

Thoughts From Other Minds:

Gideon's army being diminished ... he must either fight by faith or not at all; God therefore here provides recruits for his faith, instead of recruits for his forces.

I. He furnishes him with a good foundation to build his faith upon. Nothing but a word from God will be a footing for faith. He has this as full and express as he can desire, v. 9. 1. A word of command to warrant the action, which otherwise seemed rash and indiscreet, and unbecoming a wise general: Arise, get thee down with this handful of men unto the host. 2. A word of promise to assure him of the success, which otherwise seemed very improbable: I have delivered it into thy hand; it is all thy own. ...

II. He furnishes him with a good prop to support his faith with. 1. He orders him ... to go down privately into the host of Midian ... (v. 10) and hear what they say" (v. 11); God knows the infirmities of his people, and what great encouragement they may sometimes take from a small matter; and therefore ... he orders him to go down and hearken to what they said, that he might the more firmly believe what God said. ... 2. Being so, he orders him the sight of something that was discouraging. ... the vast numbers of the enemy (v. 12), the men like grasshoppers for multitude, ...; the camels one could not count, any more than the sand. But, 3. He causes him to hear ... two soldiers of the enemy ... (1.) One of them tells his dream ... (2.) The other ... undertakes to interpret this dream ... This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon, v. 14. ... if Gideon had heard the dream only, ... it ... would have done him little service; but, having the interpretation from the mouth of an enemy, it not only appeared to come from God, ... but it was likewise an evidence that the enemy was quite dispirited, and that the name of Gideon had become so formidable to them that it disturbed their sleep. The victory would easily be won which was already so tamely yielded: Into his hand hath God delivered Midian. Those were not likely to fight who saw God fighting against them.

Lastly, Gideon, observing the finger of God pointing him to this very place, at this very time, to hear this dream and the interpretation of it, was exceedingly encouraged by it He was very well pleased to hear himself compared to a barley-cake, when it proved to effect such great things. Being hereby animated, we are told (v. 15), 1. How he gave God the glory of it; he worshipped immediately, bowed his head, or, it may be, lifted up his eyes and hands, and in a short ejaculation thanked God for the victory he was now sure of, and for this encouragement to expect it. Wherever we are, we may speak to God, and worship him, and find a way open heavenward. God must have the praise of that which is encouraging to our faith, and his providence must be acknowledged in those events which, though minute and seemingly accidental, prove serviceable to us. 2. How he gave his friends a share in the encouragements he had received: "Arise, prepare to march presently; the Lord has delivered Midian into your hand."

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Sermon: "Gideon victorious — saving by faith" (text: Judges 7:1-8:35)

Scripture: Judges 7 and 8

Sermon Notes

Introduction: Israel had done evil, and so the Lord had given them into the hand of Midian seven years, and they had laid waste the land and brought the people very low—and then they cried out for help to the Lord.

We too have been laid waste and brought low by unbelief; generally speaking our congregations are small and aging and the younger generations are missing, taken captive by secular humanism, evolution and unbelief.

Yet we have not yet learned to call on the Lord for help with passion and urgency, as though we know what trouble we are in, although we really believe that only the Lord can save us. We can learn to pray for the Lord's help by praying Psalm 80.

Covenant with me before the Lord to *do* this; write it down; add it to your prayer list—and if you don't have a prayer list, then start one, and keep it in your Bible, so you will be reminded of it every day when you read the scriptures.

Don't be discouraged; show the Lord you are in earnest by your persistence; don't be intimidated by the power of evil or discouraged by weakness, either, for Gideon testifies to the fact that our weakness is no obstacle to God's saving power.

1. The sword of the Lord

It is well that it is so, for we are weak, much weaker than Gideon's 32,000 compared to the Midianite horde of 135,000 swordsmen; our enemies are not flesh and blood, but 'the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. God would have us know our weakness, so we will know our victories to be his victories.

Gideon probably thought his army too small—but the Lord said it was too many, for if he saved by them, Israel would claim the victory as their own (v. 2). So 22,000 were reduced 10,000, and then to the 300: 'And the LORD said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand' (v. 7).

