



Trust

GOD PROVIDED VICTORY AND BROUGHT HIMSELF
GLORY THROUGH GIDEON'S ARMY.

JUDGES 7:1-8,19-23

The expression, “Cinderella story,” is an analogy that originates from the children’s story of “Cinderella.” It refers to someone who has come from obscurity to surprisingly gain significant recognition or success. Most people enjoy a good Cinderella story. Someone like Abraham Lincoln, who came from a humble background to become president, is an example of a Cinderella story. There are many occasions in the Bible when God used unlikely people to do extraordinary things so that He would receive the glory.

 **Why do stories of people rising from humble circumstances to achieve success resonate so strongly with us?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JUDGES 7:1-12:15

Judges 7:1-8:21 recounts Gideon's victory over Midian. He began with thirty-two thousand men, but God reduced the number to three hundred. This was to ensure that Israel knew the victory was by God's power, not their own strength. In the aftermath of victory over Midian, the Israelites wanted to make Gideon king. But he refused, saying God would be their king (Judg. 8:22-23).

Though there was peace in Israel for forty years until Gideon died, Gideon himself led all of Israel to worship an idol in his hometown. When Gideon died the Israelites began worshipping the Baals again (8:24-32).

Judges 8:33-9:57 demonstrates how much Israel turned away from God. Though Gideon had refused an offer to become king, his son, Abimelech (meaning "my father is king"), maneuvered himself into a position that led the citizens of Shechem and Beth-millo to make him king. Abimelech had all his brothers killed, except for the youngest, Jotham, who escaped. Jotham pronounced a curse on Abimelech and his subjects. After three years, God dealt with their wickedness by causing a civil war to break out between them. The citizens of Shechem, who made Abimelech king, were slaughtered, and Abimelech perished when a woman dropped a millstone on his head.

Judges 10:1-5 mention two minor judges, Tola and Jair. After them, Jephthah was the next major judge to save Israel after Israel "abandoned the LORD" and began worshipping other gods. Jephthah led Israel to victory over the Ammonites and judged Israel for six years (10:6-12:7). After Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon judged Israel (12:8-15).

It is notable that after the Gideon narrative, instead of indicating "the land had peace" for a number of years (3:30; 5:31; 8:28), the remaining narratives conclude with the phrase, "judged Israel" (a number of) years (10:2-3; 12:8-9,11,13-14; 16:31). Israel may have experienced some stability, but there was no more rest.

 **As you read Judges 7:1-8,19-23, identify how Israel continued its downward spirals of unfaithfulness to the Lord.**

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

TOO MANY (JUDG. 7:1-3)

¹ Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the troops who were with him, got up early and camped beside the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them, below the hill of Moreh, in the valley. ² The LORD said to Gideon, “You have too many troops for me to hand the Midianites over to them, or else Israel might elevate themselves over me and say, ‘I saved myself.’” ³ Now announce to the troops, ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’” So twenty-two thousand of the troops turned back, but ten thousand remained.

VERSE 1

At the beginning of verse 1, the writer referred to Gideon as ●**Jerubbaal**. This refers to what transpired in Judges 6:25-32. God commanded Gideon to tear down the altar of Baal that belonged to his father along with the Asherah pole beside it. Gideon commissioned the aid of ten of his servants and did what the Lord told him to do, though he did it at night so that no one would know he was the one. The angry men of the city discovered Gideon was responsible for what they deemed as sacrilege. Consequently, they wanted to kill Gideon, but Joash, Gideon’s father, spoke up for him. When the men of the city stood down and dispersed, Joash called Gideon, “Jerubbaal,” meaning “let Baal contend.” Gideon’s action proved Baal was unable to defend his own honor much less himself.

Gideon was camped about five miles south of the Midianite army of one hundred twenty thousand men (Judg. 8:10) with only thirty-two thousand troops **beside the spring of Harod**. Ironically, *the stream of Harod* means “The Spring of Trembling.” This was an apt name for the spring, for according to verse 3 it describes the mental and physical state of the majority of Gideon’s troops as they anticipated the looming battle.

