



A Study of the Book of Judges

Lesson 7: Gideon and the Biscuit Avalanche Judges 7:3-8:3

Our subject this morning is Gideon...Gideon and the biscuit avalanche. Now I'll explain what I mean by that as we proceed but for now I just want to plant that picture in your mind...the picture of an avalanche of biscuits and I am not talking about the gigantic biscuits you get now days at restaurants...I am talking about the simple, small biscuits you used to buy in paper tins at the market...10 for \$1.00.

When we left Gideon last time, he had been dubbed Jerub-Baal because he challenged Baal's power by tearing down one of his altars. We left him mulling over the significance of a dry fleece. He had set the fleece out as a test of confirmation of the Lord's presence and blessing. You will remember that he had done so twice...once asking for the fleece to be wet and the ground dry from dew and the second time for the fleece to be dry and the ground wet with dew.

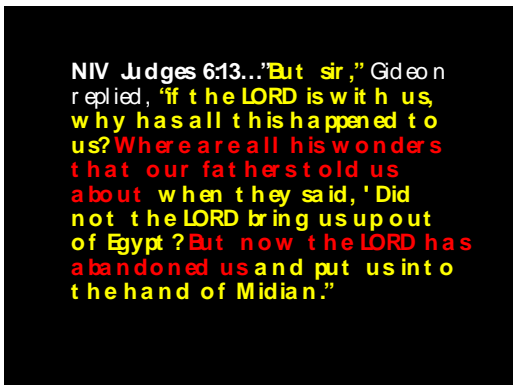
You will also recall, I hope, that the fleece was not the first manifestation of Gideon's fear and uncertainty. In fact, we saw last week that Gideon seemed continually burdened down with doubt.

We saw last week what I believe to have been seven, separate, easily identifiable indications of Gideon's doubt and uncertainty regarding the promise of God¹.

Initially, he had doubted whether or not the God of his fathers...the God who had so graciously delivered His people in the past...was even still out there...was still interested in delivering His people. In doing that, he doubted the reality of being connected to the God of Israel's history. That doubt came up in Judges 6:13.

Look at it for a moment.

NIV Judges 6:13...*"But sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian."*



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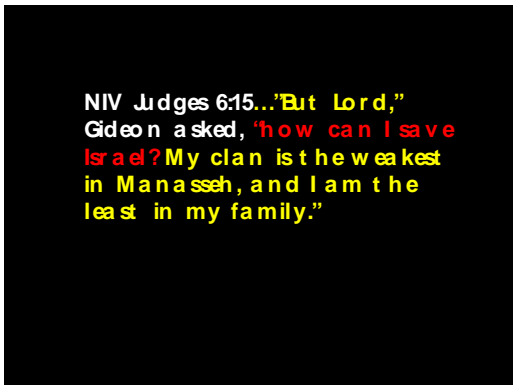
You can see, I think, what Gideon is asking. He is asking, **"If it is true that God is with us, why have things turned out the way they have?"**

It's a great question. But it's not the real question. The real question is, **"If God still God and if He is why does He seem so far away?"** It is a question we all

ask from time to time, especially when life is hard and when providences are frowning.

Secondly, we saw his Gideon's doubt about being up to the task of delivering his people from the oppression of the Midianites. You will remember, I hope, how he responded to the Lord's gracious word to him in Judges 6:15.

^{NIV} Judges 6:15... "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."



Now, to be fair, Gideon's concern was principally directed toward his own inability and not specifically toward God's inability to use him. In fact, many commentators see his concern as a wonderful expression of his own deep, genuine humility². That is why Judges 6:34 is so important. Look at it for a moment.

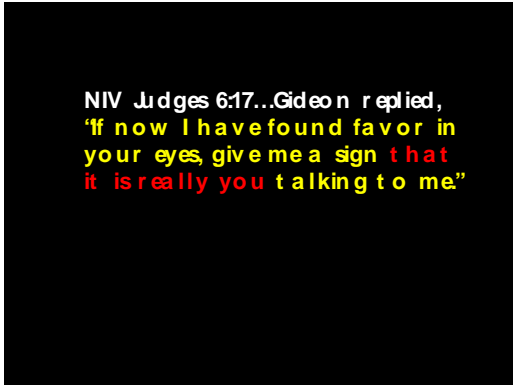
^{NIV} Judges 6:34... Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him.

