

The Book of Judges

Lesson 6: Gideon's Three Hundred and the Lord's Victory -- Judges 7:1-8:35

Picture the morning. Thirty-two thousand men are camped on the slopes above the spring of Harod, weapons sharpened, hearts pounding, staring down at a valley that swarms with Midianites like locusts, camels without number, tents as thick as sand on the seashore. Gideon has finally said yes to God. He has torn down his father's altar, blown the trumpet, gathered the tribes. And now, at last, the army is assembled and the odds are merely terrible instead of impossible. You can almost feel the relief in those ranks. Then the LORD speaks, and what He says turns everyone's stomach: the people who are with you are too many. Too many? They are already outnumbered. But God is not interested in a fair fight. He is interested in a clear one.

So the winnowing begins. First the fearful go home, and twenty-two thousand walk away, leaving ten thousand. Still too many, says the LORD. Take them down to the water and watch how they drink. Three hundred lap from their hands; the rest kneel down and put their faces to the stream. And God, who delights to use the small and the unlikely, says: by these three hundred I will save you. Send everyone else away. Imagine standing there as ninety-seven percent of your army marches off over the hill. Whatever confidence you had built is gone. You are left with three hundred men, a valley full of enemies, and a promise. That is exactly where God wants you, and exactly where He wants us: stripped of every other reason to boast.

What happens that night is one of the strangest battles in all of Scripture. No swords drawn at first. Just trumpets, and empty clay jars, and torches hidden inside them. Three hundred men surround the camp in the dark, and at Gideon's signal they smash the jars, lift the torches, blow the trumpets, and shout, A sword for the LORD and for Gideon! The light blazes out of the broken jars all at once, and the noise rolls across the valley, and the LORD sets every Midianite's sword against his neighbor. The enemy destroys itself in the darkness while Israel simply stands and watches God work. When the dust settles, no one can stand up and say, My own hand has saved me. The victory has God's fingerprints all over it, and only His.

And then comes the part of the story we would rather skip. Because the same Gideon who confessed so beautifully, The LORD will rule over you, also gathered the gold from the spoil and made an ephod that became a snare to his whole house. The man God used to tear down one idol ended up building another, and a religious one at that. The people who watched fire pour from broken jars went right back to Baal the moment Gideon was buried. This lesson holds both halves together, the glory and the warning, and asks us a hard, honest question. When God wins a victory in your life, who gets the credit? And what good thing in your hands might quietly be turning into the very idol God means to break?

Group Discussion: When you read that God reduced Gideon's army from thirty-two thousand to three hundred so that Israel could not boast, My own hand has saved me (7:2), what does that reveal about how God wants His people to win, and where do you see Him still working that way?

Personal Reflection: Where in your life right now are you tempted to take credit that belongs to God, whether in your work, your family, or even your service in the church, and what would it look like to hand that glory back to Him this week?

Read Judges 7:1–8:35

Study Questions

1. Why did the LORD insist on reducing Gideon's army, and what does the stated reason in Judges 7:2, lest Israel boast, My own hand has saved me, teach us about the way God secures glory for Himself in the salvation of His people?
2. When God strips away the supports you were leaning on so that you have nothing left but Him, how do you usually respond, and what would it look like to trust Him in that place instead of scrambling for a backup plan?
3. What is the significance of the means God chose for the victory, the trumpets, the empty jars, and the hidden torches (7:16–20), and how does the breaking of the jars to let the light shine illustrate the way God works through weak and broken vessels?
4. Gideon was still afraid even after God's promise, and God graciously let him sneak down to overhear the enemy's dream (7:9–15). When has God met your fear with a fresh assurance, and are you willing to ask Him for the encouragement you need rather than pretending you have none?

5. How did the LORD actually win the battle by setting the Midianites' swords against one another (7:22), and what does this tell us about who fights for God's people and where true victory comes from?
6. Gideon's harshness toward Succoth and Penuel (8:4–17) shows a man whose success curdled into vengeance. Where might your own past hurts or appetite for vindication be shaping how you treat people who fail you?
7. Gideon refused the crown with the good confession, I will not rule over you, the LORD will rule over you (8:23), yet then asked for the gold. What does this mixture teach us about the danger that lurks even in our most sincere moments of faith?
8. Israel wanted to make Gideon king, and we are quick to crown the people God uses. Whom are you tempted to lean on or idolize in place of God, a leader, a mentor, a hero of the faith, and how can you honor them without putting them where only God belongs?
9. Gideon made an ephod from the spoil, and all Israel prostituted themselves after it, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his house (8:27), and after he died the people turned again to Baal and forgot the LORD their God who had delivered them (8:33–34). How does a good or even religious thing become an idol, what does this whole arc teach us about giving God the glory rather than boasting in ourselves, and how does Israel's swift return to Baal warn us, against any notion that God's people cannot fall away, that we must remain faithful to the end?

10. Looking back over the whole of Judges 7 and 8, name one specific way the Lord Jesus is teaching you through this passage either to give God the glory you have been quietly keeping for yourself or to surrender a subtle idol, even a good thing, that has become a snare, and what is the first concrete step of obedience you will take?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 1:26–31, God chooses the weak and foolish things so that no flesh may boast in His presence; 2 Corinthians 4:7, we have this treasure in jars of clay so the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us; Zechariah 4:6, not by might nor by power but by My Spirit, says the LORD; Galatians 5:4 and Hebrews 3:12–14, the sober warning that those once delivered can fall away and must hold fast to the end; Exodus 32:1–6, Aaron’s golden calf as a parallel to Gideon’s ephod, religious-looking objects that become snares

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