

## THE BARLEY LOAF - JUDGES 7:1-25

### STUDIES IN THE JUDGES #7

Lafayette College of Eastland, Pennsylvania was nationally recognized as the number 1 college in track and field in 1909. Coach Harold Bruce had assembled 46 of the most talented and conditioned track stars in our nation. So the major problem that the athletic director had that year was actually finding schools to compete with Lafayette. For the Pennsylvanian college was so dominant that most schools just didn't want to go through the humiliation of being stomped on by them. So you can imagine the pressure that the administrators felt when the school that had been scheduled to be the victim for homecoming backed out 3 weeks before the event. It was a lame excuse. Everyone knew that it was just a matter of avoiding humiliation. But what was Lafayette College to do now? Just 3 weeks before homecoming. The alumni would be streaming back to the school anticipating a glorious athletic victory. And now, it looked like they wouldn't even have a contest at all.

Well, in desperation, Coach Bruce called his old friend, Glen Warner, who was coaching at Carlyle Institute. Could Pop Warner possibly bring his team over to compete against Lafayette? Coach Bruce tried to hide his disappointment when Coach Warner told him that he really didn't have a track team at all - only 5 players on it. And Carlyle didn't have any money left in their track budget - not even enough to bring those 5 players over to Lafayette College. But Coach Bruce was really stuck. He had to have some opponent there to show off his squad for the Alumni. So he made an unusual concession.

If Coach Warner would bring his handful of runners over, Lafayette would pay all the expenses. Then, when the agreement was made, Coach Bruce announced it proudly to his school and even said to the student body that he hoped the Alumni would be pleased with the blowout that they would witness.

Well, that track-meet between Carlyle and Lafayette was indeed a blowout. But it wasn't quite as the Alumni or Coach Bruce had expected. The first event was the 1/2 mile. And to everyone's surprise, Carlyle won it. Then came the mile, and again, Carlyle was the winner. Next came the 2 mile, the high and low hurdles and the dashes - and in every race, Carlyle won. The field events were no different. The pole vault, the shotput, the high jump and the broad jump were all won by Carlyle. When the final score was tallied up, it was Carlyle Institute 71 points, Lafayette College 31 points. An overwhelming and crushing victory for the underdog which is still remembered as one of the greatest upsets in all of collegiate sports.

Carlyle didn't win that track meet because it was the larger team - no, the Carlyle team was only 1/9th the size of the Lafayette team. But that small Carlyle team had better quality than the whole Lafayette team - or I should say that one member of that Carlyle team was of better quality. He was just a freshman that year, unknown to the world of college athletics, but he would eventually be called by many the greatest athlete that our country has ever produced. Yes, on that spring day in 1909, a young man named Jim Thorpe almost single-handedly defeated the number 1 team in track and field in our nation.

History is filled with examples of great upsets. Underdogs overcoming extreme odds to be victorious in conflict. And we all are thrilled by these stories. Perhaps this is because each of us feels that we are an underdog, and we would like to think that we have a chance to win as well. But there are battles that we face in life where the odds are so stacked against us that there is absolutely no chance of a victory. Nothing short of a miracle will do. No amount of planning or talent or tactics will suffice. We need to realize that with God's help, no situation in life is hopeless. For God is able to bring victory in circumstances that would otherwise be completely hopeless.

We come this evening in our study of the judges to one of the greatest upsets in the military history of the human race. For Gideon faced a situation in life that was humanly impossible. He along with his family and people had been oppressed by the Midianites. For 7 years, these raiders had migrated in from the east during the harvest season and had ravaged the crops of the land, taking away the bounty for which Gideon and his neighbors had worked. Finally, in desperation, the Israelites had cried out to the Lord for help. The Lord had answered the prayers of his people by choosing a timid and hesitant man named Gideon to be the deliverer. The best army that Gideon could muster was only 32,000, just a quarter of the Midianite 135,000. Certainly, Gideon would have felt at this point that the situation was hopeless. How could he possibly fight against the Midianites who were experienced in fighting with a quarter of the man-power, untrained and ill-equipped? But to complicate the situation, God told Gideon that he had too many in his army. No, it was God's

plan for Gideon to defeat the Midianites with just 300 soldiers. 300 soldiers who didn't have a fighting weapon in their hands against 135,000 who were veterans in combat. For you mathematicians the odds were 450 to 1. Certainly, this must have seemed like an impossible situation to Gideon and his army. But God had already planned one of the great upsets and victories of all time.