You see the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon and made him to have strength that he did not possess in and of himself. Gideon was not up to the task. Gideon was justified in being humble.

His humility reminds me of one of the last few times, I went to hear Dr. J. Vernon McGee speak. It was just before he died. The pastor that introduced him had studied under him and knew him very well and said, **“Our speaker tonight is Dr. J. Vernon McGee. Dr. McGee is a humble man. Some people, his wife in particular, say he has a lot to be humble about.”**

That is the way it was with Gideon. He was humble and rightly so. The task of delivering the land from the Midianites was beyond him...way beyond him. Still there is a sense that in exercising doubt, he not only doubted himself...he also doubted God and God’s ability to use him...to use the common, the insignificant and the profane to accomplish His purpose. After that, of course, we saw his doubt, his fear and uncertainty in asking for a confirmation that the words the Angel of the Lord had spoken to him were true. That occurred in Judges 6:17. I hope you will remember how he expressed his doubt.

^{NIV} Judges 6:17...Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me."



Now again to be fair, Gideon didn't doubt that someone had spoken to him. The thing he doubted was whether the word he had just received was a word from the Lord.

We saw last week how the Angel of the Lord, that wonderful character speaking those wonderfully gracious words, was more than likely the preincarnate Christ Himself, confirmed the truth and reality of the His Word being a word from God³.

And then fourthly, we saw his doubt and uncertainty in his decision to tear down the altar the altar to Baal in the darkness of night rather than in the openness of day. And to fair again, it would be wrong to attribute his decision to fear if the text didn't explicitly do that for us. That occurred in Judges 6:27.

NIV Judges 6:27...So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.

NIV Judges 6:27...So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.

And then fifthly, we saw his fear and uncertainty in asking for the sign of the wet fleece and the dry ground. That was in Judges 6:37.

And then sixthly, we saw it again as he asked for a variant of the same sign the next day...that is a dry fleece and wet ground. That occurred in Judges 6:39.

Now, to be fair, none of Gideon's doubts disqualified him from accomplishing what God had chosen him to do. It would be wrong to be any harsher on Gideon than the Lord was and text makes it perfectly clear that the Lord never spoke to Gideon harshly or rebuked him in any way for his doubt or his fear and uncertainty. Instead, the Lord was constantly trying to prop up Gideon's faith...to encourage him...to strengthen him.

Certainly, when I speak of his doubt I am not really trying to denigrate his character or anything like that. I of all people am unworthy to question his faith and confidence in the Lord's leading. I am just trying to draw attention to the fact that the author of Judges is trying to draw attention to the fact and he does so because it is important to his purpose for the book. You see he was calling the nation to obey the Lord...to follow Him and His chosen king...to obediently

trust Him, to exercise his own covenantal loyalty and faithfulness, to follow Him and His commands.

I think the author of the Book of Judges wanted those reading the story of Gideon, to ask, **“For heaven’s sake, why he is so afraid? Why was he so slow to believe the obvious blessing of God? Why was he so slow to just do what God had commanded?”**

Now in saying that, I need to quickly add that I think the author of Judges wanted his readers to ask those kinds of questions about Gideon in order to get them to ask the same kinds of questions about themselves. I think the author of Judges and by that I mean ultimately the Holy Spirit wanted the readers of the book to ask, **“Now why am I so afraid? Why am I so slow to believe and trust in the obvious blessing and goodness of God? Why am I so slow to just do what God commands?”**

You see, we sometimes need to see the flaws in other people’s lives in order to train ourselves to perceive the flaws in our own lives.

And it seems to me, that it is somewhat proverbial to say that it is always easier to see flaws in another person’s life than it is in our own.

That is the reason, I think, the Lord gives us the wonderful biblical characters He does...characters whose complex lives are simplified and pared down in the text so that we can see their flaws and the result of their flaws and seeing their flaws learn to see rightly our own flaws rightly.

