

• *Preparations for battle*

1. The preparation of the soldiers

• *God wants to use people who are weak*

• *God wants to use people who are willing*

• *God wants to use people who are watchful*

• *Two ways to drink water*

• *A long, long guzzle*

• *Or with watchfulness*

• *The people God wants to use*

Gideon has accepted the fact that God is calling him to be the deliverer of Israel. He has asked God for various signs to prove that he is indeed in God's will. God has answered him and given him his requests. Now the battle is soon to begin. God gets the soldiers ready for victory; then He gets Gideon ready for victory.

1. **First there is the preparation of the soldiers.** Gideon sets up his camp at En Harod, a place where there is a spring of water not far from the valley of Jezreel ^{☞1}. The camp of the mighty Midianite army is not very far away to the north ^{☞2}. Gideon's army numbers about 32,000 men. But then God gives Gideon some surprising guidance.

God wants to use people who are weak. God tells Gideon, 'The people with you are too many...' ^{☞1}. God does not want the people to be so numerically powerful that, after the battle is finished, they take the credit of victory for themselves.

God wants to use people who are willing. Anyone who wants to go home may go home ^{☞1}! Gideon must tell the people plainly, 'Anyone who is afraid may go!' About 22,000 men go home! The remaining 10,000 men are ones who want to be there. They will not go home even when they are given permission to do so. Jesus still wants a family of disciples consisting of those who are willing to do God's will ^{☞2}. He says 'If anyone wishes to come after me...'. It is a personal matter: 'If anyone...'. It is a voluntary matter: 'If anyone wishes...'. So Gideon said to his men, 'If you feel afraid and you want to go home, you may go...'. Maybe some who stayed were afraid too, but they were unwilling to go home. Gideon himself was fearful, as we shall see.

God wants to use people who are watchful. The numbers were still too large; God wanted even fewer. Gideon is told to take them down to the place where the springs of fresh water are to be found ^{☞1}. There He will give further instructions about who is to go on this campaign against the Midianites. Anyone who drinks water by lapping up the water in dog-like fashion (apparently from a cupped hand) is to be put on one side. They are the ones God will use. Anyone who drinks water by getting down on all fours is to be allowed to go home. The ones who scoop up water and drink it from a cupped hand are the ones God wants to use. By this test the number that God will use is reduced to three hundred men ^{☞2}

Is there any significance in the way the two groups drink water? I am sure the main point is simply that God wanted to reduce the number to a smaller group. They did not have to be great military heroes or skilful soldiers. On the other hand there surely was a reason why one group of soldiers drank water in one way, and a smaller group drank water in another way. Of course, all of the soldiers were thirsty. All of them needed to quench their thirst. One group gets down on all fours to quench their thirst. Nothing matters to them but having a long, long guzzle, from the water-spring.

The other group have something else on their minds as well as their own needs. They remember that there are Midianites not far away who might attack at any moment. They are not about to put down their weapons and quench their thirst on all fours. They also are keeping in mind what could happen at any moment. They are not so eager to meet their needs of a thirst-quenching drink that they forget to keep themselves ready for an attack from the Midianites.

It is a parable of the kind of people God wants to use. They may not be super-saints, but they are people who are less concerned with the

☞1 7:1a
☞2 7:1b

☞1 7:2

☞1 7:3
☞2 See Mark 3:31-35

☞1 7:4
☞2 7:5-7

• *Concerned about the Lord's kingdom*

• *300 go home*

2. More preparation of Gideon

• *Gideon admits he is still a man with weakness*

• *Gideon encouraged through a dream*

3. The tiny army are given an effortless victory

• *Victory as the enemy armies panic*

• *God given success*

pleasures and needs of life and more concerned about what is happening in the Lord's kingdom. They do not 'guzzle on all fours' and neglect God's kingdom.

Rather they take small sips from cupped hands and while they do so, they stay wide-awake to what is happening in the work of God. The three hundred take the provisions of those who go home (7:8).

2. **Next there is the preparation of Gideon.** One might think that Gideon would by now be ready for the conflict again Midian, but Gideon still has some doubts. He is still a man who needs God's help.

Gideon has to admit to himself that he is still a man with weakness. Once again Gideon needs a sign! God tells him that the day for victory has arrived ¹. But, says God, if Gideon is still afraid he can creep down to the enemy camp and he will hear something that will encourage him ². It must be noticed that God's offer requires that Gideon admits to himself that he still has a problem with needless fear.

God helps Gideon to rise to fearless assurance. The number of the enemy is vast ¹. Gideon is allowed to hear a man relating a dream. One little loaf of bread rolls into the camp. It is small yet it knocks down a large tent ². His friend recognizes the symbolism of the dream. The small loaf of barley bread stands for Gideon. The large tent stands for the Midianites ³. It encourages Gideon and brings him to a complete assurance that God is about to work ⁴.

3. **When God has done his work of preparation, the tiny army are given an effortless victory.** Gideon divides the three hundred into three ¹. This will have the effect of spreading them out and giving the impression that there is a large army. The soldiers must imitate Gideon when they get to the edge of the enemy camp ² and at the right time shout 'For the **LORD** and for Gideon' ³.

They arrive at a time when the enemy camp are likely to be deeply asleep ¹. They have trumpets ready and lamps burning beneath earthenware pots. Suddenly they uncover the lights and start blowing on the trumpets and shouting ². The enemy army are suddenly woken up from their sleep. The Israelites do not have to do anything; they simply stand where they are! They stand still and see God's salvation. Without the three hundred having to do any fighting, the enemy armies panic. In their confused state they start killing each other!

Then they run for their lives ¹. The men from the three tribes are summoned for the final triumph ². A tiny army won a mighty victory because God gave the success to them.

¹ 7:8

¹ 7:10-11
² 7:1

¹ 7:12
² 7:13
³ 7:14
⁴ 7:15

¹ 7:16
² 7:17
³ 7:18

¹ 7:19
² 7:20

¹ 7:21-22
² 7:23, See 6:36



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