

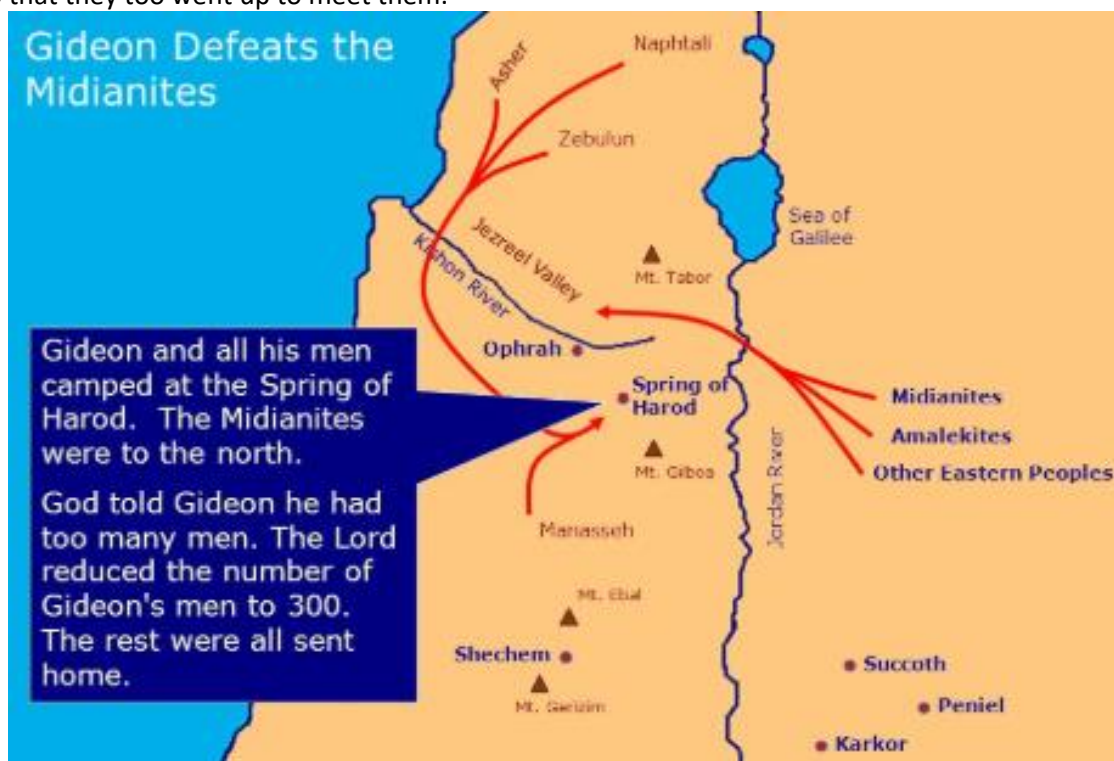
THREE HUNDRED MEN OF GIDEON

Judges 6:33-7:25 (key verse 7:7)

"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."

Last week we learned about Gideon, a timid man yet whom God called mighty warrior. We learned that he was a mighty warrior because God was with him. In today's passage Gideon leads an army of 300 men into a battle with 135 000 army enemies. These are the 300 men of Gideon. We want to learn, how God helped Gideon who was a timid man and a nobody to lead 300 mighty men, what was special about the 300 men and the war with touches and trumpets.

This is just after Gideon had destroyed Baal's altar as we learned from last week's message. Look at verse 33-35 "Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. 34 Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. 35 He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them."



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After the Midianites, Amalekites and other Eastern peoples crossed over the Jordan river, the spirit of the lord came over Gideon and he blew the trumpets summoning the Abiezrites and Naphtali whom all met and later on would camp at the Springs of Harod. However, though Gideon had the spirit of the Lord upon him and had summoned some tribes of Israel he still struggled with something. Look at verse 36-37, “Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand **as you have promised**— 37 look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, **then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.**” Gideon, could not believe that it was through his hands that Israel would be saved. Though he was sure that it was God’s promise or what God said, **that through his hands Israel would be saved.** Gideon still struggled to accept by faith. He looked at himself, remembered that he was from the weakest clans in Israel, and was also the least in his family [6:14-15]. Gideon focused on his human abilities and how he was described or defined by others based on human standards. The Lord had told