VERSES 2-3

Given the Midianite army outnumbered the Israelites by nearly four to one, Gideon received an instruction from God that must have been completely unexpected. The Lord told him he had **too many troops** for the Lord to give the Israelites a victory over the Midianites. Certainly, the Lord could do whatever He wanted to do.

The issue was not the Lord's ability but Israel's misplaced trust and lack of humility. The Lord knew that if He gave Israel the victory with their thirty-two thousand troops over Midian's one hundred twenty thousand troops, then Israel would boast and take credit for the amazing victory instead of recognizing that it was God who did it for them.

Therefore, the Lord instituted a two-pronged Israelite army reduction plan. The first stage was straightforward. God told Gideon to announce to his troops that whoever was *fearful and trembling* at the prospect of fighting the Midianites could leave. Gideon must have been shocked to see twenty-two thousand of his thirty-two thousand men abandon him. With only ten thousand men remaining, Gideon's army went from being outnumbered by almost four to one to being outnumbered by his enemies twelve to one.



In what ways might we try to do God's work by our might and for our glory?

The issue was not the Lord's ability but Israel's lack of humility.

STILL TOO MANY (JUDG. 7:4-8)

⁴ Then the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many troops. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. If I say to you, 'This one can go with you,' he can go. But if I say about anyone, 'This one cannot go with you,' he cannot go."⁵ So he brought the troops down to the water, and the LORD said to Gideon, "Separate everyone who laps water with his tongue like a dog. Do the same with everyone who kneels to drink."⁶ The number of those who lapped with their hands to their mouths was three hundred men, and all the rest of the troops knelt to drink water.⁷ The LORD said to Gideon, "I will deliver you with the three hundred men who lapped and hand the Midianites over to you. But everyone else is to go home."⁸ So Gideon sent all the Israelites to their tents but kept

the three hundred troops, who took the provisions and their rams' horns. The camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

VERSE 4

Gideon had lost nearly seventy percent of his army, yet with the best strategy his remaining ten thousand troops could have perhaps defeated the Midianites. It was for this reason the Lord had not finished downsizing Gideon's army. There had to be no doubt that a victory over the Midianites would be because God did it. So the Lord said to Gideon, ***There are still too many troops.*** It is also difficult to imagine that Gideon was perfectly calm when he received this word. God instructed Gideon to take his troops down to the spring where He would ***test them.*** Gideon needed to accept the Lord's assessment of each man. If the Lord said one could go with Gideon into battle, then that one could stay. But everyone the Lord said could not to go into battle would not be permitted to stay.

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father*

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. (See Psalm 47:8; Job 42:2.)

VERSES 5-7

Gideon obeyed the Lord and brought his troops to the water. God instructed him to separate the men into two groups based on how they drank from the spring. Everyone who lowered themselves and lapped the ***water with his tongue like a dog*** was put in one group. The ones who knelt, scooped the water up, and drank it from their cupped hands were to be separated into a second group. Of the ten thousand men who drank at the spring, only ***three hundred*** scooped up the water and drank it from cupped hands. The Lord told Gideon He would save Israel using these three hundred men.

Some Bible teachers have suggested that the first test was a test of courage and this second test was one of vigilance. However, the text provides no explanation. Such speculations can easily sidetrack one from the main point. The main thing and the plain thing is that the Lord downsized the army so that He would receive all of the glory for defeating Israel's enemies. The weaker Israelites would be forced to completely trust in the Lord if they were to defeat

the Midianites. The emphasis is on Israel's utter weakness and the Lord's absolute power. All of Israel needed to learn what Jonathan, Saul's son, would know years later when he went into battle vastly outnumbered, declaring, "Nothing can keep the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6).

VERSE 8

Gideon obeyed and *sent* everyone back *to their tents* except the three hundred men the Lord had chosen to stay. The three hundred left behind took the *provisions* and *rams' horns* from those who returned home. This insured every one of the three hundred men had everything they would need for what lay ahead of them.

