

Judges

Lesson 14

With Gideon's new name being used, he is called Jerubbaal. If you will remember, Jerubbaal means *let Baal contend against him*. Gideon's new name meant that he was going to lead an army against all the forces of Baal. To believers in Baal, Gideon was facing a god. To believers in the LORD, Gideon was facing a figment of man's imagination – not a god at all. Let Baal contend against Jerubbaal. First, Jerubbaal called the troops. He then commissioned the test. Now he culled the troops. Chapter 7, verse 1. *"Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley."* (7:1)

The day Gideon found the fleece dry on the ground, he and all his men journeyed toward the Valley of Jezreel and camped at the *"spring of Harod."*

The *"spring of Harod"* is near Mount Gilboa. *Harod* means *trembling*, probably because of the feeling of his men as they knew they were about to face the Midianites. The name *Harod* is only found in this verse; however, a variant of the name, *Harodites*, is found in 2nd Samuel 23:25. The spring sits about one and three-quarter miles southeast of the village of Jezreel. From the hill, Gideon could see the water of the spring. From the hill, Gideon and his men could see the enemy camped in the valley below. This same hill, by Mount Gilboa, will be used hundreds of years later by King Saul on the last day of his life. (1st Samuel 29:1)

The *"hill of Moreh in the valley"* sat north of Gideon's camp. Most commentators know this *hill of Moreh* by another name, *Little Hermon*. *Moreh* means *teacher*, and it was also called *the hill of the teacher*. It was the place where the Canaanite holy teaching was given. The village of Endor sat on the northern part of this hill. The *hill of Moreh* is a raised ridge that runs parallel to Mount Gilboa. Between the two is the *plain of Jezreel* or the low-lying area between the two mountains. This *plain of Jezreel*, being a low-lying area, is also a small valley in the larger valley.

For all of this to work correctly, Gideon's camp had to be situated on the northeast slope of Mount Gilboa, where the spring is located.

(i) He Sends the Fearful Home (7:2-3)

With the description of Gideon's camp presented, the LORD gives His instructions. As for Gideon, with just a word of inquiry, he sends the fearful home. Verse 2. *"The LORD said to Gideon, 'The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me.' Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.' So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained."* (7:2-3)

Now we know. When Gideon arrived at the camp, his army was thirty-two thousand strong. Gideon was to make one statement, *'Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.'* With that statement, twenty-two thousand fearful when home.

We must stop and look closely at the words *"let him return and depart from Mount Gilead."* These words have caused great consternation among many commentators. *Gilead* was the nickname of the half-tribe of Manasseh that lived on the east side of the Jordan River. In the beginning, Manasseh had one son named Machir. Machir had several sons, the best known was Gilead. The half-tribe who lived on the west side of the Jordan was known by the nickname *Machir*; those who lived on the east side were known by the nickname *Gilead*. However, because all the tribe of Manasseh descended from *Machir*, all were known by the nickname *Machir*.

In the same way, the largest section of Manasseh's tribe were descendants of Gilead. Descendants of Gilead lived on both sides of the Jordan River; therefore, in Gibeon's camp, there were Gileadites from the east and the west. The camp of Gideon was first and foremost the camp of a commander of Manasseh – Gideon. He and his tribal kin were supported by men from Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, but it was no less a camp of Manasseh in origin with Gideon at the lead. Therefore, the nickname of *Gilead* was fully appropriate for the camp under Gideon's command. As we have studied in the past, it was very common for geographical locations to have more than one name or nickname. The case is the same here. Gideon was camped on Mount Gilboa, but because it was his camp, the camp of the warriors of Manasseh, Gideon nicknamed it *Mount Gilead*. Thus, those who were *afraid and trembling* were to leave the camp of Gideon, the camp of *Mount Gilead*.

Ten thousand men were left. But that was still too many.

(ii) He Sends the Kneeler's Home (7:4)

Next for Gideon, he sends the kneeler's home. Verse 4. *"Then 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. Therefore it shall be that he of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go with you; but everyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go.'"* (7:4)

Gideon was able to send twenty-two thousand men home based simply on their feelings about the war. Now the LORD is going to have Gideon test the remaining ten thousand men based on their actions. As most of us know from hearing this story as young children, the LORD will have Gideon watch the men as they drink. We will see the selection of the lappers and the sending of the kneelers next.

