

Uncommon Deliverance

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[0:00] Jesus. Somebody already asked me tonight if I was going to continue on with what Pastor Don did last week.

! The answer to that question is really no and yes. I'll tell you why that is in a minute. Because if you remember, if you were here last week, Pastor Don reviewed the series of plagues that God used to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

And in his closing prayer, Don said something to the effect of, whenever we study the amazing methods that God used to deliver his people in the Old Testament, we should be reminded of the amazing methods that God used to deliver us today.

And continuing with that theme tonight, we're going to look at another Old Testament example of deliverance. We're going to look at Judges 7 to see an episode from Gideon's life.

Some of you may remember last fall, about eight months ago, we covered the call of Gideon in Chapter 6. So before we look at tonight's main text, I'm going to do quite a bit of review of Judges Chapter 6 so we can remind ourselves of the call of Gideon.

[1:17] Remember that the Old Testament documents a repetitive cycle for Israel because Israel would serve God for a while and then they would rebel. And then God would discipline the nation and eventually a deliverer would come and Israel would be delivered and then the cycle would repeat itself over and over again several times.

The first six verses of Chapter 6 in Judges actually summarize one of those discipline periods. So let's look at Judges 6, 1 through 6. They say, Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years, and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel.

Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains. So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up, also Amalekites and the people of the east would come up against them.

Then they would encamp against them to destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts.

Both they and their camels were without number, and they would enter the land to destroy it. So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.

[2:38] So you see an excerpt of the discipline cycle right then. And then Judges 6, 7 through 10 have God's response to the cries to the Lord. Let's look at Judges 6, 10.

It says, Also I said to you, I am the Lord your God. Do not fear the God of the Amorites in whose land you dwell, that you have not obeyed my voice. So why was God disciplining the Israelites there?

Disobedience. And he made it pretty clear that it was because of disobedience that that was happening. And then we met Gideon in verses 11 and 12 of chapter 6.

And when we first meet him, we are going to find that he is hiding in a winepress. That is what makes these verses seem even more out of context with how Gideon actually is acting there.

It says, It says, Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terraminth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezarite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites.

[3:41] And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor. It doesn't sound too much like a mighty man of valor right there, does he, when he is hiding in the winepress.

It says he is hiding in the winepress to thresh the wheat, but I think he is probably enjoying being hidden in the winepress himself too. So if you skip to verses 14 and 15, Verse 14 starts with the next command from the Lord.

It says, Then the Lord turned to him and said, Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you? So he said to him, O my Lord, how can I save Israel?

Indeed, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. So we see that Gideon has a little bit of self-confidence problem right there.

And God reiterates what he wants Gideon to do and why in verse 16. Verse 16 says, Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.

[4:42] So Gideon still didn't really believe that he was actually talking with God. He asked God to prove himself by giving Gideon a sign. And after God gave him a sign by consuming Gideon's offering with fire, we see Gideon's reaction in Judges 6.22.

That verse said, Now Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the Lord, so Gideon said, Alas, Lord God, for I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face. By his own words there, Gideon admits that he is talking with the angel of the Lord.

However, he still asked for more proof that God will save Israel by using Gideon. Look down to verses 36 through 38 of chapter 6.

They say, So Gideon said to God, If you will save Israel by my hand as you have said, Look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand as you have said.

And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. But even that still left Gideon hesitant to obey.

[5:55] Let's read on to verse 40, or through verse 40. Verse 39 says, Then Gideon said to God, Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more. Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece.

Let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground there be dew. Then verse 40 says, And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground.

So you can see that Gideon asked God to just reverse the test that he did before. So let's go ahead and finish setting the scene for tonight's study by reading Judges 7-1. It says, Then Jeroboel, that is Gideon, and all the people who were with him, rose early and encamped beside the well of Herod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Morah in the valley.

So picture what's happening here. Earlier we read Judges 6-5, and that verse said that both the Midianites and their livestock were too numerous to count. They're ready to plunder Israel again, and Gideon and his troops are camped just to the north of the Midianites.

Tonight we're going to focus on verses 2-24 of Judges 7, and we're going to see what happens next between Gideon and the Midianites.

[7:15] We're going to cover those verses under three headings. And in verses 2-8, we see some unexpected declarations. So look for those unexpected declarations as we read the verses.

So here are those verses. Starting in verse 2, it says, And the Lord said to Gideon, The people who are with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against me, saying, My own hand has saved me.

Now therefore proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead. And 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained.

But 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. Then it will be that of whom I say to you, This one shall go with you, the same shall go with you.

