

## Gideon's Sword – Judges 7:9-22

This afternoon I'd like to take a favorite children's story and try to look at it from an adult's perspective. Most kids raised in Sunday School know the story of Gideon. They know that he was a timid man, living in trying times, risking his life just to keep his family alive. An enemy had occupied Israel, terrorizing the people and making day-to-day life extremely dangerous. One day, while Gideon was trying to thresh out a little wheat, while hiding from the enemy, the angel of the Lord visited, ordering him to prepare a small offering – and then God raised up miraculous fire to consume it. Emboldened by this, Gideon proceeded to destroy one of the local altars dedicated to idolatry. Following that, at the command of God, he called for an Israelite army to drive out the idolatrous Midianites. Many kids know the story of Gideon testing the will of God with the woolen fleece. *“Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.”* The Lord patiently and graciously gave the man His answer. *“And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.”* Then just to make sure, Gideon asked God to reverse the miracle the next night. *“And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.”*

That brings us to **chapter 7**. Gideon had 32,000 volunteers to fight against the Midianites, but the number was too large. With that many men, and their general lack of faith in Jehovah, the credit for any victory over the enemy would have been stolen by the mob and not credited to the true cause – the Lord. So God ordered that the 32,000 be reduced, and reduced again, until there were only 300 left. The final number was less than 1% of the original volunteers. 300 men were the tools God used to rout the enemy, bringing glory to the real victor – Jehovah-shalom. What caught my attention and led to this study was Gideon's battle cry – *“The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.”* Isn't this the only battle cry given to us in the Word of God? It used to be when armies met their enemy in hand-to-hand combat they came together screaming, trying to create panic or at least confusion. And clearly that was a part of Gideon's plan – both panic and confusion. To go along with the other parts of the attack were the shouts – *“The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.”* But why these words in particular? Is there any special significance? Did the Lord give this battle cry to His general, or did Gideon come up with it on his own? Let's table those questions for a few minutes while we consider...

### **The details of the battle in the valley of Jezreel.**

The valley of Jezreel is within the northern Israel tribe of Issachar, with the Brook Kishon running down its 10 mile length. The Kishon eventually runs into the Mediterranean Sea just at the foot of the famous Mt. Carmel. The valley is also called *“Esdraelon”* and *“Meggido.”* Many battles have been fought there, and scripture tells us there are more to come.

Another thing to note before we come to our application is that Israel's enemy at the time was Midian. And the Midianites were brethren, or cousins, to Israel – children of Abraham through Keturah. Apparently, it was Keturah who gave her fourth son his name, and it speaks to the problems she had with Abraham's first wife – Sarah. The highly prophetic name, *“Midian,”* means *“strife”* – the Midianites liked to quarrel, fight, argue with Israel. They were two very different children – particularly when it came to their worship.

Gideon was the fifth Judge of Israel. If it matters, his name means *“hewer”* as in someone who hews or chops wood. Like all of the Judges, Gideon is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes those men closely resembled the Lord Jesus – and sometimes only remotely. Most of them are not as crisp a picture of Christ as David or Joseph or Israel's sacrifices. But I am reminded of the glorified Son of God that we see in **Revelation 19:11** – *“I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp SWORD, that with it he should smite the nations: And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”* Again, what was Gideon's battle cry? *“The SWORD of the LORD and of Gideon.”*

That shout apparently grew out of a dream which the Lord conveyed to Gideon. It was not Gideon's dream, but it came to his knowledge quite miraculously. After his army had been reduced to 300 men, Gideon's timidity might have reared its ugly head again. So the Lord told him to venture down into the valley to reconnoiter among the enemy army. The Lord said, *“But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host.”* That night the pair silently approached one of the outer-most tents, where they listened to two men talking. One said, *“Behold, I*

*dreamed a dream, and, lo, 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.*” The other man – clearly directed by God – said, *“This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon on the son of Joash, a man of Israel; for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host.”* That was all Gideon needed to hear. He became convinced that Jehovah was going to give Israel the victory.

At mid-night, perhaps that same night, Gideon divided his 300 men into three companies. Even though they may have had a few swords and knives between them, they were basically unarmed. They were ordered to take clay pitchers, like those used to carry water. Inside they placed pitch or tar and perhaps some additional fuel like straw. This concoction was set ablaze, but being confined by the pitcher, the light extended up instead of out. And I suppose that the men held their pitchers at arm’s length in order to keep their faces hidden and unburned. With one hand carrying those inclosed lamps, perhaps some with handles and some without, the other hand held a shofar. This shofar was a trumpet made out of an animal’s horn – probably a ram’s horn. It was hollow, and the men could blow into the narrow end. As their lips fluttered against each other in the armature of the horn, sound was produced, amplified somewhat as it passed through the horn. A good trumpeter can make beautiful music simply by the position of his lips, but it is unlikely many, if any of these men, were good trumpeters. But it didn’t matter. The only thing important was a sound – a trumpet blast – no matter what kind of sound it was.

