

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-
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DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 6

JUDGES

CHAPTER 7

Judges 7:2, *“And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.”*

INTRODUCTION

The children of Israel cried to the LORD for deliverance from the oppression of the Midianites. The LORD, who had been gracious and merciful, called Gideon to save His people from the Midianites. Gideon was initially timid and fearful but the LORD patiently built his confidence and trust in Him. Having doubly ascertained his mission and that the LORD would be with him as promised, Gideon raised an army to go to war against the Midianites.

There are valuable truths and principles that can be drawn and learned in this chapter with regards to

God’s sovereign control over the affairs of men. This is well illustrated in the way God dealt with Gideon and Israel. God often does things differently from men. In order to defeat a powerful enemy, one’s army must be much more powerful to ensure victory. But that is not God’s way—to be a leader, man must first learn to be a servant; in order for man to keep his life, he must lose it. The thoughts and ways of God often run counter to man’s thinking and methods.

God has a good purpose for doing things His way. God desires that His people learn to trust and depend on Him more. The focus was not in the defeat of Israel’s enemies. This was easy for the Almighty God. The focus must be Israel’s relationship with her God. Israel and Gideon must learn to trust God more in the process. But that does not mean that the people do nothing and wait for things to happen. Gideon had to be willing to be the instrument which God could use. God’s people must live by faith and faith means to act upon the Word of God, believing what it is not as if it is. It is also interesting and instructive to observe how God changed and used Gideon from being fearful, to having faith in Him, and ultimately to finish the work God had called him to do. Someone put it thus: “The task ahead of you is never greater than the power behind you.”

OUTLINE

1. The LORD reduces the number (vv. 1-8);
2. The LORD assures Gideon (vv. 9-14);
3. Gideon prepares his men (vv. 15-18);
4. The miraculous defeat of the Midianites (vv. 19-23);
5. Gideon appeals to his fellow Israelites (vv. 24-25).

COMMENTARY**The LORD Reduces the Number – 7:1-8**

Jerubbaal was another name given to Gideon by his father. Gideon led the army of Israel and pitched at the spring of Harod by Mount Gilead (or Gilboa), where there was water for his soldiers to drink. The Midianites camped just north of the Israelite camp by the hill of Moreh in the valley of Jezreel. The Midianites were confident of carrying out what they had been doing for the past seven years — plundering, pillaging and destroying the farms and the cities of the Israelites. Gideon had amassed an army of 32,000 men. From their camp on Mount Gilead, they could see a great part of the army camp of the Midianites, who numbered 135,000 (8:10). This is a ratio of 1 in 4.2 in favour of the Midianites. But the odds were still too high in Israel's favour.

The LORD said to Gideon that his army had too many men for Him to deliver the Midianites to Israel. The reason which the LORD gave was that Israel might boast and glorify herself claiming: "Mine own hand hath saved me" (7:2).¹ If against such odds, Israel could still think that it was by her own strength that the Midianites were defeated, it goes to show the poverty in Israel's spirituality. How could they not see the hand of God in the deliverance of Israel in the ratio of 1 in 4?

The LORD instructed Gideon the way to reduce the number of soldiers. He told Gideon to announce to all the 32,000 soldiers that those who were "fearful and afraid" could return to their homes. Twenty-two thousand opted to return home, leaving 10,000 who were willing to go to war. Gideon could have been shocked. The ratio now between Israel and the Midianites dropped to almost one to fourteen. The LORD knew best because He could see the hearts of Gideon's soldiers. Fear would present a greater problem of morale amongst the soldiers. It was better for these soldiers to return home.

Then the LORD said to Gideon something shocking! The army of Israel was still too large! Israel would have difficulty in seeing the hand of

¹ Isaiah 42:8 *I am* the LORD: that *is* my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.

the LORD in Israel's deliverance if the ratio had been 1 in 14! This time the LORD did not give the reason for a further reduction of the number of soldiers. Gideon was simply told to take the soldiers "down" to the springs of Harod. The word "down" indicates that the Israeli soldiers were camped on higher ground (Mount Gilead). Their going down to the water would then be in full view of the Midianites. Nevertheless, it was the LORD'S instruction, and Gideon obeyed.

The LORD said that He would choose the soldiers who should or should not go to war. When the soldiers were at the edge of the water to drink, the LORD told Gideon to choose the soldiers who scooped with their hands and "lappeth of the water with his tongue as a dog lappeth." The soldiers who knelt down to drink the water directly would not be chosen. The number of soldiers who lapped the water with their hands was 300. The LORD said that with these 300 men, He would save Israel and deliver the Midianites into Gideon's hand. The rest of the men, 9,700, were to "go every man unto his place" which would probably be back to their camp.