We need to be trained to perceive reality. That is what happens to Gideon in the text today. He comes to perceive things as they really are.

Now that having been said let's turn at last to the text and see what reality we can perceive together.

^{NIV} **Judges 7:1**...Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh.

Now the fact that Gideon and his men assembled at the Spring of Harod is one of those wonderful coincidences or providences that occur from time to time in Scripture. Apparently they were camped on one side of a valley on the side of a hill above a spring and the Midianites were camped across the valley some three or four miles away near the hill of Moreh. Anyway, I was making the point that that the use of the word **"Harod"** is a wonderful coincidence...that is true because the word **חרר** means **"to tremble, to shake...presumably with fear."**

That would mean that a modern naming of the place would have been something like Trembling Springs or even Shakey Springs.

And what is funny about that is that the author of Judges uses a sort of word play to move the story along. Look at verse 2.

^{NIV} **Judges 7:2**...The LORD said to Gideon, **"You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, ³ announce now to the people, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'"**

Do you see the word there in verse 3 **“trembles?”** It’s the same word from verse 1...תַרְדָּד...**“Harod”**. You see they are at **“Trembling Springs”** and the Lord wants Gideon to say to his men, **“Any of you who are trembling may go home.”** It is a wonderful word play...at Trembling Springs...the tremblers departed.

Now notice at the conclusion of verse 3 just how many people were trembling.

^{NIV} **Judges 7:3**...So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

That means that in one moment Gideon lost 69% of his army. He started off with thirty-two thousand men and was suddenly down to ten thousand. That means that at that point his army was outnumbered thirteen to one. We know that because Judges 8:10 tells us that the Midianites had at least one hundred and thirty-five thousand men.

^{NIV} **Judges 8:10**...Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with a force of about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of the armies of the eastern peoples; a hundred and twenty thousand swordsmen had fallen.

Now I ought to make a comment about this notion of men who are afraid being able to leave the army. It was actually permitted on the basis that having fearful men in the army was more likely to be a discouragement than a strength. That, at least is the argument of Deuteronomy 20:4 and following.

^{NIV} **Deuteronomy 20:4**...“For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.” ⁵ The officers shall say to the army: **“Has anyone built a new house and not dedicated it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may dedicate it. ⁶ Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else enjoy it. ⁷ Has anyone become pledged to a woman**

and not married her? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else marry her." ⁸ Then the officers shall add, "Is any man afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too." ⁹ When the officers have finished speaking to the army, they shall appoint commanders over it.

NIV Deuteronomy 20:5...The officers shall say to the army: "Has anyone built a new house and not dedicated it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may dedicate it.
6 Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else enjoy it.
7 Has anyone become pledged to a woman and not married her? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else marry her."
8 Then the officers shall add, "Is any man afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too."

You see he is actually recalling the words of Moses when they entered the land. He was saying, "If you are afraid just depart." Now in Gideon's case it is hard to see how keeping those that were afraid could have been any more disheartening than losing 69% of his army.

Of course, he was about to lose more than that.

He was about to lose another 30% and not 30% of what was left but 30% of the original 32,000 men.

Let me put it this way. Gideon is going to wind up going to battle with less than one man for every hundred he started out with...less than 1% of his original force.

Start	32,000	100%
Minus	22,000	69%
Equals	10,000	31%
Minus	9,700	30%
Equals	300	01%

Here's the way that worked itself out. He started off with 32,000 men and God reduced that number by 22,000...leaving Gideon only 31% of his original force.

Next God is going to further reduce Gideon's army by 9,700 men. He is going to sift them out reducing Gideon's army to a little less than 1% of its original number. And that remaining 300 is going attack 135,000 Midianites.

Verse 4 explains how that came about.

^{NIV} **Judges 7:4...But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them 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."** ⁵ So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, **"Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink."** ⁶ Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

Now here's the idea. The Lord intended to reduce Gideon's forces even more than they already were. He intended to do that so that Israel might not be able to say, **"Look at what we have accomplished."**

Now the standard that God imposed on Gideon was this...all the men that bent down on their knees and put their face into the water were turned out. Only those men that put their hand in the water and cupped the water up to their mouths were kept.