Gideon that he will be with him [6:16], yet Gideon could not but focus on himself and saw it impossible to lead Israel into victory. And so Gideon asked for a sign. That if there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then he will know the Lord will save Israel by his hand. And the Lord did as Gideon had requested. Look at verse 38, "And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water". This was something seeming impossible, since if the dew was on the fleece it was naturally also expected to be on the ground, yet there was only dew on the fleece. This could only be a miracle work of God. Still Gideon's faith was still weak, in verse 39, Gideon pleads with God not to be angry with him as he makes another request for affirmation. Look at verse 39b, "Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew." And the Lord did as Gideon had requested. A seemingly impossible thing to happen, something that no human intelligence or human ability could have made possible. This was the third sign of affirmation that the Lord conducted for Gideon. The first one we heard from last week message, as Gideon wanted to make sure that he was indeed talking to the Lord [6:17]. However, throughout all Gideon's requests to be sure, the Lord was patient with Gideon. Gideon had a weak and imperfect faith, asking for a second and third sign showed form of weakness. He did not also keep his word from his second request. He said, **he would know the Lord would save Israel through his hands if the fleece had dew and the ground was dry.** Yet he proceeded to ask again that the fleece be dry while the ground has dew. Without going into details, in many ways I see myself in Gideon. I even think Gideon is better, I might have asked for more signs. God is indeed patient and merciful.

However, if we really had a look at Gideon's challenge, it was indeed a great one. At some point I feel like I cannot blame him. Many could have said no. He only had 32,000 men while Midianites had 135,000 men [8:10]. However, in his weak faith he requested for affirmation through a sign. Gideon's weak faith is still greater than no faith. God indeed understood Gideon's heart and struggle. God was eager to help Gideon be a man of faith, a man of conviction, through His mercy and grace by the little signs Gideon requested.

Gideon and his men then camped at the spring of Harod, while the Medianites were north of them in the valley of Moreh [7:1]. Look at verse 7:2, "The Lord said to Gideon, 'You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me.''" The Lord found the men of Israel to be too many, that they would end up boasting that it was by their strength that they won against the Medianites. To reduce the men, all those who trembled with fear was allowed to turn back and leave Mount Gilead. And about twenty-two thousand men left while ten thousand remained [3]. This goes to show how fearful and devastating the situation was when faced with the Medianites. There men who returned were more than half their total number. Remember that Gideon initially had 32,000 men against 135,000 men on the Medianite camp. And now his men were now 10,000. As though 10,000 was not small enough, look at verse 4, "But the Lord said to Gideon, 'There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will thin them out 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.'" According to the Lord, 10,000 men were still too many. There was still a chance that when they gain victory against the Medianites, men of Israel would say it was by their strength that they got saved.

Look at verse 5-6, "So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the Lord told him, 'Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those who kneel down to drink.'" 6 Three hundred of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. All the rest got down on their knees to drink." Let us all read verse 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 others go home.'" The Lord made the situation more desperate, cutting the 22,000 impossible for victory and now cutting the 9700 and remaining with only 300, the situation became absolutely impossible for victory. It was absolutely impossible that the 300 men gain victory against the 135,000 Medianites army. There was no skill or tact the 300 men could use to win this victory, this was a clear foolishness because their loss was just obvious and seemed certain. However, Let us read verse 7 once more, "The Lord said to Gideon, With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Medianites into your hands...." God's promise was clear and sound, with the three hundred men that lapped God will save Gideon and give the Medianites into his hands. It was still not clear how through the 300, the Medianites will be given into the hands of Gideon. These were the 300 men of Gideon. Verse 7 says, "With the 300 men

that lapped I will save you and give the Medianites into your hands....” How different were the 300 men from the rest? These are the men who did not kneel down in order to drink water from the river. Let me try and extract two lessons we can learn from the 300. Firstly, the 300 men accepted their calling and were fully aware of their identity and role. They accepted their identity as a Holy Nation and mighty warriors. Those who kneeled let their guards down in kneeling as though they were not in war. They became too relaxed for the task they were to embark on. Though soldiers they behaved like civilians. They did not fully accept their calling and duty to fight against the Medianites. Their need to satisfy their thirst took first priority than their awareness of who they were and why they were there. Secondly, the 300 did not choose what was convenient and easy to serve God. Only the 300 did not kneel to drink water, whereas 9,700 kneeled. The majority of the men chose to kneel. This means that this was the most convenient method of drinking the water under the thirst they had. They went with the flow and forgot their role. They are like men who just follow the crowd, with no clear identity and direction.

