

## Judges Chapter 8 Part 2

Let us read the Josephus version of the Gideon story to compare against. Remember, the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. Josephus had some documents he drew upon, but then edited that information when he wrote it down in his books.

After the light (pitchers and torches) and sound (shofars) show, the Midianites killed many of their allies and then fled. Then select tribes of Israel pursued them.

**Judges 7:23 And the men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian.**

Assuming these were the same troops that Gideon called originally, then from Judges 7:3-7:7 there were 32,000 men. They pursued the fleeing Midianites. It can also be assumed that when the Midianites showed up that many were killed by the men of these tribes. They likely did some battlefield looting and plundering. It is also likely that the fleeing Midianites had better swords and other weapons of use to the sons of Israel. There may have been some armor and money. A smaller confident force can overwhelm a larger force that is in panic.

That brings to mind a quote from the author of the “Dune” series of books/movies:

“I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration...”

I don't agree with the human viewpoint solution to fear. But it is true that fear is a “mind-killer.” The Christian solution to fear is to trust the power of God the Holy Spirit and God the Father's plan.

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We all have stories of panic, either ones we participated in or ones which we saw.

Concerning the battlefield plundering, Josephus says, “Now there were slain in this battle of the Midianites, and their auxiliaries the Arabians, about a hundred and twenty thousand; and the Hebrews took a great prey, gold and silver, and garments, and camels, and asses; and ...”

**Judges 7:24** Then Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, “**Come down against Midian and take control of the waters ahead of them, as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan.**” So all the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they took control of the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan.

**Judges 7:25** And they captured the two leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and they killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb, while they pursued Midian; and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon from across the Jordan.

The number of men from the tribe of Ephraim that responded the call to arms is not given. The military commanders were captured and beheaded.

**Judges 8:1** Then the men of Ephraim said to Gideon, “**What is this thing that you have done to us, not calling upon us when you went to**

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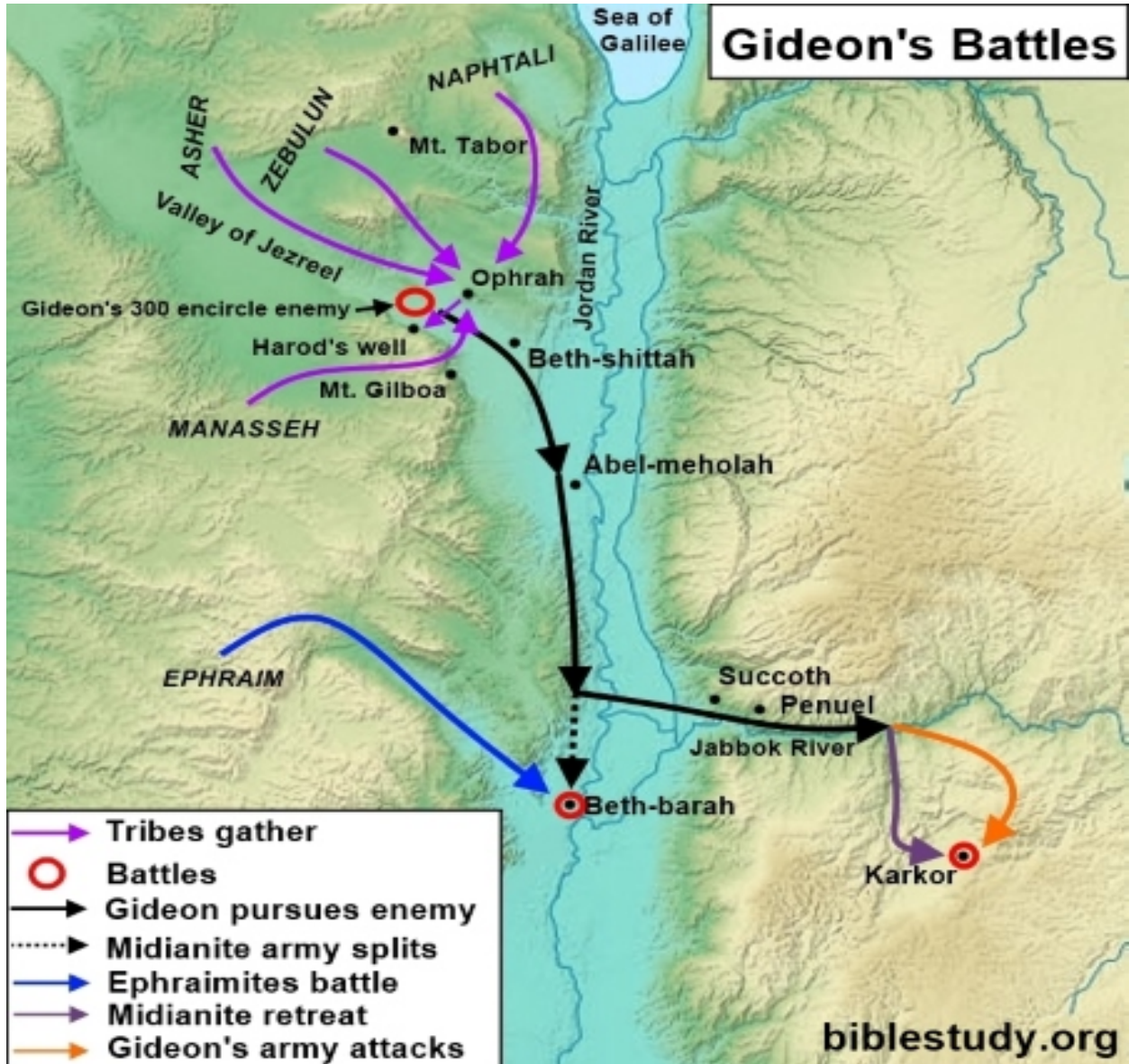
**fight against Midian?” And they quarreled with him vehemently.**

