

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

"Reduced for Battle"
Judges 7:1-25

Introduction

1. There was a problem in Israel. The nation had slipped into sin and rebellion against God. The Lord, therefore, had delivered them into the hands of the Midianites and certain other enemies (6:1, 3).

2. But, as is true of God's promise, He raised up a judge to deliver them from the enemy (2:16). The man selected of the Lord at this time was Gideon (6:11). The call to Gideon was confirmed and reconfirmed (6:12, 14, 16, 25-28, 36-40). There was no reasonable doubt about the man God had chosen as His deliverer.

3. Now the battle with the Midianites was about to take place. The issue would be settled: deliverance or slavery. Here is the thrilling account:

1. The PREPARATION for the battle vv. 1-6.

The geographical location for this whole event is given in the text (v. 1). It is all in the plain of Esdraelon near the slopes of Mt. Gilboa. The area is well-known today and suitable for battle. Here God gave Gideon some unusual words of instruction for battle. The details are provided:

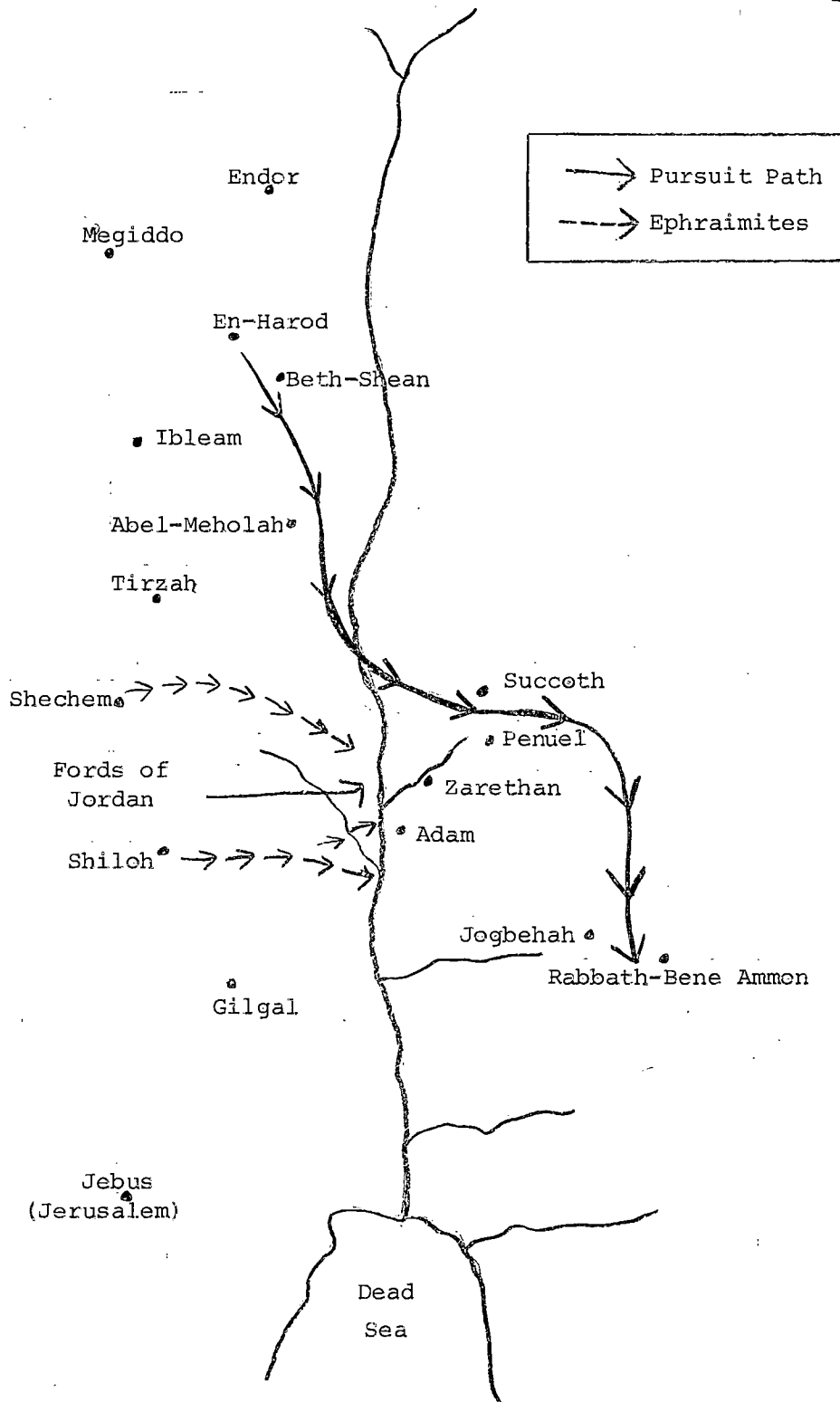
a. The direction to reduce the troops v. 2.

