

GIDEON . . and his strange way of fighting a battle  
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(Judges 7:20)

The man seemed stupefied. He could hardly believe his eyes. The vandalism of a religious fanatic had smashed the altar of Baal, and the evidence of a furious onslaught lay all around in the dust. The onlooker stood as though turned to stone, and in those moments of horror he saw also the other altar which had been erected alongside the fallen idol. Suddenly his wild cries rang through the street, and almost immediately his fellow citizens came running to the scene of the commotion. Stunned and bewildered, they stared at the overturned idol, and then angrily demanded the name of the prowling iconoclast. Someone mentioned Gideon, the son of Joash, and immediately the infuriated mob surged toward the well-known homestead. "Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal . . . And Joash said unto all them that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? . . . If he be a god, let him plead for himself" (Judges 6:30, 31). And the calm demeanour of the old man restrained the angry people, and ultimately prepared the way for the deliverance of the nation. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon; the men of Israel rallied to his standard, and after long years of cruel bondage, the might of the enemy was challenged.

#### Faith Which Startled

Gideon's first attack against idolatry was made under cover of darkness, but subsequent events encouraged confidence, and finally he became a mighty man of faith. His army was systematically reduced in size until the entire enterprise bordered on the ludicrous. With three hundred followers, this dauntless man would challenge a host whose "camels were without number, as the sand by the seaside for multitude" (7:12). Stealthily the intrepid warriors crept to their allocated positions, and holding their meagre equipment in their hands, they awaited their leader's signal. Unsuspecting and drunken, the enemy sprawled all over the valley as Gideon quietly surveyed the scene. Then the silence of the night was shattered as three hundred men smashed their earthen pitchers. Amid the peacefulness of the night, the noise resembled an ominous thunderclap from another world. Rampaging fears struck terror in the hearts of the awakening Midianites, and rushing from their tents, they drew their swords and frantically stabbed into the darkness.

#### Faith Which Shone

When the terrified men saw lights dancing around their camp, their last vestiges of courage fled. Gideon had given lamps to every man, with instructions that these should be hidden within the earthen pitchers until the vessels had been destroyed. Then "the men held their lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands" (7 : 20). Exultant faith filled their hearts, and three hundred pairs of eyes seemed balls of fire on that night of vengeance, Again and again their wild cries echoed through the night-" The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." Then came the sounds of three hundred trumpets-an accelerated symphony of praise which reached even to heaven.

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Faith Which Sang

"And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow" (v, 22). Then Israel's faith sang, for it became evident that the haunting days of Midianite oppression had gone for ever. Never again would foul invaders pillage the land, burn their crops, and reduce Israel to starvation. God had truly visited His people. An earthen pitcher! A shining lamp! A trumpet! What strange weapons of war; yet these have always been outstanding weapons in God's armoury. In order to express the greatness of his message, Paul used similar phraseology. He believed that the outshining of the light of the indwelling Spirit was dependent upon the breaking - or shall we say, the crucifixion - of the human vessel. He said, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4 : 7). His identification with Christ in death and resurrection led to Pentecost, where the lips of the saint could be placed on the trumpet, and the note of victory could echo through the darkness of sin's battlefield. Gideon and Paul would have been very happy to compare notes on military strategy.

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