

Gideon Defeats the Midianites

Israel as a Tribal Confederation

Document

5.3

Midianites Oppress Israel (Judges 6 – NKJV)

Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years, and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which *are* in the mountains. So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it. So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD.

And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD because of the Midianites, that the LORD sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. Also I said to you, “I *am* the LORD your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell.” But you have not obeyed My voice.’”

Gideon Chosen by Yahweh

Now the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, “The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!”

Gideon said to Him, “O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.”

Then the LORD turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?”

So he said to Him, “O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.”

And the LORD said to him, “Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.”

The Sign of the Fleece

So Gideon said to God, “If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said— look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and *it is* dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.” And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.” And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground.

“The Original Three Hundred” (Judges 6-7 – NKJV)

Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

Then [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.

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.’ 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.**

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.”

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.” 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.

[Gideon and his servant go down to the Midianite camp to perform **reconnaissance**]

[Gideon] returned to the camp of Israel, and said, “Arise, for the LORD has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand.” 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. 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: 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!*’”

So Gideon and the hundred men who *were* with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the **middle watch**,¹ just as they had posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that *were* in their hands. 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!” And every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled. When the three hundred blew the trumpets, the LORD set every man’s sword against his companion throughout the whole camp; and the [Midianite] army fled...²

And the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and pursued the Midianites.... 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.

Gideon Rejects Kingship (Judges 8 – NKJV)

Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, “Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.”

But Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you.”

The Conclusion of the Book of Judges (Judges 21 – NKJV)

So the children of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family; they went out from there, every man to his inheritance.

In those days *there was* no king in Israel; everyone did *what was* right in his own eyes.³

¹ That is, the middle of the night

² In a night battle, it is difficult to tell friend from foe.

³ This exact phrase also appears in Judges 17.

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The Midianites Oppress Israel

What is the *problem* in this passage?

According to the author of the text, what did Israel do to get into this predicament?

Gideon Chosen by Yahweh

What is ironic about the way that the angel greets Gideon?

The Sign of the Fleece

If someone were to say, "I'm putting out a fleece," what would they mean?

The Original Three Hundred

Which tribes sent men to join Gideon's army?

What is problematic about the number of tribes participating?

How many men originally responded to Gideon's call for troops?

How many men were left with Gideon after they were put to the test?

How would you describe the men who were left with Gideon vs. those who had gone home? (What kinds of men were weeded out and which ones stayed?)

Conclusion

"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

Interpret this in light of what you just read. What does it mean to you?
