

GIDEON'S ARMY

Jon Macon

More than 3,000 years ago, God sent an angel to Gideon, the son of an idol-worshiper of the tribe of Manasseh, and chose him to lead an army of Israel in battle against their oppressors, the Midianites and Amalekites. In Judges 6:14, the Lord said to Gideon, "*Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?*" Gideon replied, "Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And the Lord said unto him, *Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man*" (Judg 6:15-16). At this point, the outcome of the coming battle was already settled, and without doubt Israel would prevail over their enemies. The only question that remained was *how* God would accomplish this victory through His servant Gideon.

Gideon's original army

Judges 6:33-35 says, "Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; *and Abi-ezer was gathered after him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.*" The army began with those of Gideon's home region, and grew to include his own tribe, and then the neighboring tribes. From Judges 7:3, we learn that this original army consisted of 32,000 men. That number was dwarfed by the size of the army of their enemies, which consisted of 135,000 men that drew sword (Judg 8:10), yet God said it was much too large. "And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, *lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.* Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead" (Judg 7:2-3).

The final army of 300

Judges 7:3 informs us that twenty-two thousand of Gideon's original army departed, and only 10,000 soldiers remained. God's goal was to reduce the size of Gideon's army to a point where everyone would know without any doubt whatsoever that it was *God*, not man, who delivered Israel from their enemies. Therefore, an army of 10,000 was still far too large. So God then reduced Gideon's army to its final size of only 300 men. "And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say

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(continued)

unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. So he brought down the people unto the water: and the Lord said unto Gideon, Every one that laps of the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that bows down upon his knees to drink. *And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men:* but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the Lord said unto Gideon, *By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand:* and let all the other people go every man unto his place” (Judg 7:4-7).

Israel's victory

Gideon then “divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man’s hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do. When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon” (Judg 7:16-18). Judges 7:19-22 says, “So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands. 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. And the three hundred blew the trumpets, *and the Lord set every man’s sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host:* and the host fled to Bethshittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abelmeholah, unto Tabbath.” As their enemies fled, Israelites from other tribes joined Gideon’s men and completed the destruction (Judg 7:23-25). By using an army of 300 men to defeat a host more than four hundred times larger could only be an act of God. As righteous Jonathan later said, “*There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few*” (1 Sam 14:6). And just before he slew Goliath and led a slaughter of the Philistines, David said, “*The Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord’s*” (1 Sam 17:47). There are many other examples of God’s power taught in scripture, and we need to always remember Romans 8:31: “*What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*”