**Judges 8:2 But he said to them, “What have I done now in comparison with you? Is the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim not better than the vintage of Abiezer?**

**Judges 8:3 God has handed over to you the leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb; and what was I able to do in comparison with you?” Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.**

We dealt with the complaints from the tribe of Ephraim last week.

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(from biblestudy.org)  
Gideon's Battles

**Judges 8:4 Then Gideon and the three hundred men who were with him came to the Jordan and crossed over, exhausted yet still pursuing.**

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The retreating Midianites were terrified, adrenalin kicking in causing them to flee rapidly. The 300 are trying to keep up without the adrenalin rush. They probably have more than the normal backpack of supplies. Likely they went on a plundering spree once the Midianites started to flee. So they are not just carrying their normal supplies, but heavy plunder as well. They haven't had much sleep, little to eat, ran out of water and running to keep up with the fleeing Midianites. They are exhausted.

Remember from chapter 7 that it was a good assumption that the people, the citizens of the tribes that were originally called, provided provisions. These provisions are now used up.

**Judges 7:8a So the three hundred men took the people's provisions (citizen-provided provisions) and their trumpets in their hands.**

Now, the logical assumption is that citizens of Israel, even if from another tribe, will supply provisions to rid themselves of the Midianites.

**Judges 8:5 And he said to the men of Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who are following me, for they are exhausted, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian."**

As I just said, the citizens of Israel provided provisions for the 300. Now tribes that were on the other side of the Jordan refuse to provide bread to the Israelite army. I have referred to sons of Israel who work against Israel or deny Israel as "wicked" sons. This is based upon the book by David Mamet, "The Wicked Son." The citizens of Succoth and Penuel are wicked sons.

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Based upon the previous map, Succoth and Penuel are located in the territory of the tribe of Gad. But Gideon does not identify them as from the tribe of Gad. They are just from those cities and subservient to whoever is in charge. In their minds, until the kings of Midian had been completely defeated, in other words, killed, they would not go against them even though their own tribal families were in danger.

Also note that the scenario is similar to what happened under Barak. There, Sisera, the commander of the enemy forces is killed first, then the king, Jabin, is killed. Here in Judges chapters 7-8, the commanders of the armies, Oreb and Zeeb are killed. Then Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian will be killed.

There is an interesting flow of events. God provided a prophet to warn the sons of Israel Judges 6:7-10. No one listened. The Angel of the Lord came to Gideon. Very slowly, with great doubt, Gideon finally believes. Then Gideon is energized by the Holy Spirit. Gideon takes command of the farmer armies of Israel, even 300 chosen by God. Gideon and the 300 in their pursuit of the kings of Midian run out of provisions and need to eat. Yet, the wicked sons who are aligned with the enemy refuse to provide bread for their brother tribesmen.

