

Gideon's Victory Over the Midianites

Judges 7:16-25

Judges 7:16-25 - *"Then he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "Look at me and do likewise; watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp you shall do as I do: ¹⁸ When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and say, 'The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!'"*

¹⁹ So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just as they had posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that were in their hands. ²⁰ Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers—they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing—and they cried, "The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!" ²¹ And every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled. ²² When the three hundred blew the trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp; and the army fled to Beth Acacia,^[a] toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel Meholah, by Tabbath. ²³ And the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and pursued the Midianites.

²⁴ Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the mountains of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites, and seize from them the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan." Then all the men of Ephraim gathered together and seized the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan. ²⁵ And they captured two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued Midian and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side of the Jordan."

Background Notes

Israel had cried out to the Lord because of the oppression of the Midianites, and the Lord had called Gideon to be their leader. Gideon had passed the test of faith that the Lord had given him, and now it was time to defeat the Midianites in the strength of the Lord. The time had come for the battle!

Gideon divided his small army of 300 men into three companies of 100 men each, and he sent them out to surround the Midianite camp. Each man carried a trumpet, a torch, and an empty clay jar to cover a smoldering torch. What kinds of weapons are those? Torches, trumpets, clay jars? Why did they carry those items instead of swords and spears? Well, I'll give you two reasons:

1. They didn't have any weapons. The Midianites had camels and weapons, but Israel had very few weapons available.

2. God wanted to show His power for Israel by defeating the Midianites, totally apart from military weapons. Then Israel would know for sure that it was **God** who fought for them and defeated the enemy.

Furthermore, there are some great lessons here about spiritual warfare. We can learn these lessons from the way Gideon defeated the Midianites.

When Gideon and his men blew their trumpets, and the enemy saw the lights from 300 torches surrounding them, most likely they thought that a huge army was attacking them! In the world of ancient warfare, a commander with a number of troops under him would sound a trumpet to call his men into battle. So when Gideon and each one of his men blew a trumpet and held up a lighted torch (remember it was nighttime), the Midianites thought that each of the 300 men was a commander of many others, and they thought that a huge army was surrounding them. A trumpet and torch represented many men - or so they thought. That's the way God worked it out!

Notice that Gideon gave the signal at the beginning of the middle watch - that would be about ten o'clock at night (v19). So the Midianites who awakened at the trumpet blasts may have mistakenly thought the men who were going off guard duty and walking back to their tents were invading Israelis! Thus, in the confusion, the Midianites began to kill each other. Again, God was working it all out!

Doctrinal Points

1. Victory in spiritual warfare demands broken clay jars.

Gideon's victory over the Midianites is more than just a true record of events that took place many years ago. Many spiritual lessons for the Christian are seen in the way that these events took place, and the way they're recorded in the Word of God.

Follow the spiritual picture. The land of Canaan, which was the Land God promised to Israel, represents the "land of spiritual blessing" for the Christian that God has promised for the believer. God called Israel to defeat and remove all the enemy nations in the Promised Land, and He promised them that they would never have to suffer defeat in battle if they followed Him. But Israel failed to do remove the pagan peoples from the Land, and the enemies caused Israel to turn away from worshiping the Lord alone.

The book of Ephesians shows believers that the land of spiritual blessing for the Christian is also the land of spiritual battle (read Ephesians 1 and 6). We don't ever have to be defeated in spiritual battle if we put on the Lord's armor, but unfortunately we are defeated in spiritual warfare if we let the enemy of our souls continue to operate in our lives. All of this is pictured for us in the books of Joshua and Judges.

In Gideon's time, the pagan Midianites and the Amalekites (enemies that oppressed Israel in the Promised Land) represent the pleasures of the world and the strong desires of the flesh that oppress the Christian in the land of blessing.

Gideon's use of trumpets, torches, and clay jars represent the method of victory in spiritual warfare. Turn to 2 Corinthians 4:5-12: *"For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed - always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you."*

In 2 Corinthians 4 we see that believers have a treasure, but it is contained or hidden within "earthen vessels" - clay jars! What is the treasure? It is the life and light of Christ. The earthen vessels or clay jars are individual believers - our frail mortal bodies (v10-11). Just as the clay jars carried by Gideon's men had to be broken for the torches to shine out, so **our clay jars must be broken for the life and light of Christ to be seen in our lives.** They must be broken open.

Now remember that this is a picture! It doesn't mean we literally harm or injure our bodies. 2 Corinthians 4 teaches us that the "death to self" principle must be at work in our lives. *"...always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you"* (v10-12). It's the **"death to self" principle** that's at work here.

If we want the life and light of Christ to be seen in and through us, then the clay jars must be broken. The "death to self" principle must be at work in our lives. This principle is pictured in Gideon's victory over the Midianites. The clay jar had to be broken open so that the smoldering torch inside could flare up and shine out. Victory in spiritual warfare demands broken clay jars.

2. Victory in spiritual warfare demands clear-sounding trumpets.

In Gideon's victory over the Midianites, what do the trumpets represent? I believe that they represent the clear and certain testimony of believers. The trumpets or ram's horns of Gideon's men would be heard from miles around. The purpose of those trumpets was not to make music - it was to let the enemy know that "the sword of Lord and of Gideon" had arrived (v18)!

A principle of victory in spiritual warfare is to have a clear and distinct and consistent Christian testimony. Do you see how that's represented in the trumpets? As 1 Corinthians 14:8 says, *"For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?"* What is your Christian testimony like? Is it like a loud and clear trumpet sound - or is like a shaky note or a muted birdcall?

Maybe you don't even have a Christian testimony because you're not a Christian. If that's so, why not trust the Lord for your salvation and become a Christian right away? It's as simple as that. Trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior because He died on the cross as the Substitute for your sins. Commit your life to Him. That's how you become a Christian.

As Christians, let's have loud and clear testimonies - and let's make sure our lives are consistent with our testimonies! Victory in spiritual warfare demands clear-sounding trumpets!

Practical Application

Can you say, "Look at me, and do likewise"?

That's what Gideon said to his men: "*Look at me and do likewise; watch, and... you shall do as I do...*" (v17). The sign of a great leader is when he or she can say, "Look at me and do likewise."

Can you say that? Can you tell others to "look and me and do likewise"? Can you say, "Do as I do" or "Follow my example"? Or do you have to say, "Do as I say, but don't do as I do"?

There's a lot of application here, right? Parents - how about around your house? Can you say to your children, "Look at me, and do likewise"? That's a pretty convicting question, isn't it? What about controlling your temper, or talking about other people behind their backs?

And this doesn't apply only to parents. Can you say to your fellow-believer, perhaps the one sitting next to on Sunday mornings - "Look at me, and do likewise?" Can you say it to your neighbors, co-workers or fellow students?

It's a tough question for all of us, isn't it? Let's try to be more like Gideon at the time of battle, so that we can all say, "Look and me and do likewise"!