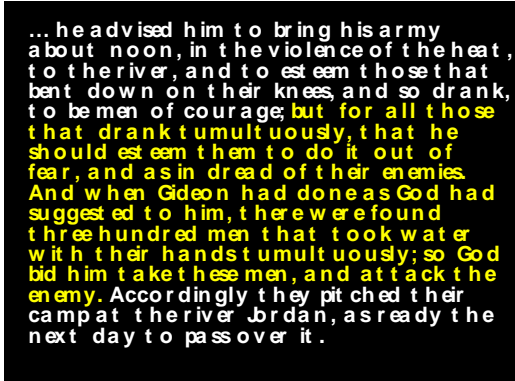


Now the way most commentators explain that is that those who more or less just dove face first into the water were oblivious to the danger were excluded while those that lapped the water cupping it up to their mouths were kept because of their alertness⁵.

Now that makes perfect sense but there is a problem...the Lord did not need the men to be alert...in order to deliver Israel⁶. He was not dependent upon their alertness. In fact the ancient commentators argued the exact opposite.

Josephus and some of the early church fathers like Theodoret explained the cupping thing to be a sign of fear rather than of alertness. The point that such commentators were making is that the Lord used those that were fearful to accomplish His deliverance

Now his point was that the Lord wanted to use the men that were weak and terrified in order not to have the glory of victory taken from Himself.



... he advised him to bring his army about noon, in the violence of the heat, to the river, and to esteem those that bent down on their knees, and so drank, to be men of courage; but for all those that drank tumultuously, that he should esteem them to do it out of fear, and as in dread of their enemies. And when Gideon had done as God had suggested to him, there were found three hundred men that took water with their hands tumultuously; so God bid him take these men, and attack the enemy. Accordingly they pitched their camp at the river Jordan, as ready the next day to pass over it.

Now which one is right? It seems to me it is really impossible to know exactly why the Lord chose the men that he did.

This is what Josephus said:

Now that they might not pass God over, but ascribe the victory to him, and might not fancy it obtained by their own power, because they were a great many, and able of themselves to fight their enemies, but might confess that it was owing to his assistance, he advised him to bring his army about noon, in the violence of the heat, to the river, and to esteem those that bent down on their knees, and so drank, to be men of courage; but for all those that drank tumultuously, that he should esteem them to do it out of fear, and as in dread of their enemies. And when Gideon had done as God had suggested to him, there were found three hundred men that took water with their hands tumultuously; so God bid him take these men, and attack the enemy.⁷

Isn't that great...there is just no way to know why he chose the men he did. Look at verse 7.

^{NIV} **Judges 7:7**...The LORD said to Gideon, "**With the three hundred men that I lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place.**" ⁸ So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.

Now the trumpet there is a shofar...a ram's horn. Apparently not every man had one. But the men that were to remain were to take the shofars, the trumpets, of the men who were departing. Now it's hard to know exactly what the provisions mentioned here were...they may have been swords or other armaments...apparently it did not include food...we'll talk about that next week.

^{NIV} **Judges 7:8**...Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley.

They are finally ready now to go into battle...except for Gideon who has it seems one more doubt. Look what it says in verse 9.

^{NIV} **Judges 7:9**...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.

Now let me just ask you a question and I want you to use all of your deductive powers to answer it. The text says that the Lord spoke to Gideon and said, "**If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp.**"

Then the next verse says that he and Purah went down to the camp. Now what can you deduce from that? You can deduce that he was still very much

afraid...very much afraid. Even after all of these wonderfully encouraging words from God, he was still afraid. And you know from a human perspective he probably should have been.

Look at verse 12.

^{NIV} **Judges 7:12...**The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore. ¹³ Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream...

Now I want you to picture this scene. Gideon...probably in a hooded garment...moving down through the Midianite camp...just at the change of watch...walks into the midst of the Midianite camp. Think of that...two Israelites in the midst of 135,000 Midianites. He and his servant were just walking through the camp quietly...and they stopped to listen to the conversation of two men they ran across.

It's a remarkable scene don't you think?