When I was attending Arabic Language lessons, I heard an Arabic saying that stayed with me. I found it recently in a quote from a book:

“There is an old Arab Bedouin saying: *I, against my brothers. I and my brothers against my cousins. I and my brothers and my cousins against the world.* That is jungle law. It is the way of the world when the world is thrown into chaos. It is our job to avert that chaos, to fight against it, to resist the urge to become savage. Because the problem with such law is that if you follow it, you are always fighting against someone.”

— Nafisa Haji, *The Sweetness of Tears*

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I have not read this book, so I cannot comment on its content other than to reproduce the quote from it.

I happened to see the movie “Lawrence of Arabia” this week on TV. It reminded me that in a tribal culture, individual tribes may from time to time war against each other.

For the Christian, I am in Christ; I will love my brother. God will fight my fights. Although I am in the world, I am not of the world. I am a citizen of heaven.

**Succoth.** From Bibleatlast.org: “After parting with Esau, Jacob journeyed to Succoth, a name which he gave to the place from the "booths" which he erected to shelter his cattle (Genesis 33:17). It was in the territory of Gad, and is mentioned with Beth-nimrah (Joshua 13:27). In his pursuit of Zeba and Zalmunnah, Gideon seems to have retraced the path followed by Jacob, passing Succoth before Peniel (Judges 8:5). Their churlishness on that occasion brought dire punishment upon the men of Succoth. Gideon on his return "taught them" with thorns and briers (Judges 8:16).”

Bruce Waltke translates this word as “shelter” in Genesis 33:17.

**Please.** Gideon used this word four times when talking to the Angel of the Lord. Obviously, it is a polite word and as Gesenius says, it is used in a “submissive and modest request...”

**Following me.** Literally, at my feet

**Loaves.** This a different word than the one used in the Midianite’s dream. This is a more common word.

**Bread.** This is the same word for bread as used in the Midianite’s dream.

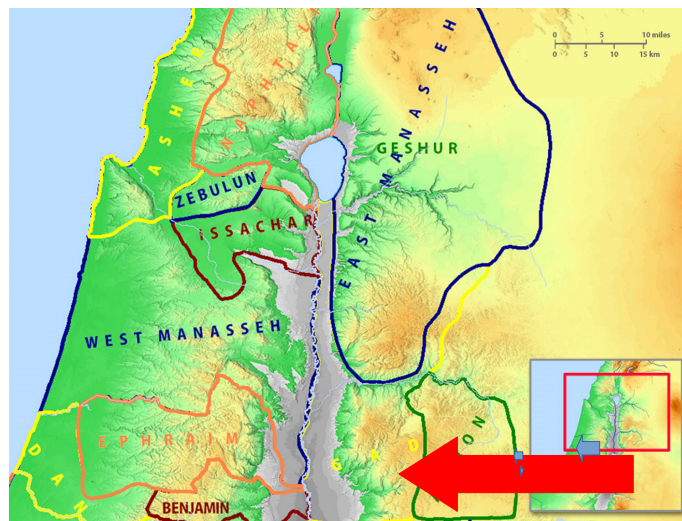
**Zebah and Zalmunna.** Per Thomas Constable “Gideon routed the remnant of the Midianite alliance, and captured the two kings of Midian:

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"Zebah" ("Victim") and "Zalmunna" ("Protection Refused"). Their names, like that of "Cushan-rishathaim" earlier (3:8, 10), may have been nicknames that the Israelites, and or the writer, gave them.

Often, nicknames are remembered better than real names. I remember hearing about the "Butcher of Buchenwald," but I couldn't tell you his name.

These are two leaders of the Midianite tribes, literally "kings."



(from freebibleimages.com)

**Judges 8:6 But the leaders of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?"**

This is the human viewpoint of the wicked son. They do not recognize the familial ties to Israel. Instead, whoever poses the greatest threat is who I align myself with.

**Leaders.** Same word used of the Midianite military commanders, Oreb and Zeeb. They were put to death for what they did to Israel. Now the leaders of Succoth refuse to help Gideon.



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**Judges 8:7 So Gideon said, “For this answer, when the Lord (Yahweh) has handed over to me Zebah and Zalmunna, I will thrash your bodies with the thorns of the wilderness and with briars.”**

When the Lord. Gideon uses the name of God, the God of the covenants, Yahweh, to remind the inhabitants of Succoth that they are under the covenant just as Gideon is. Yet, they have forgotten their Lord God and have allegiance to the Midianites.