With companies of 100 men on two sides and the end of the valley, at Gideon’s command the pitchers were broken open so that the torches flashed back and forth across the Kishon. Then 300 trumpets started blaring their unearthly sounds. And between blasts, 300 voices shouted without any unison or precision, *“The sword of the Lord and of Gideon; the sword of the Lord and of Gideon; the sword of the Lord and of Gideon.”* I wish I knew whether or not there could have been an echo in that valley.

Instantly the Midianite camp awoke from a dead sleep. Probably the average soldier thought that every lamp and trumpet represented a hundred, three hundred or a thousand Israelites. Panic ensued, and the enemy began stampeding away from the lights and the din. Sleep-blinded men bumped into their neighbors, stomping on one another’s feet and tripping over each other. The camels started to stampede running over people. And Midianite swords began falling on other Midianites. It was a complete rout, and the victory belonged entirely to the Lord.

#### **Now let me try to make an application or two.**

Just as on the night of Israel’s attack, with only the moon and a billion stars providing limited light, we are living in a very dark day. *“The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble”* – **Prov. 4:19. Psalm 82:5** describes our world – especially spiritually – *“They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are out of course.”* Nationally, all of our foundations are out of course – politically, morally, socially, educationally, religiously. We live in a world with *“the blind leading the blind,”* explaining why so many have fallen into ditches. The unbelieving Midianites of the world today are dragging our neighbors into hell and trying to pull our children into their darkness as well. But remember, those Midianites are essentially our brothers and our cousins. We have more to fear from unbelieving Americans than we do from ISIS, the Chinese or the North Koreans. It’s people of our own race with our own skin tone that we need to overcome for the glory of the Lord. Something must be done. But who is there that can bring these people to their knees before the Lord? There is the captain of our salvation – the Lord Jesus Christ – our Gideon. He has the plans of battle, and they are nothing like the philosophies of men. Man’s idea is to overwhelm the enemy with mega-churches of thousands of people – 32,000s of people. But in contrast to that, it is God’s will to use a minuscule portion of professing Christendom – less than 1%. He uses little churches with 300 members and even littler churches with 30 members. He whittles the number of soldiers down according to His will and His criteria. And the soldiers for the most part aren’t professional soldiers at all – they are farmers, shepherds and boys. Practically speaking, it is not reasonable to expect them to be a part of any great victory. But God does this, and uses this plan, so that **HE** will be glorified, not the soldiers themselves. It is not reasonable to expect victory; but by faith we can see it afar.

Today, *“the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, (yet) they are mighty to the pulling down of strongholds.”* We are to go into the Lord’s battle with lamps and trumpets – with our voices and with our feet. What this dark and dismal world needs is the light of the Lord. And *“YE are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it (into an opaque pitcher), but on candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father*

*which is in heaven.*” Our good works might include giving a neighbor a few dollars for gasoline or a sack full of groceries. It might be helping him fix his car or seeing to it that he gets to his doctor’s appointment. It could be mowing his grass when he’s laid up, or shoveling the snow because he back won’t permit it. **But** – these are things which a lost neighbor might do as well. The difference ought to be *“that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”* These Midianites around us need to know that we are the servants of Christ Jesus. They need to see genuine Christian smiles long before they see the sword of the spirit in our hand.

I have been trying to visualize how the pitchers of Gideon’s 300 were broken and then still used. *“The three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands...”* To be honest, I couldn’t figure it out, and I couldn’t find a commentator to sufficiently explain it to me. It seems to me that once the pitcher was broken it would be impossible to hold the fire any longer. If it was me, I would have thrown the pitchers, with the fire inside, onto the outermost tents of the enemy, hoping to create a conflagration and even more panic – but that was not God’s way. And perhaps the lesson comes from deliberately leaving the question unanswered. You may have an entirely different way of letting your light so shine before men than what I am able to do. As long as all 300 of us are willing to do whatever the Lord reveals to us, then the Father will be glorified.

Along with the 300 lamps, 300 trumpets were a part of the attack. Undoubtedly the din of all those horns suggested a great number of attackers, but there must have been more involved than that. Was it that most of these Israelites were not trained musicians and the noise was just that – only noise? Is the lesson that we don’t have to be skilled at theology to speak to a lost soul about the Saviour? Perhaps you are able to teach a child about the Saviour, but that child’s father is beyond your ability to help. You’ll have to leave him to one of God’s other servants.

Or are we to draw a parallel to Paul’s praise of the **Thessalonians** in the **first chapter** of his **first epistle**? *“For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad...”* I am told that the words *“sounded out”* could be translated *“trumpeted out.”* The tiny persecuted church in Thessalonica was trumpeting the praises of God throughout the region. Or perhaps we should consider the fact that besides a military use, the shofar trumpet was used in the worship of the Lord. **Psalm 150** – *“Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Praise him with the sound of the TRUMPET: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.”* Perhaps the blasting of Gideon’s trumpets was to honor the Lord by faith for His upcoming victory.