And of whomever I say to you, this one shall not go with you, the same shall not go. So he brought the people down to the water, and the Lord said to Gideon, Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself.

[8:27] Likewise, everyone who gets down on his knees to drink. And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouth, was 300 men, but the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water.

Then the Lord said to Gideon, By the 300 men who lapped, I will save you and deliver Midianites into your hands. Let all the other people go, every man to his own place. So the people took provisions and their trumpets in their hands, and he sent away all the rest of Israel, every man, and retained those 300 men.

Now the camp of Midianites was with him in the valley. So what do you think the unexpected declarations are in those verses? You see that twice God told Gideon that Gideon had too many soldiers to go against the Midianites.

So had too many soldiers is what goes into your blanks there. So how many people did the Midianites have to go against? Yeah, the Midianites also had too many, but the difference with them is that they had too many old groups to count.

So is Gideon's 32,000 less than what the Midianites have? Not far. Yep. And of course we get that 32,000 looking at the figures in Judges 7-3.

[9 : 48] So how do we know Gideon's 32,000 is quite a bit less than what the Midianites had? Exactly right. We were able to count Gideon's 32,000, but they couldn't count the Midianites.

We can be pretty sure that Gideon really didn't expect God twice to say that Gideon had too many men. God, though, goes about reducing the size of Gideon's force, and we see that first reduction in verse 3.

That's when God told Gideon to dismiss all of the soldiers who were fearful. Actually, that's in accordance with the Mosaic Law, because the Mosaic Law allowed exemptions for several classes of people, including those who were fearful.

And that's because they might also cause the others to be afraid as well. Here's Deuteronomy 28, chapter 20, verse 8 of Deuteronomy, that has that exception in it.

It says, The officers shall speak further to the people and say, What man is there who is fearful and faint-hearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart.

[10 : 58] You know, we might have expected Gideon to go with the fearful crowd, but God didn't really give him that option. It wouldn't have looked too good if the commander had gone away too.

But verse 4 actually tells us that 22,000 of the people left because they were afraid. So you kind of get the idea that it might have started with a slow trickle of people walking out, and then when they saw others leaving, you know, it became a pretty big stampede of two-thirds of the people actually leaving.

And we see from verse 4 that Gideon is down to only 10,000 people. So we know now that the 10,000 is even less than what the Midianites had, quite a bit less than what Gideon started out with. So let's look at what God says next. In Judges 7, 4, God says, The people are still too many. Then verses 4 through 6 explain how God narrowed down Gideon's army even more.

The soldiers who laughed as a dog, the ones who scooped the water with their hands like a dog uses its tongue, were chosen. And the ones that sank to their knees to drink were rejected.

[12 : 09] And no reason was really given for the distinction, so it showed nothing about their ability as soldiers. It was just a way to divide the crowd. And you may hear other lessons focus on these verses where the teacher tries to come up with some spiritual significance to whether each soldier was a lapper or a kneeler.

And it is tempting to come up with those theories, but neither way of drinking is singled out as the right way here in the verse.

And we'll see as we go along tonight that their abilities as soldiers had no bearing on the victory anyway. So it wasn't about Gideon trying to find the right 300 men, the elite fighting force that could go up against anybody and do it.

It was about getting to the right number that God wanted him to have to go up against the Midianites. So with only 300 soldiers left after the second reduction, do you think Gideon needed some reassurance that God was still on his side?

He's like those 300 needed some. That's exactly right, too. I imagine the 300 did need a lot of reassurance. And, of course, God gave Gideon that reassurance in verse 7.

[13 : 25] That's the verse that says, By the 300 men who left, I will save you and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place. So there's a key piece in that verse.

Who is going to be the one to deliver the Midianites to Gideon? And that is the key piece that God wanted to make sure Midian knew. He definitely said, I will save you.

He didn't say the 300 men will save you. And that, of course, is quite a bit of reassurance there. And that takes us to the second section. We've already looked at the unexpected declarations where God whittled the forge down to 300.

And we just talked about the reassurance of success. Now as we move to the next section, we're going to see God provide more assurance. And that reassurance comes through an unsettling dream.

So, unsettling dream is the next section in your handout. And the section actually goes through verse 15. But we're going to read about the unsettling dream first by reading verses 9 through 14.

[14 : 33] They say, It happened on the same night that the Lord said to him, Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Pira your servant, and you shall hear what they say.

And afterwards your hand shall be strengthened to go down against the camp. Then he went down with Pira his servant to the outpost of the armed men who were in the camp. Now the Midianites and the Amalekites, all the people of the east, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts. And their camels were without number as the sand by the seashore in multitude. And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companions. He said, I have had a dream. To my surprise a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian. It came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned. And the tent collapsed. Then his companion answered and said, This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel.

Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp. So let's walk through these verses now. God tells Gideon to go down to the Midianite camp where he's going to get reassurance about his upcoming victory.

[15 : 45] Verse 12 doesn't sound very reassuring, though look at what it says again. It says, Now the Midianites and the Malachites, all the people of the east, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts.

And their camels were without number as the sand by the seashore in multitude. So about this time, probably the people of the east, were lying in the valley as the sand by the seashore in the valley. So just in case we've forgotten the size of the force facing Gideon 300, the writer reminds us again, he describes it in three different ways, how big the force is.

He says they're as numerous as locusts. He says their camels were without number. And of course if their camels were without number, the people holding those camels had to be without number.

And then he also describes them as like the sand by the seashore in multitude.

So about this time probably Gideon has to be wondering why God sent him down there to spy on the camp. But that's about when things take a turn for the better because that's when Gideon hears about the dream that one of the Midianite soldiers had.

Because Gideon arrived just as a man was telling his friend about the dream, and he dreamed that a round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp and overturned the tent which had struck.

[16 : 58] The amazing thing to me is not really the dream, it's how his friend reacted to the dream. Because look at verse 14 again, it says, And then his companion answered and said, This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel.

Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp. So had you been the dreamer's friend, would you have been so sure that it could be nothing else but the Lord proclaiming how God was going to deliver Midian?

Or Gideon? Or Gideon from the Midianites? You know, I can think of probably hundreds or thousands of other explanations other than thinking that, Well, it means that God is coming to crush us and specifically naming the person that's going to lead the deliverance.

But based upon the explanation, we can tell that the friend either had to be the world's worst pessimist, or God actually had to inspire the interpretation of that dream.

And Gideon correctly read the man's interpretation as a sign from God. And there really is quite a bit of divinely inspired symbolism there, because the barley bread could aptly describe the poverty-stricken Israelites.

[18 : 17] And of course, the tent would be a symbol for the Midianites, because the Midianites were a nomadic people that moved around and camped. So that's a couple of reasons why Gideon was able to correctly interpret it as encouragement from the Lord that Israel would be victorious over Midian.

And that's why he gets such reassurance then from such an unsettling dream. Then verse 15 tells us how Gideon responded to that unsettling dream.

Verse 15 says, And so it was when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation that he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel and said, Arise, for the Lord has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand.

So what was the first thing that Gideon did after hearing about the dream's interpretation? Yeah, worship was the first thing that he did.

So has Gideon's attitude changed then, just in the time that we've been looking at these verses here? It's changed quite a bit, right? Because in verse 10, God told Gideon, if you're afraid to go down, God was probably pretty charitable when he said, if you're afraid to go down.

[19:31] I'm sure God knew that Gideon had to admit of purpose. One, he's been afraid several times before in that verse that we've looked at tonight. Plus, when you think about it, any commander worth his salt would have to be afraid taking 300 people against me.

That's too numerous to count. Right now, after hearing about the Midianites dream, he actually responded by worshiping God and by telling his troops to get up.

Remember, this is still nighttime here, so some of his troops were already in bed, I doubt. Look at the quote again from Gideon in verse 15. It says, Arise has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand.

So take attention to the tense of the verb in verse 15. Does Gideon say God will deliver the camp of Midian into him? It says he has delivered the camp of Midian.

Has it actually happened yet? It hasn't happened yet in actuality. In the mind, Gideon's mind, he's now convinced that because God has told him this to happen, it's just as if it has already happened.

[20:38] And here's where we can see that Gideon must either be crazy or simply be confident about the upcoming deliverance that's going to happen. And that upcoming deliverance is the section of the study.

And we read about that upcoming deliverance in verses 16 through 24. We'll take those verses in sections. And we'll look at Gideon's battle plan first in verses 16 through 18.

So looking at Judges 6, 16 through 18, they say, Then Gideon divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man's hand with empty pitchers and torches inside the pitchers.

And he said to them, Look me and do likewise. Watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp, you shall do as I do. When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you shall also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and I say the sword of the Lord and of Gideon." So this is where I wish the Bible had recorded the reaction of Gideon's troops.

Because, remember, Gideon has just assembled the troops at night. He's told them to get out of bed and be ready to take the Midianite for Israel. And then he tells them the battle plan.

[21:55] And actually paraphrasing the battle plan, he says that the plan is to take some pitchers with torches inside, and then when they get to the Midianite's camp, they're going to break the pitchers and yell.

