

GIDEON'S BRAVE THREE HUNDRED

– JANUARY 24. – JUDGES 7:1-8,16-23. –

A LITTLE ARMY TOO LARGE – "THINE BE THE GLORY" – COWARDS OFF FOR HOME – COWARDS' SPRING – STILL TOO MANY – WHY THE LAPPERS WERE CHOSEN – "DO AS I DO" – PITCHER, LAMP, TRUMPET – JEHOVAH AND GIDEON – THE VICTORY – THE INCIDENT A PARABLE – ITS MEANING.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts." – ZECHARIAH 4:6.

TODAY'S Study reminds of the victory of the Spartan Three Hundred over the Persian hosts, except that in this case the battle depended, not upon human bravery, but upon the Lord's blessing. Our last Study showed us Gideon, encouraged by the Lord's promise of victory, sending messengers to the various tribes in Israel. Today's Study shows the resultant army of 32,000 with Gideon at the foot of Mount Gilboa, at Harod Spring – a little lake which drains off eastward to the Jordan. On the farther side of the lake were the Midianites, numbering about 135,000. An invading host, they had for some time been pillaging the Israelites unmolestedly; but now they learned that Gideon's army was gathering; and they assembled themselves to crush it.

While Gideon was feeling that his army was far too small for such a battle – one to four – the Lord directed him to the contrary – that the army was too large, and that there would be danger that the victory He purposed should come might not be appreciated as being from the Lord, but be thought to indicate the dexterity of Israel's warriors. Accordingly, by Divine direction, Gideon gave word to his army of 32,000 that as many of them as were fearful

and preferred to return home might do so. Many were fearful – 22,000. The name of the spring, Harod, signifies coward; and it has been assumed that the name was given it because of the fear manifested by the 22,000 who went home.

Surely the faith of Gideon was tried as his little army melted to 10,000 men! But the Lord said to him, There are yet too many. Cause the host to go down to the spring to drink; and discern between those who drink directly from the pool, kneeling down and putting their mouths into the water and sucking it up, and those who, bending over, lap from their hands as a dog laps with his tongue.

There were Three Hundred of this latter class left by this test; and the Lord declared these to be the proper ones to especially win the victory. The remaining 9,700, however, would later join in the pursuit of the enemy.

The custom of lapping water with the hand is still common with the people of Palestine – shepherds, etc. They became very expert at it. Symbolically, this act would seem to signify alertness and obedience. An ox drinks by putting his mouth into the water and sucking it and, when thirsty, gives his entire attention to the sucking of the water, refusing to pay any attention to the commands of his owner, and even resisting the use of the rod upon his flanks. The dog, on the contrary, while lapping the water with his tongue, is all alert, with his eyes watching in every direction, seeing everything about him, and ready to quit the water at any moment in pursuit of obedience to duty.

If water here, as elsewhere in the Bible, be understood to represent the Truth, these two companies of Gideon's army would represent two classes who love and appreciate the Truth. Both classes drink of the water of Truth, but the one class more for their own satisfaction. The other class, watchful, attentive, drink according to their needs, and do not neglect alertness in the

Master's service, keeping eyes and ears open for the guidance of Divine providence at all times. This latter, wiser class are represented [R5607 : page 10] by the Three Hundred who were with Gideon, Gideon himself representing Jesus, the Captain of our Salvation.

THE VICTORY AT ARMAGEDDON

Armies in olden times evidently did not keep so strict a watch as do modern armies. At all events, Gideon and a trusted companion were able to penetrate in the darkness of the night amongst the tents of the Midianites. Listening, they heard one relate his dream of how a barley loaf rolled down a hill and did havoc. Another offered the interpretation that this was Gideon and his small army, which was likely to be their undoing. The incident shows that the Midianites were fearful, apprehensive. Gideon was confident; his faith was strengthened by this little experience which the Lord permitted him to have. [R5607 : page 11]

About midnight, shortly after the hour of the changing of the guards amongst the Midianites, was the time appointed for Gideon's attack. The method of warfare was novel. The Three Hundred were divided into three companies, and spread out over a considerable space near the Midianites. In addition to their usual armor, sword, etc., Gideon and his Three Hundred had new weapons. Each in his left hand had a pitcher of earthenware, each pitcher had in it a lamp; and each soldier had in his other hand a ram's horn trumpet. The instructions to the three separated bands were that those who were immediately with Gideon should do as he did; and that the other bands, hearing, should imitate, breaking the front of their pitchers to let the light shine out ahead, shouting aloud, "Jehovah and Gideon," and blowing in the rams' horns.

The Midianites, waking out of sleep, beholding the flashing lights, hearing the clash of the pottery like the sound of armor, hearing the shouting of voices and the blowing of trumpets,

imagined themselves being surrounded by a great host; and half-dazed, they fled. They fought each other, mistaking each other for foes. Gideon and his Three Hundred pursued and were soon in the fight, assisted by the remaining 9,700. The victory was a great one. The Lord was recognized to be the Deliverer; and Gideon, His servant, was honored accordingly.

SOME LESSONS FOR TODAY

Referring to Old Testament matters the Apostle declares, "These things were written aforetime for our instruction." (Romans 15:4.) In addition to the lessons learned at that time the Lord, through some of these experiences of the past, gives certain spiritual lessons to Spiritual Israel. Gideon's call resembles the Gospel Call for volunteers on the side of righteousness – of right against wrong, truth against error.

Many in the world hear the Message, have sympathy with it and respond, purposing to become soldiers of Christ; but before they are fully accepted, the voice of Jesus calls to them, saying, Sit down and count the cost; it is better not to put your hand to the plow and become a servant of the Lord than afterward to look back and wish that you had not become one.

The sight of the enemy, the "fear of death" (Hebrews 2:15), causes them to walk not with the Master, because it is too much. When they first responded to the Call, they thought of the glory and honor, but overlooked the fact that these could be obtained only at the cost of hardship and endurance. These cowards who turn back, and never really take the vow of consecration, are perhaps no worse off than if they had never responded. But they will not share in the great victory – the laurels will not be theirs; the crown of life will not be their portion.

Then comes the second test – that of obedience and loyalty. One class of the Lord's people, like the faithful dog, put obedience

to the Master's voice first, alert to do His will. Another portion of the Lord's consecrated people heed less the Master's voice, and even the rod; and being less alert to the service of the Lord, they are less used of Him.

Compared to the world, the most alert ones are but as very few. It is those of the Lord's people who are alert that He chooses and grants the greatest opportunities for service. These are the ones most willing to break the earthen vessel – to use their present earthly lives in the service of the Lord – that the light of Truth may shine out, and that the Cause of Truth may have a victory. These zealous ones are most faithful in blowing upon the trumpet, representative of God's Word. These have the blessed opportunity for letting their light shine. Their zeal entitles them to special privileges and opportunities.

The victory of the Lord is attained by the Antitypical Gideon and His little bank of faithful followers, "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." The Lord's Spirit is represented by the light of the lamp shining from the broken vessel. The broken vessels of Gideon's host represent how the Lord's people present their bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, in His service – in letting the light shine out – in fighting a good fight against the hosts of sin.

We are doubtless near the time when the great victory, the antitype of Gideon's, will be accomplished, when the hosts of sin, the powers of evil, will fall upon one another for their mutual destruction. The present war amongst the nations of Europe is the beginning of this, but not its end. According to the Bible, the climax will be a temporary reign of anarchy, which will fully prepare the world for Messiah's glorious Reign of Righteousness.

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