I don’t know about you but I see a parallel with Joshua’s victory at Jericho. If you’ll remember, for seven days the people of Israel silently walked around the city of Jericho. Then on the seventh day, following seven trips around the city, *“it came to pass ... when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout, for the Lord hath given you the city.”* What did those people shout? It was probably not – but it could have been – *“The sword of the Lord and of Joshua; the sword of the Lord and of Joshua.”* I think that it was probably a shout of praise, but I don’t know for sure.

*“The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.”* I spent quite a bit of time thinking about this battle and all the interesting things about it. And I tried to find an explanation for Gideon’s battle cry – *“The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.”* You may understand it better than I do, even after all my time in prayerful meditation. I know that Paul tells us that *“the sword of the SPIRIT is the Word of God.”* And undoubtedly that should be a part of the explanation for Gideon’s war cry. But God’s Word was not actually shared with the Midianites that day. It is not enough for us to go to the Spokane Reservation and simply shout – *“The Bible is God’s Word.”* But should I make that application anyway? Is that what those Israelites were saying?

The sword of the Lord – the sword of the Spirit – is the Word of God – written and spoken. And again, *“the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.”* Today, our chief weapon against the Midianites is the Word of the Lord. The only way to bring them to their knees before God – the absolute ONLY way – is by giving them God’s Word and letting the Holy Spirit wield His own sword. Love and kindness in themselves cannot defeat God’s enemy. Good works are good and effective only when they are performed in God’s name with the purpose of God’s glory. The Puritans and other Protestants have tried to evangelize the lost through governments and legislation, but that is not God’s way and has always failed. Money cannot bring rebels to their

knees before God; bullets and bombs are ineffective in a spiritual battle. Only the Lord and His sword are effectual in this spiritual warfare.

While that is absolutely true, Gideon was right when he added his name to the battle cry – *“The sword of the Lord **and of GIDEON.**”* Yes, only the **sword** of the **LORD** *“is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”* But God has ordained that unless the men and women of Gideon take that sword to the enemy, the battle will not be won. The cry was not simply *“The sword of the Lord; the sword of the Lord.”* That might have been presumption. And it certainly wasn’t *“The sword of Gideon.”* It was – *“The sword of the Lord **AND of Gideon.**”* We are Gideon’s men – Christ’s soldiers – in this battle against the Midianites. If we don’t descend down into the valley of the shadow of death, blowing our trumpets, shouting God’s name and revealing God’s light, there will be no victory for Christ. We must **obey** the Lord, **trust** the Lord and **let Him work.**

But there is more – **Judges 7:20-21** – *“And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon. And **they STOOD every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled.**”* Notice that the 300 men did little more than break their pitchers, blow their horns and shout the battle cry. *“And they **STOOD every man in his place round about the camp.**”*

They didn’t chase the enemy down the valley; they didn’t attack in the true sense of the word, with their knives and the Midianite swords they might have picked up. Earlier as they first took their positions they determined they were not going to fall back either. You might say that our job is to create confusion among the enemy of God. When you stand firm, declaring that God created the universe in six days, sometimes the lost stutter and stammer in utter confusion. When you tell the world that salvation is by grace alone, apart of any of the good efforts of the lost, jaws may drop, and words may fail. Blow that horn and break that pitcher, stir up the lost, and stand firm. **If** some of the enemy, in their confusion ran toward Gideon and his men, they were determined simply to shout and trumpet, leaving their defense up to the Lord. These people were willing to obey their orders; they were willing to die if necessary to bring the Lord His victory.

It seems to me that true Christianity would be far stronger in these last days, if only God’s people would stand. Not everyone is meant to face the enemy and attack or to run after the enemy. But if everyone held his ground with the Word of God in his hand and in his mouth, our over-all witness before the Midianites would be much stronger.

*“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”*

As soon as the enemy began their terrified retreat toward Beth-shittah, Zererath and Abelmeholah, others in Israel took up the fight. Some secured the fords of the Jordan, cutting off the Midianite retreat to the east. Others captured the two princes of the enemy. Hundreds, if not thousands of others, became involved when they heard of the faith and sacrifice of the 300. There was even a quarrel with Gideon because some people were not invited to original the battle.

Eventually, Gideon’s men retired without fanfare or public honor. You can’t name a single one of those heros other than Gideon. But you can be sure their names are written in the Lord’s glorious journals – and that is all that really matters. I read somewhere that only God knows what great victories could be won if His people would simply not care if their names were ever known.

Brethren, we have a work to do; there are Midianites to be humbled; there are lost men to be saved. They come from among our brothers and our cousins. But they are lost; they are idolaters; they are wicked souls in the eyes of the Lord. We may be few in number, but where two or three are gathered together in the name of the Lord there He is in their midst, and that means victory. Who knows what great things might be accomplished if we stand our ground, blow God’s trumpets and unleash God’s light within us.