We have seen in past weeks Gideon's preparation for this task of defeating the Midianites. We first saw God's call of Gideon to the position of being a judge, noting specifically the obstacles that Gideon had to overcome in his personal life in order to be in a position where he could be used of God. And then last time, we saw God's leading Gideon to remove the sin from his life so that the power of the Spirit could flow through him.

Now this week, we come to the battle itself. Let's read it together in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of Judges:

JDG 7:1 Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. <sup>2</sup> The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, <sup>3</sup> announce now to the people, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.' " So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

JDG 7:4 But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go."

JDG 7:5 So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those

who kneel down to drink." <sup>6</sup> Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

JDG 7:7 The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place." <sup>8</sup> So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.

Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley. <sup>9</sup> During that night the LORD said to Gideon, "Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. <sup>10</sup> If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah <sup>11</sup> and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp." So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp. <sup>12</sup> The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore.

JDG 7:13 Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. "I had a dream," he was saying. "A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed."

JDG 7:14 His friend responded, "This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands."

JDG 7:15 When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped God. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, "Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp into your hands." <sup>16</sup> Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside.

JDG 7:17 "Watch me," he told them. "Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. <sup>18</sup> When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon.' "

JDG 7:19 Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. <sup>20</sup> The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" <sup>21</sup> While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled.

JDG 7:22 When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath.

This battle is undoubtedly one of the most unusual battles in the entire O.T. I see in this battle 3 STEPS THAT GOD TAKES IN BRINGING VICTORY AND DELIVERANCE FOR HIS PEOPLE: I would address your attention to these 3 steps as we consider the battles that we face in life and the victory that God wants to give to each of us in these personal battles.

1. First, God reduces the size of his army so that there can be no question as to who was responsible for the victory. READ 7:2a - "The Lord said to Gideon, You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands." God goes on to say that the reason why he must reduce the size of the army is that if he doesn't, Israel will boast that her own bravery and strength has saved her.

When Gideon was called by God to lead the Israelites out from their oppression under the Midianites, he did what probably any of us would do.

Gideon sent out the word to the Israelites that he was mustering an army. And I am sure that Gideon was pleased when 32,000 men showed up to go to battle. Now 32,000 wasn't that many compared to the 135,000 that the Midianites had - only about a quarter of their amount. But 32,000 was quite a number of men considering the oppressive conditions of the Israelites at the time. So when Gideon presented his army to the Lord, I am sure that he had at least a small sense of satisfaction. There, Lord, I have done my part in raising an army - now you do your part in leading us to victory.

But God knew that there was a great danger in allowing Gideon's original army to go into battle. The danger was that they had just enough men to boast in a great victory. After all, winning a battle against 4 to 1 odds - we must be brave and courageous men who are skillful in fighting. God was not going to give Gideon the victory so the army could take all the credit. So God said to Gideon, "You have too many men Gideon. Tell everyone who is afraid to go home." When Gideon told anyone who was afraid to go home, 22,000 left. Two thirds of Gideon's army was depleted immediately. Now he only had 10,000 left - the odds were now about 13 to 1. But God said to Gideon, "You still have too many in your army."

So God directed Gideon to give another test to his soldiers. Gideon was to instruct them to go down to the water to drink - probably the spring of Harod because that is where they were camped. The indication is that they probably were quite thirsty. The men who rushed down to the water, falling on their knees to drink the water directly from the spring were separated from those

who knelt down and brought the water up to their mouths in their hands to drink. 9,700 who drank directly from the spring with their mouths were sent home, and the 300 who lapped up the water from their hands were retained. And those 300 men became the army of God that Gideon was to lead into battle against the Midianites.

Now, at first glance, this seems to be a very unusual way to muster an army for battle. Normally, a general will try to gather as large an army as possible to go into battle. The commonly accepted axiom of warfare is that there is strength in numbers. To intentionally cut an army down in size is not the usual pattern, is it? But upon closer examination, we can see the wisdom of God in directing Gideon in this manner.

The first cut is the most obvious in its intent. If a soldier is fearful, he can pass that spirit on to others. Especially in the type of warfare that Gideon was engaged. These were the days of hand to hand combat. The best fighting soldiers were put in the front. Generally speaking, two armies would engage and the tide would very quickly turn one way or the other. If one side sustained immediate losses, often a panic would set into the ranks and the soldiers would begin to run for safety. We can see the danger in having two thirds of the army scared to death starting the battle, not wanting to be there anyway. It would be easy for panic to set in and the army to run away from the enemy for safety. So it really makes sense to send away those who are fearful, even though it depletes the ranks, because they would not be the best fighting men anyway - they would only pad the numbers.

