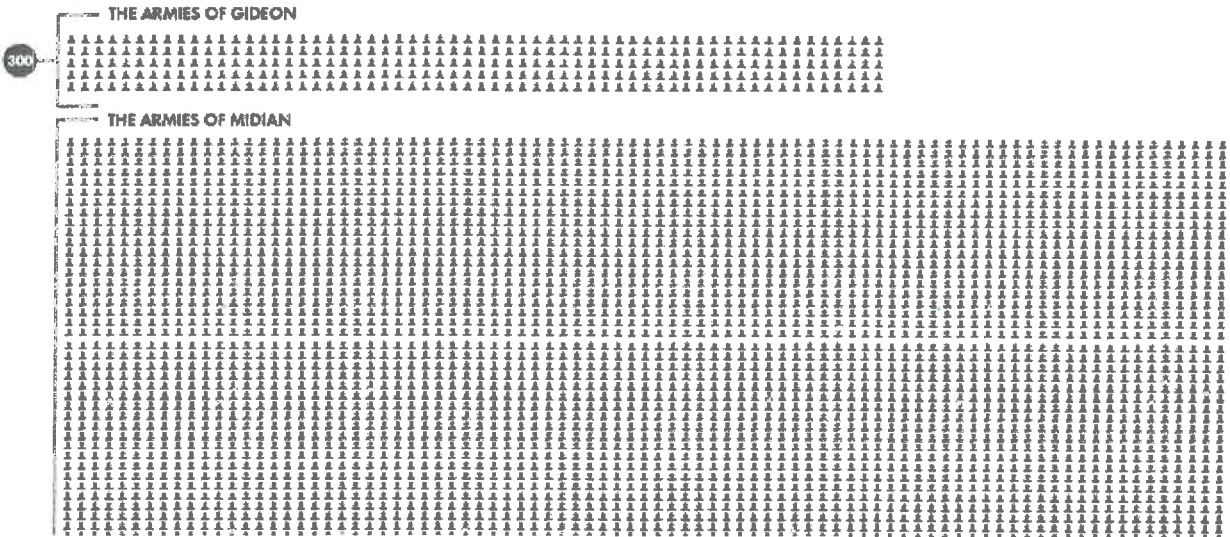


Falling from Faithfulness: The Book of Judges Gideon's 300

Intro: Gideon's Army Pictures

FOR THE GLORY OF THE LORD



Judges 7:1-8:21 ESV

7 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley.

²The Lord said to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’ ³ Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.’” Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained.

⁴ And the Lord said to Gideon, “The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ shall not go.” ⁵ So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, “Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink.” ⁶ And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. ⁷ And the Lord said to Gideon, “With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home.” ⁸ So the people took provisions in their hands, and their trumpets. And he sent all the rest of Israel every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men. And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

⁹ That same night the Lord said to him, “Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given 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 outposts of the armed men who were in the camp. ¹² And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance. ¹³ When Gideon came, behold, a man was telling a dream to his comrade. And he said, “Behold, I dreamed a dream, and behold, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of

Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell and turned it upside down, so that the tent lay flat.”¹⁴ And his comrade answered, “This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp.”

¹⁵ As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped. And he returned to the camp of Israel and said, “Arise, for the Lord has given the host of Midian into your hand.”¹⁶ And he divided the 300 men into three companies and put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars, with torches inside the jars.¹⁷ And he said to them, “Look at me, and do likewise. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do.”¹⁸ When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, ‘For the Lord and for Gideon.’”

¹⁹ So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch. And they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands.²⁰ Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!”²¹ Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled.²² When they blew the 300 trumpets, the Lord set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. And the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.²³ And the men of Israel were called out from Naphtali and from Asher and from all Manasseh, and they pursued after Midian.

²⁴ Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against the Midianites and capture the waters against them, as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan.” So all the men of Ephraim were called out, and they captured the waters as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan.²⁵ And they captured the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. Then they pursued Midian, and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon across the Jordan.

8 Then the men of Ephraim said to him, “What is this that you have done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against Midian?” And they accused him fiercely. ² And he said to them, “What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the grape harvest of Abiezer? ³ God has given into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. What have I been able to do in comparison with you?” Then their anger against him subsided when he said this.

⁴ And Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the 300 men who were with him, exhausted yet pursuing. ⁵ So he said to the men of Succoth, “Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.” ⁶ And the officials of Succoth said, “Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?” ⁷ So Gideon said, “Well then, when the Lord has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will flail your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers.” ⁸ And from there he went up to Penuel, and spoke to them in the same way, and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. ⁹ And he said to the men of Penuel, “When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.”