Now he is going to listen to what these two men say because the Lord wants to communicate an encouraging word to him through the voice of his enemy. Now look at the message God wants him to hear.

^{NIV} **Judges 7:12..."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."**

Now this image of a barley loaf is really extraordinary. Let me try to explain it this way. Barley was poor man's bread. In Israel there were many different kinds of grains. Wheat was the most important and barley was the cheapest...the poorest of the grains. It was used principally to feed animals.

Barley loafs were never very large...usually they small and round...something like a biscuit. It symbolized farming and the tent symbolized the nomadic, Bedouin way of life and the Midianite who interpreted his friend's dream rightly understood that the barley loaf represented the Israelites and that the tent represented the Midianites.

Barley bread was the fare of the poorer classes⁸. The best bread was made from wheat. Barley was the fare of animals, the weak, the lowly, the poor. And the barley loaf mentioned would have most likely been a small round loaf...really almost like a muffin or a biscuit. It was very coarse bread; it was the cheapest of breads. Think of it as something like cornpone⁹. It was the kind of bread poor people ate...cornpone...biscuits. Anyway, in the dream this Midianite looks up and sees a barley loaf rolling down the hill and he watched it as it tumbled into the Midianite camp and struck a tent and knocked it over, turning it completely upside down. Now you don't have to be an outdoorsman or even a good cook to know that a biscuit rolling down a hill will not knock over a tent...it just won't¹⁰. Biscuits are light and small and insignificant and a barley loaf is even smaller and cheaper than that. But the man in the camp knew that the barley loaf represented Israel and its farming, agrarian community and that the tents represented the Bedouin, Midianite community and that this barley loaf striking the tent meant that the Israelites were going to put the Midianites all to flight. That's how he understood the dream.

Now the question is, **“Will that finally put an end to Gideon’s doubt and fear?”**

Let’s see...let’s look at verse 15.

^{NIV} **Judges 7:15**...When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped God...

Now the word that is used for worship here is not a word associated with simply bowing one’s head and being subtle...no, it is a word that implies prostration. Now I want you to get that picture...Gideon is in the camp...the very camp of the enemy...when he prostrates himself on the ground worshipping God.

Now let me ask you does that sound fearful? He completely exposed himself to the enemy...to cast aside any sort of defensive posture...to lay down flat in the middle of the camp...and to worship the Lord God is a wonderful gesture of his confidence in God’s promise.

Now how do we know that he did that in the camp? Look at the next part of the verse.

^{NIV} **Judges 7:15b**...He returned to the camp of Israel...

Do you see what I mean? If he had not yet returned to his own camp that means that he worshipped the Lord his God in the very presence of his enemies.

Verse 16 tells us that he expresses that confidence in what he says to the 300 when he returns to his camp.

^{NIV} Judges 7:15b...He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, "**Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp into your hands.**"

Gideon really and truly believed the promise of God at last.

Verse 16 tells us what happened next.

^{NIV} Judges 7:16...Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside.

Now what is funny about that is that the text doesn't say anything about weapons at all. Now I assume they have weapons but I know they have a trumpet in one hand and a clay pitcher in the other and when you think of a clay pitcher you should think of something like a strawberry jar...a terracotta or clay pot with a torch or oil lamp inside and the idea was that that they had a trumpet and a pitcher with a fire in it but that the Midianites could not see the fire inside the pitcher. I think what happened is that they either pulled the lamp from the pitcher and crashed the pitcher to the ground or simply crashed the pitcher to the ground and blew the trumpet. All 300 men did the same thing at the same time. That was their attack on the Midianites.

Now you have to admit...that that was a pretty strange attack. It is not the kind of thing you expect to rout 135,000 soldiers but that is what happened. Look at verse 17.

^{NIV} Judges 7:17..."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.'**" ¹⁹ Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the

edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. 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!**" ²¹ While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled. ²² When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath. ²³ Israelites from Naphtali, Asher and all Manasseh were called out, and they pursued the Midianites.

In other words, they broke the jars, blew the trumpets and the Midianites starting killing each other...that's what happened. The Midianites were so rattled they took off running in all directions during the middle watch...that is, at midnight. At midnight they are running through the darkness of the Israeli countryside trying like everything to get home.