But the second cut is more difficult to understand at first. For the 10,000 who remained were all courageous, ready and willing to give their lives in battle for the freedom of their families and country. Why send willing soldiers home? Well, in addition to God's desire to just cut the numbers more drastically so that no miraculous element of the battle can be denied, there is a logic to the rationale that is used. When the freedom to get a drink is given, the soldiers who were rejected rush down to the water and almost throw themselves into the pool in their desire to find immediate satisfaction for their own needs. With their faces buried in the water drinking, they are oblivious to anything else that is going on around them. An enemy could sneak up unawares and they would never know. On the other hand, the 300 who pass the test kneel and bring the water up to their mouths in their hands. In their desire to satisfy their physical thirst, they still have not lost the perspective of what is going on around them. Having brought the water up to their mouths, they can still see if an enemy would be sneaking up from behind. And they are the ones chosen by God to go into battle.

There is an important application that we can make from God's test here. In the eyes of the world, quantity is often the most valued. Bigger is better. If the company is a fortune 500 company, it is the more important one. If the musical group fills stadiums for concerts, it is the most talented. And the press and populace love to get on the bandwagon of the bigger and the popular. But we all must realize that God never emphasizes quantity over quality. In God's eyes, quality is more important. We have to remember that God is infinite in his

being - what amount of quantity could impress an infinite God? And how many does God need with him to have enough power for victory? God is infinite in his power. He doesn't need any help. Rather, God being perfect in his being is looking for quality- individuals whose hearts are right before him. When God needed to save the world from destruction, he chose one righteous man named Noah to build an ark. When God wanted to call out a people for his namesake, he called an individual named Abraham for the task. And that nation which God called out was never the biggest or most impressive nation on the earth. Rather it was a small, seemingly insignificant group of people. And so it remains to this day. God is looking for individuals who will give their whole heart to Him. God is looking for people who will stand for what is right in the minority. And just as God used Gideon's 300 to miraculously defeat the 135,000 Midianites, testifying of his power and greatness, so God wants to use those who will stand firm for Him today to shine as lights in darkness for His glory and honor.

2. But let's move now to the second step that God takes. God encourages Gideon so that he would be prepared to lead the army into battle.

READ 7:9-11a - "During that night, the Lord said to Gideon, 'Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp.'"

I imagine Gideon needed this encouragement, don't you? He had been a very reluctant volunteer to lead God's army. But to Gideon's credit he had

accepted the challenge and had raised the best army that he could - 32,000 men. But then God had whittled his 32,000 down to 300. Don't you think that Gideon began to wonder about this whole plan? I mean he had been reluctant to resist the Midianites at all. He had received a miraculous sign from the angel of the Lord and then had asked the Lord for 2 additional signs. But now, to go against the mighty Midianites at 450 to 1 odds - I am sure that Gideon had doubts, aren't you?

Well, God had planned a word of encouragement for Gideon. So Gideon and Purah snuck down into the Midianite camp just in time to overhear a Midianite soldier tell his comrade about a dream that he had. In this dream a huge loaf of Barley bread rolled into camp knocking down a tent. But it was the interpretation of that dream that encouraged Gideon. "This barley loaf must be Gideon the son of Joash", the Midianite soldier said. "Certainly, God has given our whole camp into his hands."

In that moment Gideon's whole attitude was changed. The Bible says, "When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped God. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, Get up. the Lord has given the Midianite camp into your hands." 7:15

You see, the problem hadn't been that Gideon hadn't desired deliverance from the Midianites. Gideon, along with his fellow Israelites, had cried out to God for freedom from their oppression. But the problem was that Gideon hadn't felt adequate to do anything about the Midianites, and that he hadn't been in a position spiritually where he could do anything to help himself or his

fellow citizens. And that brought a sense of hopelessness and despair to his situation. He needed to be encouraged. God knew that and brought just the encouragement needed into his life.