(a) The Selection of the Lappers (7:5-6)

Here is the instruction to Gideon from the LORD for the selection of the lappers. Verse 5. *"So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, 'You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink.'"*⁶ *Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was 300 men; but all the rest of the people kneeled to drink water."* (7:5-6)

(b) The Sending of the Kneelers (7:7-8)

Here is the instruction to Gideon from the LORD for the sending of the kneelers. Verse 7. *"The LORD said to Gideon, 'I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands; so let all the other people go, each man to his home.'"*⁸ *So the 300 men took the people's provisions and their trumpets into their hands. And Gideon sent all the other men of Israel, each to his tent, but retained the 300 men; and the camp of Midian was below him in the valley."* (7:7-8)

An additional nine thousand seven hundred men were sent home that day. Three hundred remained with Gideon to face the thousands upon thousands of enemies in the valley. Soon we will learn that the number of Midianites and their allies in the valley was one hundred and twenty thousand men.

(4) Gideon's Campaign

(a) Gideon Sees the Camp (7:9-12)

Gideon's campaign against the oppressors began on the very night that the Israelites set camp at the springs of Harod on the slope of Mount Gilboa. Gideon could surely see the light of the fires of the camp of the oppressors in the valley. The LORD knew the heart and mind of Gideon. He knew that Gideon needed a little help mustering the courage to take his three hundred men into battle against the thousands and thousands camped across the valley. Here we hear what the LORD said to Gideon that night and what Gideon did. Verse 9. *"Now the same night it came about that the LORD said to him, 'Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands.'"*¹⁰ *But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant to the camp, "*¹¹ *and you will hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp."* So he went with Purah his servant down to the outposts of the

army that was in the camp.¹² Now the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the sons of the east were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore.” (7:9-12)

The name *Purah* means *branch*. The Hebrew word for *servant* in this passage is the word for *boy*, but in this case, it means *armor-bearer*. As the armor-bearer, Gideon could trust Purah. No one at the camp was probably closer to Gideon than Purah. He could be trusted with Gideon’s life and his secrets. He could also be trusted as a second witness to what the LORD wanted Gideon to hear down in the oppressor’s camp.

(b) Gideon Hears a Conversation (7:13-14)

Near the camp, Gideon hears a conversation, the one the LORD wanted Gideon to hear. Verse 13. *“When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. And he said, ‘Behold, I had a dream; a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat.’”*¹⁴ His friend replied, *“This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand.”* (7:13-14)

As we have read, the conversation was between two men in the oppressor’s camp. One was relaying a dream to the other. The other man interpreted the dream as referring to Gideon. He also stated that *“God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand.”* The LORD even speaks through the mouths of the heathen. Who told the interpreter friend of the dream about Gideon? Did the Midianites know that Gideon was just across the valley? It does not matter how the interpreter friend knew Gideon’s name. The important point is he knew Gideon’s name and spoke it in the earshot of Gideon. It was the LORD’s divine moment that would give Gideon the courage to carry on. Notice also the friend announces that their demise will be because of the *“sword of Gideon.”* We will hear that again later in the story.

(c) Gideon Prepares for Conflict

(i) First by Worship (7:15a)

There, near the camp of the Midianites, Gideon was encouraged. Gideon prepares for conflict, first by worship. Verse 15a. *“When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship.”* (7:15a)

Right there at the edge of the Midianite camp, in the earshot of the two enemies whom the LORD had used to encourage Gideon, Gideon *“bowed in worship.”* He did not stand to his feet, nor did he raise his hands, neither did he jump around in revelry, nor was he relying on his emotional feelings in his worship. What did he do? He bowed in worship just as all who worship the LORD should do. Every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is LORD. Gideon knew how to worship correctly, by bowing his knee.

(ii) Second by Encouragement (7:15b)

Gideon then prepares for conflict, second by encouragement. Verse 15b. *“He returned to the camp of Israel and said, ‘Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands.’”* (7:15b)

“Arise,” Gideon said to his three hundred men. It is a word of excitement. *“Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands.”* It is a statement of promise from the LORD through the mouth of Gideon.

(iii) Third by Planning (7:16-18)

Then Gideon prepares for conflict, third by planning. Verse 16. *“He divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers.”*¹⁷ He said to them, *“Look at me and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do.”*

¹⁸ *When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp and say, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’”* (7:16-18)

Gideon divided his three hundred men into three groups of one hundred men each and prepared them with their weapons – trumpets, pitchers, torches. The instruction was to follow Gideon's lead. The battle cry was *"For the LORD and for Gideon."*