And then it says Gideon sent messengers to the other tribes...to the men that had been previously dismissed...and they were called up to help Gideon and the others to give chase. Now I am not sure whether that was 10,000 or 31,700. I don't know how many people were called up but men from other tribes were called up to come and help once the Midianites were on the run.

Look at verse 24.

^{NIV} **Judges 7:24**..."Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "**Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters of the Jordan ahead of them as far as Beth Barah.**" So all the men of Ephraim were called out and they took the waters of the Jordan as far as Beth Barah. ²⁵ They also captured two of the Midianite leaders, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued the

Midianites and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, who was by the Jordan.

Gideon had the Midianites on the run. He got them, as President Bush says, up and running and then they called up reinforcements to cut them off. In particular, he called on the tribe of Ephraim because so many of the Midianites were trying to escape through their particular area of the country by crossing over the Jordan. Anyway, Gideon sent them word to go to the Jordan and to catch them as they try to cross over toward Midian.

It was a great rout. And then in chapter 8, we see the beginning of a dispute...a discontentment rising up among the Ephraimites. Look at chapter 8, verse 1.

^{NIV} **Judges 8:1** Now the Ephraimites asked Gideon, **"Why have you treated us like this? Why didn't you call us when you went to fight Midian?"** And they criticized him sharply. ² But he answered them, **"What have I accomplished compared to you? Aren't the gleanings of Ephraim's grapes better than the full grape harvest of Abiezer?"** ³ **God gave Oreb and Zeeb, the Midianite leaders, into your hands. What was I able to do compared to you?"** At this, their resentment against him subsided.

Here's what they were saying, **"Why didn't you let us participate?"**

And Gideon's response is, **"What did I do compared to you? You actually killed people. I broke a pitcher, pulled out a torch and blew a trumpet but you even killed the two principal leaders of the Midianites. Your harvests...your gleanings were better than mine...why are you complaining against me?"**

It was a wonderful act of humility and deference on the part of Gideon¹¹.

Now what we are going to see next week in the continuation of the same battle is that Gideon is going to grow a lot less amenable to disagreement and criticism. We are going to see Gideon cease to be deferential when people refuse to help him...he is going to cease being conciliatory...he is going to be quite harsh.

Now what's the lesson of all that...I think this is it.

If we are obedient...there is no such thing as being insignificant. If we obey God and follow Him and trust Him to use us...the notion of being insignificant will become irrelevant. And you know it is important to hear that from time to time.

I was visiting with a dear saintly woman this week and she had a number of doubts troubling her. She said to me, **"You know I don't matter anymore. I'm not accomplishing anything. My life doesn't count anymore."**

And you know none of those things were true. You know if we obey Him God can take the humblest sinner the most insignificant person and use them to advance His own honor and glory. Faithfulness is the thing that matters...enduring faithfulness.

When I was a boy, I had a Sunday school teacher named John Tatum.¹² Mr. Tatum was an amiable and gentle man, who faithfully fulfilled his duties week after week without complaint or grumbling. Looking back, I can imagine that must have been very difficult to do. We were a rowdy bunch of boys. Like the wild mustangs of the American West, we were proud, swift and untamable.

But Mr. Tatum kept on at his task. He blocked our way as we tried to crawl in and out of windows. We broke up scuffles, tolerated our fidgeting and put up with out incessant, empty-headed chatter. He put a lot of time and energy into his lessons in spite of our poor attention and our rude behavior. He even gave us candy.

Then one Sunday morning, Mr. Tatum was particularly subdued. Of course, we still crawled in and out of the windows and acted like wild injuns but to a boy we knew something was wrong. When he finally got us corralled, he began his lesson. At several points during the lesson, large tears tolled down Mr. Tatum's face. That was unusual, Mr. Tatum was generally unflappable...it was one of the requirements for teaching elementary boys. But we were not a very sensitive bunch. We never asked what was wrong and he never said.

On the way home from church, I asked my dad if he knew what was wrong with Mr. Tatum. He asked what I meant and I told him that Mr. Tatum seemed awfully sad in Sunday school. My dad seemed shocked.