The following verses indicate Gideon's growing fears made him reluctant to launch an attack against the Midianites. So the Lord instructed him to take his servant with him to spy on their enemy. God assured Gideon that he would then be "encouraged to attack the camp" (v. 11). Though the Midianites and Amalekites were "like a swarm of locusts" (v. 12), Gideon overheard Midianite men discussing a dream one of them had revealing that God would give Gideon victory over them. Gideon finally trusted the Lord when he heard the words of these Midianites.

The Lord recognized Gideon's human frailty. In His patience and kindness, He used the enemy to confirm what He had promised Gideon. Gideon then worshiped the Lord and returned to his camp, realizing that the Lord had already given him and his men victory over their enemy (v. 15). Worship is always a proper response to God's goodness.



When have you had to trust God despite not understanding what He was doing or asking?

JUST RIGHT (JUDG. 7:19-23)

¹⁹ **Gideon and the hundred men who were with him went to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch after the sentries had been stationed. They blew their rams' horns and broke the pitchers that were in their hands.** ²⁰ **The three companies blew their rams' horns and shattered their pitchers. They held their torches in their left hands and their rams'**

horns to blow in their right hands, and they shouted, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!”²¹ Each Israelite took his position around the camp, and the entire Midianite army began to run, and they cried out as they fled.²² When Gideon’s men blew their three hundred rams’ horns, the LORD caused the men in the whole army to turn on each other with their swords. They fled to Acacia House in the direction of Zererah as far as the border of Abel-meholah near Tabbath.²³ Then the men of Israel were called from Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh, and they pursued the Midianites.

VERSE 19

In verses 16-18, Gideon became the “valiant warrior” God had called him to be (6:12). He divided his men into three groups of one hundred in each company. He equipped each man with a rams’ horn in one hand and an empty pitcher with a torch inside of it in the other hand. They had dispersed themselves around the camp. When Gideon’s company blew their rams’ horns, the other companies were to do the same. Verse 19 indicates Gideon’s men went to *the outpost* of the enemy camp *at the beginning of the middle watch*, which was midnight. This was a good time because the guards leaving their posts would have been tired and their replacements were still getting themselves correctly situated. It was then *they blew their rams’ horns and broke the pitchers that were in their hands*.

VERSE 20

First, they blew their horns. Second, they smashed their jars. Third, they held up their lit torches that had been concealed in the jars. In a normal nighttime military maneuver, only someone at the front of a company would have been carrying a lit torch. Gideon’s three hundred men appeared to be three hundred companies surrounding the Midianites. Finally, they shouted, **A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!** Even though “sword” was probably metaphorical for “battle,” it is ironic they said *sword*, because it does not appear that any of them were carrying a sword.

VERSES 21-22

When the Midianites heard the horns blowing and the jars smashing and saw the torches, they thought they were surrounded by a large enemy. Pandemonium broke out as the terrified Midianites cried out as they attempted to escape. We must not forget

that the Lord had set the stage with the foreboding dream of defeat that apparently had been circulating throughout the Midianite camp (vv. 13-14).

There was so much chaos that the Lord caused all of the Midianites to begin attacking each other with their swords. The actual locations to which they fled is uncertain, but it makes sense that they fled east toward the Jordan so they could return to their desert homelands.

VERSE 23

After the Lord had won the battle for Israel, Gideon called upon men ***from Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh***, most likely those whom the Lord rejected for the assault on the Midianite camp (v. 8), to pursue the fleeing Midianites. It is not clear if God had given Gideon His blessing to call these new men, possibly from those rejected earlier, into the battle. It is possible that Gideon, caught up in the overwhelming triumph, called these men back into service despite God's directions.

God fulfilled His word and gave Israel and victory. He still stands ready to go into any battle with His people.

 **How should knowing that God acts in unpredictable ways impact how we live?**

BIBLE SKILL: *Respond emotionally to a passage from Scripture.*

Gideon had his doubts when God said He would deliver Israel through him. He also may have wondered why God so drastically reduced his army. Prayerfully consider times when you had questions about what God was doing. How do you tend to respond when God doesn't make sense in your life? What can you do to trust Him more fully?
