**Gideon Defeats the Midianites**

In Numbers chapter 16, Korah, Dathan and Abiram who were leaders of Israelite clans challenged the leadership of Aaron and Moses. In the ensuing confrontation, Moses called on God to choose who was holy in His sight. Moses told the people that if the punishment of Korah and his followers was something new and unnatural, then it would be a sign that it was from God. God did the unnatural, causing the ground to swallow up all 250 men who opposed Moses along with their families. In our study of Judges chapter 7, we see God again doing something unnatural as He called Gideon to lead the Israelites.

At the close of chapter Judges 6, Gideon summoned an army from several tribes of Israel. In verse 3 of chapter 7 we learn that there were 32,000 men who responded to Gideon’s call. They were camped near the Jordan River at Mt. Gilead. The enemy army that was assembled from Midianites, Amalekites and others was close by in the Valley of Jezreel. God told Gideon that he had so many men in his army that Israel might boast that they had defeated the Midianites in their own strength. God told Gideon to release from duty any man who was too afraid to fight and 22,000 men left (see Deut. 20:8). God told Gideon that there were still too many men so he ordered Gideon to take the men down to the water and choose only the men who drank by lifting the water in cupped hands rather than lying down to drink like an animal and only 300 men did so. Some writers speculate that these were the most alert soldiers who would keep their heads up to watch for danger. God told Gideon that with the small force of 300 men He would give the Midianites into their hands. Gideon let all the other men leave but retained their provisions including trumpets.

Next God sent Gideon down into the valley to observe the enemy camp. Their army was prolific, described as being as thick as locusts with camels beyond counting. Gideon overheard one of the soldiers describing to a friend a dream that he had. In his dream, a round loaf of barley came tumbling into the Midianite camp, overturning a tent. The friend responded that the dream symbolized Gideon’s sword and that God would give the Midianite army into Israel’s hands. Note that barley is the least desirable grain used for bread, confirming that Gideon was the weakest of the weak yet God would still use him to defeat the Midianites.

Encouraged by hearing of the dream, Gideon returned to the camp to rally his small army, telling them that God had given the Midianites into their hands. He supplied each of the men with a trumpet and a jar in which to conceal a lantern. Normally trumpets would only be carried by a small number of men but the vast reduction to 300 insured that each man would have a trumpet which was critical to the success of the battle plan. When they reached the enemy camp, the trumpets were sounded and the lanterns exposed to make it appear that a great army was attacking. In the confusion, the enemy soldiers attacked one another. Gideon and his army pursued them, killing their 2 of their leaders. The enemy army which had numbered 135,000 (8:10) was nearly wiped out, only 15,000 remained alive.

In chapter 6, Gideon had tested God twice by asking for a sign that He would save Israel from the Midianites. In chapter 7, God turned the tables on Gideon by testing him twice. Gideon had an army of 32,000 to fight against a Midianite army of 135,000 but God reduced that number to a mere 10,000 then he culled the number down to 300, a miniscule force with which to go into battle. It was a test of Gideon’s faith in Him and Gideon passed the test. God did the unnatural by using a small force to defeat an army 450 times its size. Recently Pastor Steve prayed that this year we would witness something unexplainable in the human experience, something that could only be explained as a miraculous act of God. Some might see this as a test of God but I think his motive is a desire to see God at work in the lives of His people. While Gideon’s test was to buoy his faith, seeing God do the unexplainable can: 1. Lead the lost to Jesus as they see something happen they cannot explain. 2. Show God’s glory which we can simply celebrate. and 3. Give confirmation that we are acting within God’s will. In Isaiah 43:19 God said that He was doing a new thing. He was referring to the coming of Jesus to make a new way for us by using Him as a sacrifice once and for all.