"You mean Mr. Tatum was actually there this morning?" he asked.

"Yes he was. Why?"

"Because, Mr. Tatum and his wife lost their baby late last night. It was a baby they thought they-would never be able to have, a baby for whom they had waited a long time. You know the fact that he was there at all says a lot about how much he cares for you boys. I hope y'all didn't torment him"

I have never forgotten that moment. I have to admit that it did not immediately prevent me from crawling out the window or fidgeting but I did begin to listen with all the attention I could muster whenever Mr. Tatum spoke. I began to connect his concern for us with his weekly preparations and as I came to understand something of his sacrifice for us my affection for him grew as well.

And you see that is Gideon's story...an insignificant man...the least in his family...a cheap biscuit that God turned into an avalanche because he was available and because he was faithful¹³.

Oh, he wasn't perfect...we'll see that next week. He struggled with trusting God but here he was faithful and God used him mightily.

Are there any questions? Let's pray.

Let's pray.

¹ J. Cheryl Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges" in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* Exum, J. Cheryl. "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges" in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* Vol. 52 Number 2, July 1990, 416. She writes, "No character in the book receives more divine assurance than Gideon and no one displays more doubt. Gideon is, significantly, the only one to whom God speaks directly, though this privilege does not allay his faintheartedness."

² Andrew R. Fausset, *Judges* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 117. Fausset writes: "Gideon's own sense of powerlessness fitted him as a vessel to receive the Divine strength: Jehovah's might thus became his might (Isa. xl. 29—31). Jehovah's mission guaranteed his success against Midian: "Thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites; have not I sent thee?" These words removed his despair of the possibility of deliverance. Consciousness of the insignificance of his family and of his own personal weakness was now his remaining cause of fear: "Wherewith shall I save Israel?" The Lord meets this difficulty, as in the case of Moses (Exod. iiii.11, 12), with the reply, "Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man" —*i.e.*, as with a single blow (Numb. xiv. 15)."

³ John Marshall Lang & Thomas Kirk, *Studies in the Book of Judges*, (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Publishers, 1983), 96. "The Biblical narrative is more explicit. It styles the stranger, "An angel of the Lord," or, "The angel of the Lord." In the account of the interview he is called the Lord or Jehovah. It is to one of the Theophanies of the Old Testament that we are introduced; and these Theophanies cannot be set aside as legendary by those who believe that all Scripture is God-breathed. Who is this angel? He is the Great Presence in Israelite history. He appeared to the patriarchs. He appeared to Moses "in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush." He was the leader of the people when they left the house of bondage. Of the crime and consequences of disobedience to Him they were warned. He was the angel of God's face: the name of the Adorable was in Him: He represented God. Manoah and Gideon feared that, after having conversed with Him, they would die. They felt that they had seen God. And the words used concerning Him, whilst implying distinction from Jehovah, imply also a mysterious unity with Jehovah. Was He the Word who in the beginning was with God, and was God, and who, in the fullness of the time, was made flesh? So said the Christian fathers of the earlier centuries. So say many commentators and divines. Augustine wisely counseled that it is better not to "say positively which of the Divine Persons manifested Himself in this or that instance to patriarchs or prophets, except where some remarkable indications determine our conclusion very decisively."

⁴ Alberto J. Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 135. "The spring of Harod' or 'ēn hārōd, in Arabic is characterized by a strong jet of water, probably spasmodic: the verb hārād in fact means 'tremble', so that there is a play on words with v. 3a; today the area is fed by an artificial reservoir and an irrigation system."

⁵ Leon Wood, *Distressing Days of the Judges*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1975), 215 Wood writes: "The first group would thus show themselves more interested in readiness to meet the enemy — being always in a position permitting sight of an enemy that might bring attack — than in satisfying a personal need for water; the other group would show their interest in getting water as conveniently as possible - which full bending down of the body to the water level would accomplish. This meant that the first group would make better soldiers than the second. "

⁶ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Judges* in the BST Series edited by J.A. Moyter (Downer's Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 72. "But Gideon has grasped the principle, already noted in the case of Ehud, that God chooses 'what is weak in the world to shame the strong so that no human being might boast in the presence of God'. It is in obedience to that principle that he willingly accepts the derisory force of three hundred men as God's weapon, divides it again so that each man is now part of a group of only one hundred, and gives them a command which involves no military skill whatever, but simply an ability to blow a trumpet, break a jar, and shout. (So much for the supposed soldierly instincts of those who had lapped water.)"

