

Gideon's Faith is Tested

Judges 7:1-15

Judges 7:1-15 - *"Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley.*

² *And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' ³ Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.'" And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained.*

⁴ *But the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, that of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' the same shall not go." ⁵ So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink." ⁶ And the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. ⁷ Then the LORD said to Gideon, "By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place." ⁸ So the people took provisions and their trumpets in their hands. And he sent away all the rest of Israel, every man to his tent, and retained those three hundred men. Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.*

⁹ *It happened on the same night that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. ¹⁰ But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, ¹¹ and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who were in the camp. ¹² Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude.*

¹³ *And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, "I have had a dream: To my surprise, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed."*

¹⁴ *Then his companion answered and said, "This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp."*

¹⁵ *And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "Arise, for the LORD has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand."*

Background Notes

I would love to take all of you to Israel with me! We would go to the very area we just read about, and see the Hill of Moreh and the valley where the Midianites camped. Water still flows from Spring Harod at the foot of Mount Gilboa, and it's the same stream where Gideon tested his men. Every time we visit this area, I take our study tour folks to the stream and "test" them. As I read aloud from this passage in Judges 7, I ask them to try to pass the "water test" by lapping the water the same way Gideon's 300 faithful men lapped the water.

"So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink." And the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. Then the LORD said to Gideon, "By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place" (v5-7).

At this point some of you are thinking, "I don't quite understand how the position of the men as they lapped the water qualified or disqualified them as passing this test. It's not exactly easy to determine the precise position for drinking that got the men into the "300 Club," is it?" Well, if a man got down on all fours, put his face down to the water and drank with no concern for watching out for the enemy, he probably failed the test. But if a man got down on one knee and scooped up water with a cupped hand and lapped water from his hand, so he could still watch out for the enemy, then he passed the test. Now - how many of you would have passed the test?

Verse 12 says, *"Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude."* That's impossible, isn't it? You can't have that many camels in that valley: "innumerable as the sand on the seashore"! Is this an error in the Bible? No, it's a figure of speech known as *hyperbole*. Hyperbole is purposeful exaggeration for the purpose of emphasis. When I tell you, "I've told you a million times to read your Bible every day" - that's hyperbole! Don't accuse me of lying! I'm purposely exaggerating for emphasis. From time to time the Bible will use hyperbole, just as it is used here. It's an accepted figure of speech. It's not an error in the Bible!

Doctrinal Points

1. God tests the strength of a believer's faith.

The water test at Harod Spring was a test of Gideon's men, and it was a test for Gideon as well. It was a test of his faith. Judges 8:10 says that the Midianites and Amalakites numbered 135,000 soldiers! How many men did Gideon have at the start? Judges 7:3 indicates that he started off with 32,000 men, so Gideon was outnumbered more than 4 to 1.

In Isaiah 48:11 the Lord declares, *“I will not give my glory to another.”* So the Lord said, *“The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’”*

So the Lord said that anyone in Gideon’s army who was afraid could leave and go back home, or at least go behind the front lines. This was right in line with what the Law said in Deuteronomy 20:8 - *“The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, ‘What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart.’* Why? Because one scared soldier makes many scared soldiers! So 22,000 men left Gideon. They may have returned later when the rout of Midian began, but at this point they left. So now Gideon was left with only 10,000 men. The odds were now more than 13 to 1 against Gideon!

Gideon’s faith in God was really being tested - but the test wasn’t over yet! Now the Lord said to Gideon, *“The people are still too many...”* (v4). Then came the “water test,” and Gideon’s army was pared down to only 300 men. Talk about a test of faith! Now the odds were stacked 450 to 1 against Gideon - but not against God! Even **1 + God** is a **majority!**

In verse 7 the Lord assured Gideon of victory. *“Then the LORD said to Gideon, “By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place.”*

If you were in Gideon’s sandals would you have believed at this point? Would you have passed this test of faith? God tests the strength of a believer’s faith. Gideon passed the test. Would we have passed? Are we passing the tests of faith that God is giving us right now? Even when the odds are against us? God tests the strength of a believer’s faith. There are many applications here. God tests the strength of a believer’s faith.

2. God tolerates the weakness of a believer's faith.

In verses 9-11, the Lord said something like this to Gideon: *“Gideon, I’ve given the Midianites into your hand, but if you’re still afraid, go down to the Midianite camp and I’ll give you a sign.”* Do you see how God tolerated the weakness of Gideon’s faith? God had already told Gideon in no uncertain terms that He would deliver Midian into his hands - but He also said *“If you’re afraid, I’ll give you a sign.”*

We already know that Gideon didn’t have a bold faith. Gideon pulled down the altar to Baal at night rather than during the day because Gideon was afraid. And Gideon needed God to reassure him by giving him signs. Gideon had a genuine faith, but it was not a bold faith. However, God tolerates a believer’s weak faith.

We also know that Gideon had a humble faith. In the dream that the Midianite soldier related, Gideon was represented by a loaf of barley bread, the bread of the poor, tumbling into the camp and striking the tents of Midian. The Midianite didn’t see Gideon coming boldly into the enemy’s camp as a knight in shining armor! No, he was seen as a loaf of barley bread

tumbling into the camp. (Today that would be like saying, “I saw a ‘Twinkie’ rolling into the enemy camp!”) But this humble description was OK with Gideon. He didn’t mind being called a loaf of barley bread! In fact, as a result of

overhearing the dream, he worshiped the Lord! *“So when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, “Arise, for the LORD has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand.”* Worship before war!

There’s a spiritual principle here. Although Gideon had a genuine faith and humble faith, it was a weak faith. It was not a bold faith. However, God tolerated the weakness of Gideon’s faith. In fact, God said that He would strengthen Gideon’s faith (v11)! Isn’t this lesson encouraging for all of us? As long as our faith is genuine and humble, God tolerates our weak faith - and He will work with us to strengthen our faith.

Practical Application

Your actions speak louder than your words.

Why did the Lord use the “water test” at Harod Spring to test the faith of Gideon and his men? Answer: because actions speak louder than words! Notice that the men didn’t pass the test based on what they said, but based on what they did. They could talk a big and brave line all they wanted, but if they lapped the water in a leisurely fashion, they were out. Maybe I should have labeled this practical application, “Are you a leisure lapper?”

The point is, are you committed? Are you alert and on guard against the enemy’s attacks? Are you ready to move out and fight the good fight based on your actions, not just on your words? A lot of Christians can talk a good line. Some of them even preach that we should be more active and involved, but then where are they when it’s time for action? They’re all talk and no action!

Our actions speak louder than our words, particularly at times when our faith is tested. Are you committed to the Lord to the point of action, or is your life only talk and no action? Have you passed the “water test,” or are you just a leisure lapper?

Are you a member of the “300 Club”? Your actions speak louder than your words!