This was an even greater shock to Gideon than the first reduction. The ratio was now reduced to four hundred and fifty to one in favour of the Midianites. It would take a "miracle" to defeat the Midianites! But the reflection on Israel's spiritual sight is

far from encouraging that only in such a great ratio favouring the Midianites would Israel be able to see God's hand in her deliverance.

Nevertheless, the LORD encouraged Gideon by repeating His promise that He would save Gideon and win the war against the Midianites. Bible commentators are divided in understanding the rationale in choosing the 300 men. One can understand the reason for the first reduction exercise. But for this test, there are two schools of thought. One says that there was nothing special or different about the manner of drinking the water. The LORD arbitrarily wanted to choose the lesser number. The other school says that the 300 men were more alert and aware of the danger at the spring. By using one hand to scoop the water and the other hand probably holding on to their weapon, they were prepared for any surprise attack by the Midianites, unlike the others. However, the important thing was that the LORD chose the 300 men who would be His instruments to defeat the Midianites. The LORD made doubly sure that the Israelites could not be tempted to boast of themselves for defeating the Midianites thus putting themselves in the place of God and committing the sin of idolatry.

The LORD Assures Gideon – 7:9-14

That same night the LORD said to Gideon: “Arise, get thee down unto the host for I have delivered it unto thine hand” (v.9). After reducing the number of the soldiers to 300, the LORD knew Gideon’s heart. Gideon must have been terribly fearful that it was impossible to defeat the Midianites. The LORD knew his heart and assured him again that He would deliver the Midianites into his hand. This time the LORD commanded him to go into the camp of the Midianites and he could hear their conversations. After that he would be strong and ready to confront the Midianites. And if he was afraid to go alone, he could take his servant Purah with him. The interesting part here is that Gideon obeyed implicitly. He did not ask any questions. He could have asked exactly where they should go, or whether they would be detected and be killed; or whether they would return safely. Gideon was learning about faith and trusting in the LORD.

The divine writer simply recorded that Gideon and Purah made their way to the fringe of the camp of the Midianites (v.11b). The combined forces of the Midianites and the Amalekites and the soldiers from the east were numerous *“like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number as the sand by the sea side for multitude”* (v.12). Gideon and Purah could have thought that it was suicidal to defeat

this vast and strong army with three hundred men! When Gideon came to a spot, he heard a Midianite soldier telling his fellow soldier a dream that he dreamt. He dreamt that “a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along” (v.13). And the astonishing part is that the other Midianite guard interpreted the dream as nothing else but that “the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host” (14).

This incident was not accidental nor a coincidence. God’s sovereign control of the affairs of men was evident. The LORD protected Gideon and Purah as they entered into the camp of the enemies. The LORD kept them from being detected. He guided the path to the very place where the 2 Midian guards were sharing about the dream at the exact moment. God must have provided the dream for the Midianite guard and its interpretation too. By His sovereign wisdom and providential control, the LORD used the enemy to encourage Gideon, His fearful military general.

Gideon Prepares His Men – 7:15-18

This incident completely convinced Gideon that the promise of the LORD to deliver the Midianites to him was certain. Gideon’s immediate

response was that he worshipped the LORD. Gideon was now a changed man! He turned his faith to the LORD.

He returned to his camp to prepare his men to attack and now he himself said to his men that the LORD had delivered the Midianites into their hands. This God-given confidence gave him a brilliant strategy to defeat the enemy. He divided the 300 hundred men into 3 companies; each naturally comprised of a hundred. He gave to each of his men a trumpet (Hebrew, *shofar*, a ram's horn), and an empty pitcher in which a lamp was put. Then he instructed them to watch him for the signal to do as he would do. His aim seemed not to engage the enemy on a man to man combat but to launch a kind of psychological tactic to frighten the Midianites, who were already demoralised. That the LORD will deliver is not a reason to diminish or deny human responsibility. Here Gideon was told of God's deliverance and yet he made strategic military plans to bring the victory to pass.

The Miraculous Defeat of the Midianites – 7:19-23

Accordingly, Gideon led his 3 companies to the edge of the enemy camp, surrounding it and positioning each company on each side of the camp. He moved his men "in the beginning of the middle watch"—about

10.00 p.m. to 2 a.m.² The moment they were in position, Gideon did not waste any time. He signalled his men, and they followed him as instructed. They blew their horns holding them with their right hands, smashed the pitchers, held the lamps in their left hands, and gave a loud victory cry: "Sword of the LORD, and of Gideon" (v.20).