**Thrash.** It can be used of threshing like an ox pulling a plow creating furrows in the dirt. Here is an entry from the TDOT: “As an Expression for Cruel Military Acts. Jgs. 8:7, 16 certainly has in mind cruel military acts, although these verses do not specify in detail how Gideon punished the elders of Succoth it is clear that he did not actually use threshing with disks. We will have to be content to say with Myers: “What threshing with thorns and briars meant we do not know, but we may imagine that it meant death by torture.””

**Thorns.** This word means thorns. Here it is used “as instruments of corporal punishment (TDOT). I suspect there is a play on this word. There is another aspect to thorns in the TDOT: “The noun *qos* is used metaphorically for hostile alien peoples and what befalls them. Isa. 33:12 compares the fate of the peoples to thorns that are cut down and burned in a fire, destroyed because they are of no value.”

**Briars.** Gesenius and Young’s Literal Translation suggest this was actually “threshing instruments.” When we get to Judges 8:16 we will see the realization of this threat.

**Judges 8:8 Then he went up from there to Penuel and spoke similarly to them; and the**

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**men of Penuel answered him just as the men of Succoth had answered.**

**Judges 8:9 So he said also to the men of Penuel, "When I return safely, I will tear down this tower."**

This reminds me of the story of Caesar when a captive of Cilician pirates. Let me read the story from the website Britannica:

<https://www.britannica.com/story/the-time-julius-caesar-was-captured-by-pirates>

**Penuel.** From bibleatlas.org "(peni'el, "face of God"; Eidos theou): This is the form of the name in Genesis 32:30. In the next verse and elsewhere it appears as "Penuel." The name is said to have been given to the place by Jacob after his night of wrestling by the Jabbok, because, as he said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." It was a height evidently close by the stream over which Jacob passed in the morning. Some have thought it might be a prominent cliff, the contour of which resembled a human face. Such a cliff on the seashore to the South of Tripoli was called theou prosopon, "face of God" (Strabo xvi.2, 15). In later times a city with a strong tower stood upon it. This lay in the line of Gideon's pursuit of the Midianites. When he returned victorious, he beat down the place because of the churlishness of the inhabitants (Judges 8:8, 9, 17)." <https://bibleatlas.org/penuel.htm>

Are these two placenames reminders of God's provision to Jacob? And reminders to Gideon of what God has done for him? Didn't Gideon see the Lord face to face?

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**Genesis 32:30** So Jacob named the place **Peniel**, for he said, “I have seen **God face to face**, yet my life has been spared.”

**Judges 6:22** When Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the Lord, he said, “Oh, Lord **God! For I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!**”

Gideon travels to Succoth

**Genesis 33:17** But Jacob journeyed to **Succoth**, and built for himself a house and made booths for his livestock; therefore the place is named **Succoth**.

**Judges 6:24 (YLT)** And Gideon buildeth there an altar to Jehovah, and calleth it **Jehovah-Shalom**, unto this day it [is] yet in **Ophrah of the Abi-Ezrites**.

There may also be a tie to the feast of booths, but that may be a little complicated to present here.

**Tear down.** From the TDOT, “The primary meaning characterizing the use of *nts* is “break up, demolish, tear down (an edifice or some construction).” The verb refers to the violent “tearing down” of houses, towers, walls, entire cities, as well as altars, sanctuaries at high places, and other cultic institutions. Apart from a few examples of metaphorical usage, *nts* refers consistently to the destruction of edifices or objects constructed by human hands. The concrete notion of “tearing down” is so strong that the more general meaning of “destroy” is wholly inappropriate.”

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This verb was used in chapter 6 of Gideon (the “Hewer”) when he tore down the stronghold to Baal. Now he threatens to tear down the tower or safe place of the people of Peneul. They have turned from the Lord and are trusting in man. Take note of a two Bible verses in this respect:

**Jeremiah 17:5 This is what the Lord says:  
“Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind  
And makes flesh his strength, And whose  
heart turns away from the Lord.**

**Psalm 118:8 It is better to take refuge in the  
Lord Than to trust in people.**

These verses were written after the time of Gideon, but they express a thought that Gideon may have had. Certainly, he was involved in the illustration of these thoughts.

**This tower.** TDOT on the word “tower:” “In older texts *migdal* refers to a fortified citadel inside the city itself offering a final place of refuge.” In other words, it provides security, or at least a sense of security. This word will be used several times in the next chapter.

Once again, we are given a reference to something with little explanation. “This” tower refers to a specific tower which up to this point has not been identified. There was apparently a single place of refuge within the city, a single tower.