

The Army That Was Too BIG

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Gideon may have been frightened when God commanded him to lead the Israelite army against the Midianites, but he was a man of his word. Once God had done the two small miracles Gideon asked for—making a sheep's fleece stay dry while the floor it was laying on got wet, then making it wet while the floor stayed dry—he gathered his men and headed out to do battle. But he probably started to have second thoughts when he learned God's battle plan! This story comes from Judges 7.

Once Gideon was convinced that God would be with him,
he woke up the army of Israel and led them out
to battle the army of Midian.
There were 32,000 men in the army of Israel
and Gideon felt good about their chances of victory.

But when the Israelites reached the spring of Harod,
not too far from the Midian camp in the Valley of Moreh,
God called Gideon aside and spoke to him.
"You have too many men, Gideon," the Lord told him.
"If I let them all fight, they'll claim that
they beat the Midianites by their own strength.
So I want you to tell them that
any man who is afraid of what lies ahead
can leave and go home,
that you will not be angry with them."

That seemed fair to Gideon. After all, they had so many warriors
that a few less probably wouldn't make a difference.

So Gideon did as God said...
and 22,000 men got up and left!

Gideon was shocked
but at least he had 10,000 fighters left.
The army of Israel was still a force to be reckoned with.

But then God said,
"Gideon, you STILL have too many men!
But don't worry. If you bring them down to the spring,
I will sort them out for you."

So Gideon did as God said...
and when the Israelites got to the stream, God said,
"I want you to divide the men into two groups.

When they walk through the spring,
 some will kneel down in the water to take a drink
 but others will just scoop up water in one hand
 and lap it up like dogs as they keep walking.
Put the 'kneelers' in one group and the 'lappers' in the other."

So Gideon did as God said...
 and only 300 men lapped up the water as they walked.
And God said, "Send all the other men back home.
 I will use these 300 men to beat the Midianites."
Gideon collected all the rams' horns and food
 from the thousands who were going home
 and kept the 300 men with him.

But now Gideon was really scared. There were SO many Midianites,
 as many men and camels as grains of sand on the seashore.
 He was sure they were going to die!

God knew that Gideon was scared, so He told him,
 "Tonight I want you and your servant
 to sneak down to the Midianite camp and just listen to them.
 It'll make you feel much better."

So Gideon did as God said...
 and there, in the dark,
 he heard a soldier telling his friend about a dream he had,
 a dream where a big loaf of bread crushed the Midianite tents.

And his friend said, "That can only mean one thing.
 God is going to let Gideon from Israel destroy us all!"

That's when Gideon realized that
 God was really going to let them win!
So he thanked God, rushed back to the camp, and shouted,
 "Get up, everybody! God is giving us victory over our enemies!"
Then he divided the men into three groups.
 He gave each man a ram's horn and a jar with a torch in it,
 and told them to do whatever they saw him do.

Gideon took one of the groups with him
 and sent the other two groups to surround the Midianite camp right then,
 in the middle of the night.
Then his group blew their horns, broke their jars and waved the torches,
 and yelled, "A sword for the Lord and Gideon!"
 And all the men in the other groups did the same.

The Midianites panicked! They were so terrified
that they started killing each other in the dark,
and the ones who survived started running away.
Gideon's men never even had to fight!

Then Gideon sent messengers to all the men he had sent home before
and asked them to join him in chasing down the enemy.
So they all did, and the Midianites lost so many men—
the Bible says they lost more than 120,000 that night—
so many men that they couldn't control Israel anymore.
God had weakened the Midianites so much
that it was just a matter of time
before Gideon and the Israelites
broke free from their power for good.

There is an old saying that
God can make one man stronger than an entire army.
So I guess He gave Gideon 300 men
just because Gideon was so scared...

And because Gideon did as God said.