The troops of Gideon were already outnumbered 135,000 to 32,000. The ratio was not in God's favor. The number must be more disproportionate in Midian's favor. The basic reason? God's fear that Israel would think she had saved herself. The Hithpael form of the verb "vaunt" means to beautify oneself or glorify oneself. This could not be. So, the order to reduce the soldiers who had volunteered.

b. The action to reduce the troops vv. 3-6.

Two specific selective processes were ordered:

1) The first order v. 3. This concerned those



who had low morale. Two words are used about them: "fearful and afraid." The former word is the generic term for "fear;" the latter is more intense and means to be "terrified." This is easy to understand. With the vast Midianite host, the inferior equipment of Israel, and their total lack of training--bad news. So many qualified right here to be dropped. 22,000 left!

2) The second order vv. 4-6. The method employed here to reduce the troops is unique. Both groups apparently knelt down to drink. The one all the way to the water and the other used their cupped hands to bring the water to their mouths. The latter, therefore, could view their surroundings as they drank. They were free to take advantage of their needs, but also free to view the enemy. The selection process distinguished between self-centered and discipline-centered soldiers. This reduced the troops to 300!

2. The PROVISION for battle vv. 7-16.

a. Directly

God was prompt to utilize the availability of the 300 troops. He again assured Gideon by direct word that the battle would be won (vv. 7, 9). Indeed, the text notes that it was the "same night" that the 300 were chosen that God gave this assuring word. It hardly seemed necessary in the light of all the previous testimony of the Lord (chap. 6), but there it is. What a God of infinite grace!

b. Indirectly

God knew Gideon's heart of fear. He supported him at every turn of the way. Most uniquely he encouraged him to take his servant Phurah, who is only mentioned here in the Bible, and enter the camp of the Midianites. There he would hear encouragement for his battle. He did this!

c. Providentially

There is utterly no other way to explain the events of this chapter. God is written across every syllable. Gideon entered the Midianite camp at exactly the right time not to be discovered. Here he came to the only two soldiers who talked with one another about

a dream which one had experienced. Hearing this dream and its interpretation reinforced Gideon in his conviction that God would indeed do what He said (6:36, 37). No wonder he worshipped there (v. 15).

3. The PARTICIPATION for battle vv. 16-25.

a. The plan of it.

There is no elaborate armour. In fact, the employment of the instruments of warfare which Gideon enjoyed would be a mockery to anyone. But not to God! He was, after all, the One upon whom success depended! So, the 300 with Gideon took trumpets, pitchers, and lamps. This means they had a horn which was long, straight, and probably made of silver (Num. 10:2). There were other trumpets which were curved rams horns (Josh. 6:4). The pitchers were made of pottery and could easily be broken. The lamps were hidden inside the pitchers. At a given signal the pitchers were to be broken, the lamps lit, and the trumpets blown. This sudden burst of illumination and noise would give the effect of a large army.

b. The personnel of it.

Gideon was restricted to 300 men. He divided these into three groups. They surrounded the Midianite camp. It is true that once the enemy fled, others were called upon to come in for the clean up job. But the virtual battle lines were between 135,000 Midianites and 300 Israel troops, a virtual ratio of more than 400 to 1.

c. The pattern of it.

This is a thriller. It is amazing to read such verbs as these: Israel "stood," but the enemy "ran...cried...fled...to...to...to" (vv. 21, 22). In fact, certain of the Midianites were killed (v. 25). The battle was a rout by all standards. Victory was complete.

Conclusion The principle revealed in this account is that God's man doing God's work in God's way will never lack God's blessing. This is not some special cliché, but it is a viable truth of the Word of God. It is eminently confirmed by the experience of Hezekiah (Isaiah 36, 37) and Jonah. Beloved, the battle is the Lord's (2 Chron. 20:15). What a mighty God we serve!