

## GIDEON

### *God's heroes are strong because He makes them strong*

God's people, led by Joshua, settled into the beautiful land that God had provided for them. For many years they worshipped and obeyed God and were thankful for all his blessings. Joshua and the people who first lived in the new land grew old and had children of their own. Over time, Joshua and that first generation grew old and died.

Their children continued to enjoy living in the beautiful land, but they did not worship and obey God like their parents had. They forgot that this land was a gift from God and they started worshipping other gods, like the nations that used to live in the land. This made them weak and it displeased God. God allowed nearby nations to become strong and they began attacking God's people in the land.

They would come at harvest time and destroy the crops that the Israelites had worked so hard to grow. They would kill the livestock that the Israelites needed for meat and milk. God's people were afraid and weak and all they could do was hide when the attackers came. These invasions made the people very poor. They did not have food to feed their families because their enemies had destroyed it.

After a while, they remembered God and started to cry out to him for help. Of course this is what God wanted them to do because it was not until they did that God could begin to rescue them. The rescuer that God chose was a man by the name of Gideon.

God sent a heavenly messenger to tell Gideon what He had planned for him. Like everyone else, Gideon was hiding from the enemies when the messenger arrived.

"The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!" the messenger said.

"What?" said Gideon. "I am no mighty warrior!"

“Why has this happened to us? Where are the mighty wonders that God used to do? Why has God brought us here and abandoned us?” Gideon asked. He was full of questions and doubts.

The messenger from God told Gideon that he would be a mighty warrior because God was going to be with him and make him strong. Gideon was told that God would use him as his rescuer.

The messenger explained to Gideon that even though he was weak, he would become strong because God would make him strong. All Gideon had to do was have faith in what God promised.

Gideon announced through the nation that he was assembling an army that would drive the enemies of God out of the land. Many people were excited to hear this good news and joined Gideon’s army. As a matter of fact, 32,000 men joined Gideon’s army. He must have been so very, very happy about this response! Then God spoke to him.

“Gideon, you have too many men in your army.” God said. “Tell the army that if anyone is afraid, they can leave and go home.”

Gideon did not understand how an army could be too big, but he did what God said. Most of the army left and went home and now there were only 10,000 men.

“Gideon,” God said, “your army is still too big!”

God told Gideon to take the entire army on a march. When they got to the river, let them stop for a drink, but watch how each man drinks. If someone picks up the water in their hand and carries it to their mouth, let them stay. If someone gets down on hands and knees and laps the water like a dog, send them home. Gideon did what God said. When he sent everyone home who had lapped like a dog, he now had only 300 men left in the whole army!

How will such a small army be strong enough to push the enemies out of the land? Why would God do this? So God told Gideon his reason. Everyone needed to see that strength comes from

God. If the army was large, people might become proud of the army instead of giving the credit to God and his strength. God saw to it that the army was so small that Gideon would have to trust in God and his strength in order to have victory.

And then God gave Gideon his secret plan for how to defeat the enemy army. It was the strangest battle plan Gideon had ever heard! Each of the 300 men in the army would go into battle without any weapons. That's right. No swords or spears or shields. No rifles or tanks or bombs. They would carry only three things—a torch, a jar, and a trumpet. Very strange weapons indeed!

The enemy army was sleeping in the valley one night. Gideon and his men very quietly spread out on the side of the mountain with their trumpets and with their torches hidden inside the jars. When Gideon gave the signal, everyone broke their jars all at once, allowing the light from the torches to be seen. The sleeping enemy army woke up at the crash of the jars breaking, they looked up and saw torches scattered all over the mountainside. Then Gideon and all his men began to blow their trumpets.

This startled and terrified the enemy army. Usually there was only one torch-bearer for a very large number of men. In the night, when they saw so many torches, they thought there were a lot more men than there really was. When they heard the trumpets, they thought the attack had begun. In the dark they became so scared and confused that they started fighting against each other. Then they began to run for home as fast as they could go. God had defeated the enemies of the Israelites that night and Gideon and his army did not even have to fight. All they had to do was have faith in God and do what he told them to do.

Gideon became a great hero in the land, but it was not because he was strong, or brave, or intelligent. He won a great victory because he trusted God and God made him strong. For many years people would remember this great victory that came to God's people because of God's strength and a man who believed.