

They were filled with sudden terror, and thought only of escape, not of fighting. But wherever they turned, their enemies seemed to be standing with swords drawn. They trampled each other down to death, flying from the Israelites. Their own land was in the east, across the river Jordan, and they fled in that direction, down one of the valleys between the mountains.

Gideon had thought that the Midianites would turn toward their own land, if they should be beaten in the battle, and he had already planned to cut off their flight. The ten thousand men in the camp he had placed on the sides of the valley leading to the Jordan. There they slew very many of the Midianites as they fled down the steep pass toward the river. And Gideon had also sent to the men of the tribe of Ephraim, who had thus far taken no part in the war, to hold the only place at the river where men could wade through the water. Those of the Midianites who had escaped from Gideon's men on either side of the valley were now met by the Ephraimites at the river, and many more of them were slain. Among the slain were two of the princes of the Midianites, named Oreb and Zeeb.

A part of the Midianite army was able to get across the river, and to continue its flight toward the desert; but Gideon and his brave three hundred men followed closely after them, fought another battle with them, destroyed them utterly, and took their two kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, whom he killed. After this great victory the Israelites were freed forever from the Midianites. They never again ventured to leave their home in the desert to make war on the tribes of Israel.

After this, as long as Gideon lived, he ruled as judge in Israel. The people wished him to make himself a king.

"Rule over us as king," they said, "and let your son be king after you, and his son king after him."

But Gideon said: "No, you have a king already; for the Lord God is the King of Israel. No one but God shall be king over these tribes."

Of all the fifteen men who ruled as Judges of Israel, Gideon, the fifth Judge, was the greatest, in courage, in wisdom, and in faith in God.

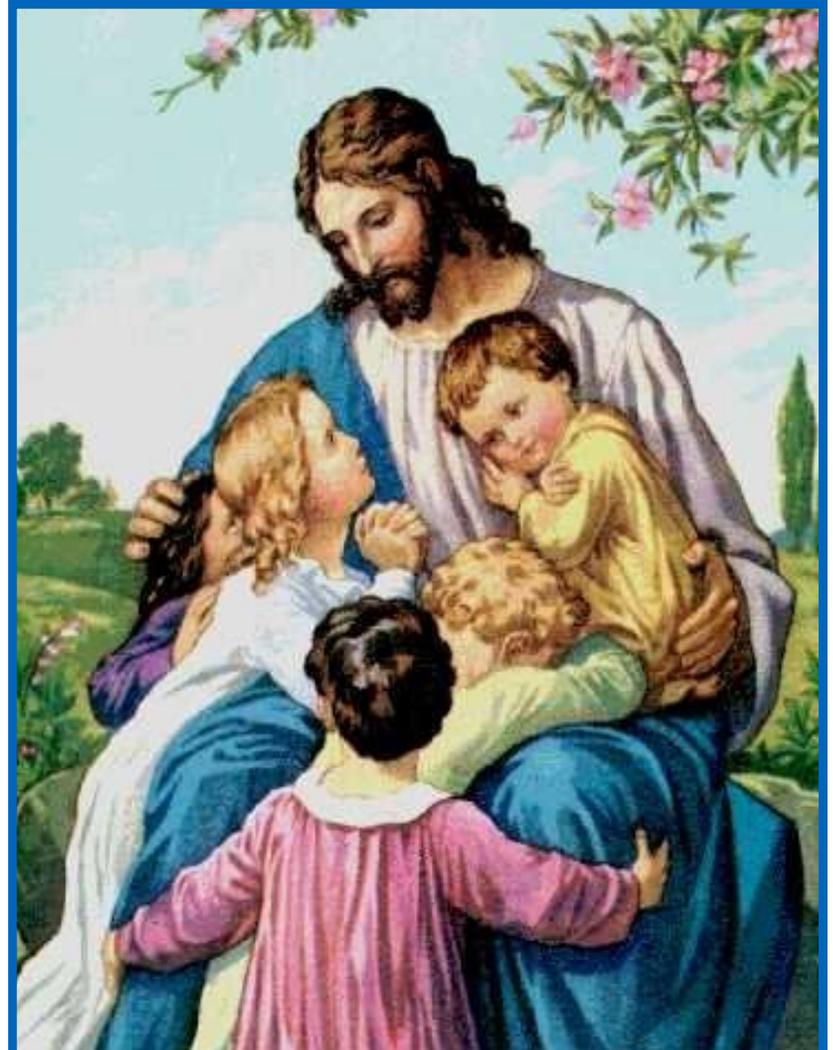
(END OF STORY)