Look at verse 9-11, “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.” The Medianites were so many that their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore [12].

Look at verse 13-14, “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.” Upon hearing this, Gideon bowed down and worshiped. He turned to the camp of Israel and called out to them, “Get up! The Lord has given the Midianites camp into your hands” [15]. A round loaf of barley was something insignificant, like a nobody. It was through God’s grace as we learned, that Gideon received full measure of faith to engage the war. He was so encouraged that he could even devise a plan on how to attack the Medianites. When Gideon gained faith through the encouragement of God, he could become smart and wise. Look at verse 16-18, “Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside. “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.’**” The men did as Gideon had commanded. Look at verse 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!”** When the trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with swords [22]. Without any weapons, the 300 men with Gideon were able to conquer the Madianites. But only with the trumpet and the torches. What does these two things represent. Firstly, The trumpets sound represented victory for Israel and God’s presence. By faith Israel declared victory even before they won the war. As we confront our enemies and the things we battle with in this life, we can learn from Gideon and the 300, that we do not need weapons. But rather to declare victory over our challenges even before we overcome them. Verse 22 says, when the three hundred trumpets sounded, **the lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other.** When we declare victory even before we see victory, we cause God to do something in our favour. Secondly, the smashed jars with torches inside. When the Lord asked Gideon to bring empty jars, Gideon and his men were expected to come to the battle with clean hearts. That means put down every sinful mind, their own wishes, judgemental ideas, basically bring empty minds. As the jars were broken the light from the torches was irradiated. We are like jars of clay, to place the light of God’s spirit instead of corrupted thoughts and desires. And so ultimately to break our sinful inner beings. Only then God’s light will shine within and from us. And this light can only be our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the true light, the world needs. As said in 2 Co 4:7, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”

I believe each and every one of us here have a life battle one way or another. We also have daily battles, as students and at our work places. It is easy to notice our battles, just waking up in the morning can be a great mission. And even

worse in winter times. Our battle should not be about getting a three meal, fighting to be recognized by our peers or boss, fighting for a comfortable life, fighting to be accepted and so on, basically fighting for survival in this world. We should ask ourselves, who am I? and what am I fighting for?

Gideon's 300 soldiers are defined by neither their ability nor personal background. They are the ones who have a clear identity as the people of His covenant. Our church should never be about numbers, aiming to become big and so on. We can become so big in number and look great. However, it is not the big numbers that change their campuses and world, it is those who are willing to serve God with sincerity among us. Those are the mighty warriors of women and men, the 300 men of Gideon. God is not moved by big numbers, but rather men and women who are willing to take their cross daily, live by daily repentance and faith. Men and women who are truly seeking to see God do wonderful things through their lives in their lifetime.

In conclusion, our missionaries who went out and pioneered other lands for the gospel are among the 300 men. Today we have Wits UBF because Missinary Rebekha and Jacob were among the 300. Missionary Deborah and Her husband who were in Botswana and went back to Korea due to challenges are among the 300. They are our heroes and mighty warriors. Recently I noticed some of our missionary women meet on Wednesday for prayer at 5:00am in the morning till 6:00am, missionary Sarah has to travel all the way from four-ways to Albertville about 30km (60km in total) just for prayer. These are among the 300 men. We have a worship team that sacrifices their time Saturday for hours for practice, just so that we may bring down God's presence for our Sunday service. We have sister Becca and Missionary Rebekha who faithfully go each Saturday for campus evangelism. Being committed to your weekly bible studies and testimony writing, allowing God to engage you and challenge you by His word. And many other things some of you do for the Lord as your way of claiming your identity as a covenant person of God, a holy nation, sincerely serving God and being consistent in faithfulness. Such are men and women who esteem to be among the 300 men of Gideon. May God have mercy on us and truly raise us to be men and women who can be among the 300 men of Gideon. Just as God was patient and showed mercy to Gideon, so shall we place our hope and faith in Him who can turn us into His mighty warriors, the 300 men of Gideon, for the glory of God.