¹⁰ Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army, about 15,000 men, all who were left of all the army of the people of the East, for there had fallen 120,000 men who drew the sword. ¹¹ And Gideon went up by the way of the tent dwellers east of Nobah and Jogbehah and attacked the army, for the army felt secure. ¹² And Zebah and Zalmunna fled, and he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and he threw all the army into a panic.

¹³ Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres. ¹⁴ And he captured a young man of Succoth and questioned him. And he wrote down for him the officials and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven men. ¹⁵ And he came to the men of Succoth and said, “Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, ‘Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your men who are exhausted?’” ¹⁶ And he took the elders of the city, and he took thorns of the wilderness and briers and

with them taught the men of Succoth a lesson. ¹⁷ And he broke down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.

¹⁸ Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "Where are the men whom you killed at Tabor?" They answered, "As you are, so were they. Every one of them resembled the son of a king." ¹⁹ And he said, "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the Lord lives, if you had saved them alive, I would not kill you." ²⁰ So he said to Jether his firstborn, "Rise and kill them!" But the young man did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a young man. ²¹ Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise yourself and fall upon us, for as the man is, so is his strength." And Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and he took the crescent ornaments that were on the necks of their camels.

Main Idea: God is strong. Humans are weak. Therefore, depend on God; put your faith in Him, [admit your weakness and avail yourself of His strength], lean into God ...

Commentator

confirms their writing,

Dale Ralph Davis: "The weakness of Gideon and of Israel pervades chapters 6-8. One can trace this theme in Israel's total helplessness (6:2-6), in Gideon's lack of status and relative obscurity (6:15), in his fear of family and townspeople (6:27), in his need for additional assurance (6:36-40), in the radical reduction of his army (7:2-8), in his fear of the battle and need for additional encouragement (7:10-15), in his soft answer to Ephraim (8:1-3), in his troops being weary and unsupported by fellow Israelites (8:4-9), and perhaps in his refusal of kingship (8:22-23). Gideon is not the conventional hero. Instead he and Israel are presented in their weakness."

Weakness before the Battle: 7:1-18

Leading into the battle with Midian that will deliver the Israelites from the oppression they have been experiencing, we see the weakness of humanity in several aspects.

- We can see the weakness of Gideon and Israel ~~and their enemies~~ through a couple of episodes which divert from the main plot—the apostasy/deliverance cycle—as well as through the battle plan
- In order for the narrative to progress through the apostasy/deliverance cycle, we need only to hear of how God uses Gideon to bring to salvation to Israel through the defeat of the Midianite army. *yet the author diverts from this straightforward approach*
- Divergence #1 – v2-8
 - We see the reduction of Gideon’s Army from 30, 000 to 300
 - Why? God told Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’”
 - Humanity has a tendency to see ourselves as strong and capable and independent; God would have none of it
 - Even if Gideon defeated the Midianite army with 30, 000 they should have recognized God’s hand in it; but, God had to reduce it in order for humanity to see their own weakness and God’s strength
 - How prone we all are to see ourselves as strong!! ** illustration? child helping lift something*
- Divergence #2 – v9-18
 - Gideon’s weakness is revealed in his fearfulness and need for assurance *apparently continual*
 - God’s work to this point is not enough (visit from the Angel of the Lord, miracles of fire coming from rock and consuming the offering, God communicating with Gideon directly, God raising an army as promised, the miraculous fleece tests); Gideon is weak and needs re-assurance
 - God tells Gideon to spy on the enemy and indicates that what he will hear will encourage him
 - Gideon overhears his enemies talking about a dream and its interpretation which ultimately confirms what God had promised
 - Side note: Gideon is a “loaf of barley bread” = weakness (kids as crumbs)
- ~~Deliverance~~
 - ~~Humanity’s weakness is seen in the Midianites as a preposterous plan is developed; if it works, the Midianites must be weak~~
 - ~~No weapons, trumpets, jars, torches~~

- Blow trumpets and shout
- If Midian is defeated with such a plan, they are indeed weak. The fact that such a plan was even suggested indicates that God sees mankind as weak; Tribesmen stealing a kill from a pride of lions

Strength during the Battle: 7:19-25

Indeed, Midian is defeated and Israel delivered by the execution of this unbelievable plan. But the emphasis and outcome don't point to weakness in a vacuum; the weakness of Gideon, Israel, and Midian is particularly in light of the great strength of God as seen in the results of the battle. *depicted*

- God's strength is revealed through two things: human activity and the theological interpretation
- Human activity:
 1. At the darkest hour of night Gideon and the hundred men with him approached the enemy camp
 2. They blew their horns
 3. They smashed their jars
 4. They held high the torches that had been concealed in the jars
 5. They shouted at the tops of their voices, "A sword belonging to the LORD and to Gideon!"
 - Weak! Me playing basketball, or ringette, or lacrosse
 - Gideon's army – no swords yet scream "A sword belonging to the LORD and to Gideon!"
 - Midian's army – swords that they use on each other
 - The ensuing victory screams loudly: Yahweh is strong and mighty
- Theological interpretation
 - Verse 22: When they blew the 300 trumpets, the Lord set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. And the army fled ...
- The Lord won this victory. The Lord is strong!