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE MEN BLEW THEIR TRUMPETS WITH A MIGHTY NOISE?



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GIDEON AND HIS THREE HUNDRED SOLDIERS

PART - II

Very early the next morning, Gideon came to look at the fleece. He found it wringing wet with dew, while all around the grass was dry. But Gideon was not yet satisfied. He said to the Lord:

“O Lord, be not angry with me; but give me just one more sign. Tomorrow morning let the fleece be dry, and let the dew fall all around it, and then I will doubt no more.”

The next morning, Gideon found the grass, and the bushes wet with dew, while the fleece of wool was dry. And Gideon was now sure that God had called him and that God would give him victory over the enemies of Israel.

The Lord said to Gideon: “Your army is too large. If Israel should win the victory, they would say, ‘we won it by our own might.’ Send home all those who are afraid to fight.”

For many of the people were frightened, as they looked at the host of their enemies, and the Lord knew that these men would only hinder the rest in the battle. So Gideon sent word through the camp:

“Whoever is afraid of the enemy may go home.” And twenty two thousand people went away, leaving only ten thousand in Gideon’s army. But the army was stronger though it was smaller, for the cowards had gone, and only the brave men were left.

But the Lord said to Gideon: “The people are yet too many. You need only a few of the bravest and best men to fight in this battle. Bring the men down the mountain, past the water, and I will show you there how to find the men whom you need.”

In the morning Gideon, by God’s command called his ten thousand men out, and made them march down the hill, just as though they were going to attack the enemy. And as they were beside the water, he noticed how they drank, and set them apart in two companies, according to their way of drinking.

When they came to the water, most of the men threw aside their shields and spears, and knelt down and scooped up a draft of the water with both hands together like a cup. These men Gideon commanded to stand in one company.

There were a few men who did not stop to take a large draft of water. Holding spear and shield in the right hand, to be ready for the enemy if one should suddenly appear, they merely caught up a handful of the water in passing and marched on, lapping up the water from one hand. God said to Gideon:

“Set by themselves these men who lapped up each a handful of water. These are the men whom I have chosen to set Israel free.”

Gideon counted these men, and found that there were only three hundred of them, while all the rest bowed down on their faces to drink. The difference between them was that the three hundred were earnest men, of one purpose; not turning aside from their aim even to drink, as the others did. Then, too, they were watchful men, always ready to meet their enemies.

So Gideon, at God’s command, sent back to the camp on Mount Gilboa all the rest of his army, nearly ten thousand men, keeping with himself only his little band of three hundred.

Gideon’s plan did not need a large army; but it needed a few careful, bold men, who should do exactly as their leader commanded them. He gave to each man a lamp, a pitcher, and a trumpet, and told the men just what was to be done with them. The lamp was lighted, but was placed inside the pitcher, so that it could not be seen. He divided his men into three companies, and very quietly led them down the mountain in the middle of the night, and arranged them all in order around the camp of the Midianites.

Then at one moment a great shout rang out in the darkness, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon,” and after it came a crash of breaking pitchers, and then a flash of light in every direction. The three hundred men had given the shout, and broken their pitchers, so that on every side lights were shining. The men blew their trumpets with a mighty noise; and the Midianites were roused from sleep, to see enemies all round them, lights beaming and swords flashing, while everywhere the sharp sound of the trumpets was heard.