⁷ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews...*Book V. Chapter 6. Paragraph 3.

⁸ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume 2...Joshua-2 Samuel*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 346. "As the tent is everything to a nomad, he might very naturally picture the cultivator of the soil as a man whose life is all spent in cultivating and baking bread. In this way bread would become almost involuntarily a symbol of the cultivator of the soil, whilst in his own tent he would see a symbol not only of his mode of

life, but of his freedom, greatness, and power. If we add to this, that the free pastoral tribes, particularly the Bedouins of Arabia, look down with pride not only upon the poor tillers of the soil, but even upon the inhabitants of towns, and that in Palestine, the land of wheat, none but the poorer classes feed upon barley bread, we have here all the elements out of which the dream of the Midianitish warrior was formed.”

⁹ Southern U.S. bread made with cornmeal but often without eggs or milk, shaped into ovals, then fried or baked.

¹⁰ Wilcock, 72. “Put yourself in the shoes of the two Israelite spies as they creep into the Midianite camp under cover of darkness. What do you see? Verse 12: the flickering fires of an army whose camp seems to stretch to infinity. What do you hear? Verse 13: a dream being discussed by two Midianite soldiers, who foresee the defeat of that entire host, in the dream-image of a tent knocked over by a mere bread-roll which comes tumbling against it.”

¹¹ Arthur E. Cundall, and Leon. Morris, *Judges & Ruth*. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), 115. “The answer of Gideon is an excellent illustration of the maxim that ‘a soft answer turneth away wrath’ (Pr. 15:1). No mention was made of his own prowess, or of his position at the head of a group of tribes which excluded Ephraim. Instead he conveyed the impression that his own contribution was insignificant in comparison to that of the Ephraimites, and that the operation of his own contingent (*the vintage of Abiezer*, 2) was a somewhat small-scale effort. Mollified by this flattery the Ephraimites calmed down, Gideon’s tactful action having averted a potentially dangerous situation.”

¹² West Side Baptist Church, W. Division in Arlington...circa 1958.

¹³ Fausset, 125-6. Of course, the abiding presence of the holy Spirit is what makes such things possible. Fausset states it beautifully.

“Tidings reach the church of spiritual revivals in all directions, through the outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit. Why should any remain barren, and fit only for the burning, when he might have, for the asking, grace given that he may become a tree of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to bloom in the heavenly paradise? You may be surrounded, like the dry fleece, with the dews of heaven descending through spiritual ordinances, as Bible readings, sermons, arid sacraments, and yet all the while remain unblessed in soul yourselves. Put in your claim for a share in God’s promise of the Holy Spirit,

Lord, I hear of showers of blessing
Thou art scattering full and free,
Showers the thirsty land refreshing—
Let some droppings fall on me,
Even me

Pass me not, O gracious Father,
Sinful though my heart may be
Thou might’st leave me, yet the rather

Let Thy mercy light on me,
Even me

Pass me not, O gracious Saviour.
Let me love and cling to Thee;
I am longing for Thy favour,
Whilst Thou'rt calling, O call me,
Even me

Pass me not, O mighty Spirit,
Thou canst make the blind to see,
Witnesses of Jesus' merit—
Speak the word of power to me,
Even me

Then, fall of grace yourself, you will diffuse the blessed dew to others. God uses weak instruments, like Gideon and his 300 men, to confound the mighty. Only, like him, be *“clothed with the Spirit of Jehovah.”* Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ. Appropriate the thanksgiving *“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robes of righteousness”* (Isa. lxi. 10). So shall you be the honored instrument of turning many to righteousness, and of wearing a crown of righteousness, which shall shine hereafter, not as the evanescent though brilliant dewdrop, but as the stars for ever and ever.”