves it.