It was a surprise raid on the camp of the Midianites. Suddenly they panicked, ran in different directions, cried out among themselves, and fled. They were surrounded, they heard the sounds of ram's horn blowing, the lights all around them, and the initial sound of smashed pitchers created the sense that a huge army had descended on them. Gideon used to great effectiveness his "surround-sound." The state of sheer panic engendered in the hearts of the Midianites by God caused them to massacre one another in the night as they fought to escape from Gideon's "army". The enemies fled to their own territories of Beth-shittah in Zererath and to the border of Abel-meholah up to Tabbath.³ Perhaps the 9,700 from the three tribes who were in a nearby

² There are three watches in the night: first watch, 6.00 p.m. – 10.00 p.m.; second watch, 10.00 pm.- 2.00 a.m.; and third watch, 2.00 a.m. – 6.00 a.m.

³ Refer *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, (Macmillan Publishing Inc. New York, & Collier Macmillan Publishers, London, 1968), maps 74, 75, & 76.

camp came out and pursued the fleeing Midianites.

Gideon Appeals to His Fellow Israelites – 7:24-25

Gideon also sent messengers to the tribe of Ephraim calling them to pursue the remaining Midianites. The Ephraimites joined the fray and took Beth-barah and Jordan. They also captured two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb. They slew both of them and brought their heads to Gideon on the other side of Jordan. The LORD had done what He had promised Gideon.

PRACTICAL VALUE

The LORD was ever merciful and gracious to His people who cried to Him in times of dire need and oppression. The Israelites should repent and obey God. It is very sad that the Israelites turned away from the LORD God to worship worthless and useless idols. And those who worship idols would be like them, worthless and useless. This is a valuable lesson for us to know how great the LORD God our Creator and Redeemer is. He loves and cares for His people. Nothing is impossible for Him. In His sovereign wisdom and power, He controls all the affairs of men for the good of His people. With His intention to encourage Gideon to fulfil the call to save Israel from the

powerful Midianites, God led him into the enemy camp to hear at the precise moment the testimony of a Midianite guard that God would deliver the Midianites into the hand of Gideon (14). Gideon's victory over the Midianites was "miraculous" when the Midianites in their panic to defend themselves massacred one another. We should be encouraged and be motivated to serve the LORD and do His will.

God required that Gideon should exercise implicit faith in Him by trusting and believing His Word. It is ironical that the words of the Midianite guard convinced Gideon more than the word of God. In doing God's will, we must exercise faith for without faith it is impossible to please God, and believe that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). If God is on our side, we should not fear what man can do to us. Humanly speaking, the Israelites were no match at all against the Midianites who outnumbered the Israelites in the ratio of 450 to 1! But Israel with God was more powerful. We can and must trust God in our daily living when doing God's will.

When Gideon was finally convinced that victory was assured, he drew out a brilliant strategy to defeat the enemy. There is a valuable principle to be learned here. We cannot expect to be fruitful in advancing the kingdom of God if we as individuals or the churches merely

wait for things to happen. We need to make plans, set goals, follow them through and trust the LORD to honour His promise, and most importantly give God all the praise and the glory. AMEN

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DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Judges 7:1-8; Isaiah 42:8; 1 Corinthians 1:27-29.

TUESDAY: Judges 7:9-14; John 10:27-30; Hebrews 11:1.

WEDNESDAY: Judges 7:15-18; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 1 John 5:4-5.

THURSDAY: Judges 7:19-23; 2 Chronicles 14:11.

FRIDAY: Judges 7:24-25; Joshua 1:12-15.

ANALYSIS:

TEXT	PRACTICAL VALUE
Judges 7:1-8	
Judges 7:9-14	
Judges 7:15-18	
Judges 7:19-23	
Judges 7:24-25	

Discussion Questions

1. Why did God reduce Gideon's army so drastically? What do we learn about God (v. 2)? How

do we apply it in our Christian life?

2. Are you sensitive to seeing the hand of God in your life or does God need to do a 1 in 450 ratio to help us see? Cite an example to demonstrate your answer.

3. Gideon was weak in faith at the start of the military campaign. His faith grew as he went along. Was the battle against the

Midianites one of faith or flesh and blood?

4. How did the dream and interpretation of the two Midianite men convince Gideon that victory was at hand? Can we say that Gideon was trusting more in the words of man here than God's?

5. How do you balance the sovereignty of God and man's

responsibility in the matter of the lawsuit against FEBC?

6. Given the account of Gideon's experience in this chapter, how would you define faith in one or two sentences?

7. What do I see and understand in this chapter that is important to my life? (Explain as fully as you can)