Some say the lapping showed that they were the best fighters—always alert, ready for action; others say that it was just the Lord's way of reducing their numbers so that they could not claim the victory for themselves. But both are true; Gideon need an elite band who could pursue and capture the Midianites (8:4, 11-12).

The Lord saves; yet the men and women he uses are important; the Lord gave Gideon his 300 because they were the best men to do the work he wanted done. If we are to be people he can use we must work hard at developing the gifts and talents he has given us; second rate, near enough, is not good enough for our King (Rejoice! 567); also, Christian character is important, e.g., for an elder Titus 1:7-8.

It's no wonder that with his army reduced to 300 that Gideon was afraid; the wonder of it is that the Lord gently took care of his fear, sending him down to the camp to not only see its vastness, but also to hear a man telling of his dream, and his friend interpreting it to mean that God had given Midian into the hand of Gideon.

Then Gideon worshipped; he bowed his heart to the Lord as God over all; he had come to the right tent at the right time, and what he had heard had strengthened his faith; returning to his 300, he gave them trumpets and empty jars and torches and told them to do as he would do, to blow and shout 'for the Lord and for Gideon'.

He was obeying scripture (Num 10:9); the torches and jars were Gideon's idea, but the trumpets were God's command; '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' (v. 22). Some say the camels stampeded—but the text does not agree.

2. The sword of Gideon

The remnants of the Midianite army fled south east towards Succoth, Penuel and Jogbehah, with Israel in hot pursuit. To cut off their escape, Gideon called on Ephraimites to take the fords—and they captured and killed two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb.

Gideon and his 300 crossed the Jordan in pursuit; there he defused the wrath of the Ephraimites; there he was rebuffed by the men of Succoth and Penuel, and, after promising to punish them, he defeated and captured Zebah and Zalmunna, punished the men of Succoth and Penuel, and put Zeeb and Zalmunna to death.

This victory is 1. a promise of future salvation (Isa 10:24-26); 2. used as a prayer for salvation from enemies (Ps. 89:9-12); this is what we pray for when we pray 'Thy kingdom come' (cf. Shorter Catechism, Q. 102); 3. a picture of Messiah's complete and final victory (Isa 9:3-6).

The Ephraimites were on the Lord's side; they had helped when called; but while the men of Succoth and Penuel wore the name of belonging to the Lord, they showed by their refusal to help Gideon that they were his enemies, and Gideon dealt with them accordingly.

They were afraid to help Gideon for fear of loss if the Midianites returned; being a real Christian means living by faith in Christ's final victory and risking loss for his sake—loss of friends as we speak up for him and his gospel or refuse to share in talk that would not please him; or loss of money or employment as we refuse to lie and cheat, or even loss of reputation, liberty or property or life itself.

We dare not in this matter say, 'so far, but no further', for Jesus demands our all (Mk 8:34-38). Today he is like Gideon. He has defeated Satan and his host (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14-15), but his victory is not yet complete; faith sees him victorious but the eye of sight sees him as Gideon and refuses to risk loss for him. Let us live by faith so as to identify ourselves with him as real Christians, unashamed to risk loss for him.

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My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Read and reflect on Judges chapters 7 and 8; why did the Lord reduce Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300? (c.f. also Deut 20:8). What significance was there in the 'lapping' test, and how is it relevant to us today in our serving the Lord?
2. How is God's grace and gentleness, his understanding of our weakness and fears, revealed in Judges 7:9-15? What aspects of the situation are revealed or emphasised in these verses?
3. What does it mean to say 'Gideon worshipped'? (v. 15) Whom did he worship, how did he worship and why did he worship? What does his worshipping say about how we should worship, or what should move us to worship?
4. How do we see Gideon's faith at work in the way he went about 'attacking' the Midianite camp? (cf. Num 10:9). How important do you think the breaking of the jars and torches were, and why?
5. Read and reflect upon Isaiah 9:3-6. Why was Gideon so gentle with the accusing Ephraimites, and so severe with the men of Succoth and Penuel, and how does this relate to our relationship to Jesus, our 'greater than Gideon'?