One of the most precious ministries of the Lord to us is this ministry of encouragement. In fact, one of the names which is given to the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, in the bible is paraclete - encourager, one who is called alongside to help in time of need. And one of the ways that we discern the ministry of the H.S. in our lives is through the encouragement that we receive. True, the H.S. convicts of sin and brings guilt to our consciences when we do wrong. But when we confess our sins, the spirit then encourages our hearts. If we continue to be discouraged and guilt-ridden after confession of sins, we know that it is the work of the enemy not the Spirit of God. Satan is called the accuser of the brethren in the bible. That is one of his names. But the H.S. is called the encourager, the comforter. He is the one who brings encouragement into our lives. And that encouragement strengthens us for further service for the Lord. This is what happened in Gideon's life as God encouraged him, and the same will occur in our lives as well.

3. And now we are ready for the 3rd step. God defeated the Midianites in the most unusual way imaginable.

I am sure that the soldiers scratched their heads when Gideon announced that the weapons would be oil lamps, clay pitchers and trumpets. What about swords and shields and bows and arrows? No, we are not going to use any traditional military weapons for this battle, just oil lamps, clay pitchers and

trumpets.

How would you like to go into a battle with the odds stacked 450 to 1 against you without any fighting weapons in your hands? Well, that's how Gideon led his army into battle. But as the conflict unfolded, each soldier saw the wisdom of God's instruction.

Gideon's troops moved out at just about midnight. Verse 19 says that they moved in at the beginning of the middle watch, after most of the Midianites had fallen into a deep sleep and just after the changing of the guard, so there was more possibility of confusion. When the signal was given, all three hundred men blew their trumpets loudly. Then they broke their clay pitchers which had been shielding the illumination of the oil lamps. And then they all yelled as loud as they could, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon." Now to understand the significance of this, we must remember that in the traditional army setting of the O.T. times, there would be very few trumpeters per legion, just enough to signal the army to advance or retreat, and few lampholders per legion, just enough to illuminate the way. Obviously, the vast majority of the soldiers would be armed for battle. So when the Midianites awoke out of their deep sleep and heard the blast of 300 trumpets and the light of 300 lamps, they would naturally assume that there was a multitudinous army out there to require so many trumpeters and so many light-bearers. And then when they heard what they thought was a vast army identifying themselves as the Lord's and Gideon's army, well, in the darkness of the night, with the sleep still in their eyes, the Midianite soldiers quickly imagined that anyone they saw was the enemy, and

they began to fight and kill one another. In short order, there was complete panic in the camp, with the majority of Midianites being killed by a fellow soldier's sword, and the rest scampering away for their lives by running from the camp. And all this time, all Gideon and his soldiers needed to do, was watch the commotion from the safety of the hillsides. What a miraculous deliverance! How could anyone in Israel refuse to give credit and glory to God for the victory that day?

There are many battles that we face each day. Now these battles are not physical conflicts such as Gideon and his men faced, but they are battles nonetheless. There are wounds that are inflicted. There are casualties that are numbered. Some of these battles are fought in our homes. Some of these battles are fought at work. Some of these battles are fought at school. Some of these battles are even fought at church. And there are times when we face battles where we feel that victory is impossible. There are times when we lose hope. There are times when we feel that defeat is sure.

When we find ourselves in such a battle, we are right where God wants us to be. For there is no circumstance that can come into our lives apart from the Sovereign will of God, and there is no situation no matter how bad it might seem where God cannot bring ultimate good out of it. It might seem to be impossible to us; but with God nothing is impossible. When we find ourselves facing 450-1 odds:

\*we need to recognize that quality is more important to God than quantity. God wants us to trust in him with a pure heart. And God is desirous of

refining our character even more and producing the jewelry of the fruit of the H.S. in our lives. Quantity is unimportant because anybody or anything with God is a majority. It is quality that God is after - he wants us to be quality men and women who reflect his glorious character.

\*we need to find encouragement in the Lord. Greater than the enemy in an impossible situation is the discouragement that the enemy strikes into our hearts. For when we are filled with discouragement, we are defeated before the battle begins. We need to allow the Lord to encourage our hearts. He does this through his Word. He does this as we cast our cares upon him in prayer. He does this through our waiting upon him. He does this sometimes through a Christian friend. But we need to seek encouragement in the Lord and allow God to minister to us through the H.S.

\*we need to realize that God is probably going to answer our prayers for deliverance in some unique and unusual way. The reason why we feel that this situation is impossible is because we haven't seen the solution yet through God's eyes. But God has a plan. And that plan will work. We need to trust in the Lord, and allow him to lead in his way and in his time.