Weakness after the Battle: 8:1-21

Having seen the strength of the Lord demonstrated in the battle for Israel's deliverance, we now return to the weakness of humanity as Gideon and Israel's moral and spiritual weaknesses are emphasized.

- Gideon's weakness is seen in his placating of his countrymen and in his punishing of his countrymen
- Placating his countrymen
 - Gideon calls upon Ephraimites to help in routing the Midianite army by sending messengers to them - They respond and help - They capture two Midianite leaders – Oreb and Zeeb - Ephraimites are angry with Gideon because they weren't called upon earlier
 - Instead of confronting the Ephraimites with, first, God's leading and working in the battle or even his own success, Gideon timidly placates them
 - No mention of God
 - Minimizes his own role which is a minimization of God's work
 - Employs flattery *-gleaning of grapes*
 - Highlights their victory with exaggeration
 - Again minimizes his personal role
 - Some see Gideon at his clever and diplomatic best; I don't think so
 - No mention of God. No reason to placate them.
 - Gideon is weak on the inside
 - Israel is also depicted as morally and spiritually weak as they could not see God's hand in this and their petty grievances were aired when there should have been praises and celebration.
- Punishing his countrymen
 - 4-9 Gideon demands help from his countrymen who refuse
 - 10-12 Gideon captures two "kings" of Midian; Zebah and Zalmunnah
 - 13-17 Gideon revenges himself on those who wouldn't help him
 - 18-21 Israel's deliverance is replaced with Gideon's personal vendetta *-food*

- Israel is depicted as morally and spiritually weak; they didn't help Gideon, they were afraid of Midianites
- Gideon is portrayed as morally and spiritually weak as Yahweh is absent from these actions, vengeance replaces national deliverance, Gideon replaces the Midianites as a brutal aggressor against Israel

Humanity is weak. God is strong.

Application:

What do we do with this message of our weakness and God's strength? And why did God communicate this message through the author of the book of Judges? Why did God see it as necessary to remind humanity of his strength and their weakness?

- 1) Because accepting the truth of our weakness is the path to strength in Christ!
 - a. **J. I. Packer, *Weakness is the Way*:** The truth, however, is that in many respects, and certainly in spiritual matters, we are all weak and inadequate, and we need to face it. Sin, which disrupts all relationships, has disabled us all across the board. We need to be aware of our limitations and to let this awareness working on us humility and self-distrust, and the realization of our helplessness on our own. Thus we may learn our need to depend on Christ, our Savior and Lord, at every turn of the road, to practice that dependence as one of the constant habits of our heart, and hereby to discover what Paul discovered before us: "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10)."
 - b. There is hope for strength if we recognize our weakness!
 - c. **Accept the reality of your situation; you are weak.**

2) The strength in Christ that comes out of accepting our weakness is realized as we embrace our limitations ... particularly our spiritual limitations.

→ countercultural
 • deny
 • hide
 • distract

EMBRACE → a. We are weak when it comes to our slavery to sin; we can't help ourselves.

EMBRACE → b. We are weak when it comes to our sanctification out of sin; we can't help ourselves.

EMBRACE → c. We are weak when it comes to our ultimate salvation from sin; we can't help ourselves.

d. **Embrace your limitations in regards to slavery to sin, sanctification out of sin, and salvation from sin.**

3) Accepting our weakness and embracing our resulting spiritual limitations are good for us if we avail ourselves ^{of} to one who is strong; J. I. Packer insists we must look to, love, and lean on Christ

a. If you've never been free from your slavery to sin, **look to Christ**—heaven's strong Saviour—for freedom from sin which comes out of forgiveness from sin.

b. As you long to grow in godliness, **love Christ** in and through all of the ways which the bible has instructed us: prayer, reading God's Word, fellowship, worship, service—the ordinary means of grace!

c. Anticipate your complete salvation from sin, **lean on Christ** knowing that he is strong enough to see you through despite your weakness.

d. Look to, love, and lean on Christ that you might find strength in him and from him.

In this passage
 God focuses on our
 weakness and his
 strength so that...

Accept the truth of your weakness. Embrace your spiritual limitations. Look to, love, and lean on Christ.