So, does that really sound like an effective battle plan? I know we've got several ex-military people in here.

How would you react if your commander came in and told you that plan? Able comes to mind.

Probably the 300 that drank a certain way probably wish they could go down to the river and try to drink one more time and see what would happen.

They don't believe they're going to pass. So think about where they are now. If Gideon's plan fails, Gideon and his troops are going to be utterly defenseless.

Coincidentally, that utterly defenseless fits with our outline, but it's not one of the points. So don't fill that in here. Let's read verses 19 through 22 to see how it actually works out.

[23:02] Those verses say, So Gideon and the 300 men who were with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just as they had posted the watch. And they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that were in their hands.

Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers. They held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing. And they cried, The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.

And every man stood in his place all around the camp. And the whole army ran and cried out and fled. When the 300 blew the trumpets, the Lord set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp.

And the army fled to Vapvacatia towards Zerahra as far as the border of Abel-Meholah by Tebeth. So in Gideon's day, first watch was from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.

And that made the middle watch be from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. So if you're filling out your blanks there, 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. is the beginning of the middle watch.

[24:01] And at this critical moment, that's when the Israelites blew their trumpets and broke the jars. And, of course, that made a terrible noise and it revealed the glowing torches. And, of course, they were shouting loudly at the time they did that, too.

So that really caused a lot of unbelievable confusion in the Midianite camp. Remember, the Midianites were probably mostly asleep by then as well. And they imagined a much larger force was attacking them.

And we also saw from the verse that the Israelites attacked right as the guards were changing shifts. So it very well could be that the Midianites mistook some of their own guards that were going off duty with more invading troops as well.

And so all of this divinely inspired confusion caused the Midianites to turn to each other or turn against each other with their swords. And the Israelites just stood there and watched from the safety outside the camp.

So really, can you visualize the scene that's going on there right now? You have to imagine what the Israelites had to be thinking as they were watching the Midianites panic out there. Because with the Midianites, panic followed shock because every soldier was on his own.

[25:14] He had no idea what was going on. And so he was in desperate retreat. You had the darkness. You had all of the noise. And you had the soldiers who were unable to distinguish friend from enemy there.

And so, of course, they wound up fighting each other. And that's why we can say this section is about uncommon deliverance. And then verses 23 and 24 provide a postscript that really document how completely the Midianites were destroyed.

They say, And the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, and Omanasseh, and pursued the Midianites. Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the mountains of Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and seize from them the watering places as far as Beth-Berah and the Jordan.

Then all the men of Ephraim gathered together and seized the watering places as far as Beth-Berah and the Jordan. So that gives us an idea of how complete the deliverance is.

And let's think about something else now as we ponder that. Why would God have chosen to deliver the Israelites this way? We actually saw the answer to that question in verse 2 of chapter 7.

[26:28] Look at verse 2 again. And the Lord said to Gideon, The people who are with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against me, saying, My own hand has saved me.

So the short answer for why God chose to deliver the Israelites this way is that God wanted to keep all of the glory for himself. So let that soak in a minute there. God wanted to keep all of the glory for himself.

Do you think God's plan worked? Well, imagine one of their returning soldiers explaining the battle to his family and friends. Which one of these summaries do you think the soldier is more likely to say?

Do you think he's going to say, I was amazing in that battle. I broke the jar and I yelled really, really loud. That doesn't sound very impressive there, does it? Or do you think that God, or he was going to say that Gideon had us use a strange plan that God made it work.

It's probably more likely to say that Gideon had us use a strange plan that God made it work.

Because even if the soldier chooses the first option and brags about how well he yelled, people are still going to ask him to explain how that could have defeated the enemy.

[27:42] It doesn't really make much sense to try to brag about that. So now we need to think about how the story applies to us. And it goes back to what Pastor Don said last week.

When we see the unlikely message that God used to deliver his people in the Old Testament, we really should remember the unlikely method that God used to redeem us. So why would God

choose to save people like us by having his son die on a cross in a way that unbelievers see as a failure?

It actually is summarized very well by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1, 26-31. So just listen to 1 Corinthians 1, 26-31. They say, For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, that God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.

And the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence, but of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, that as it is written, he who glories, let him glory in the Lord." So God brought about our salvation the same way he did for the reason that we saw in Judges 7-2.

God wanted to keep all of the glory for himself. So we see the consistency then between the Old Testament and the New Testament. It's even more proof that God doesn't change, and only God can orchestrate that kind of uncommon deliverance.

[29 : 29] So just like he delivered Gideon in his troops, we also have been beneficiaries of uncommon deliverance as well.