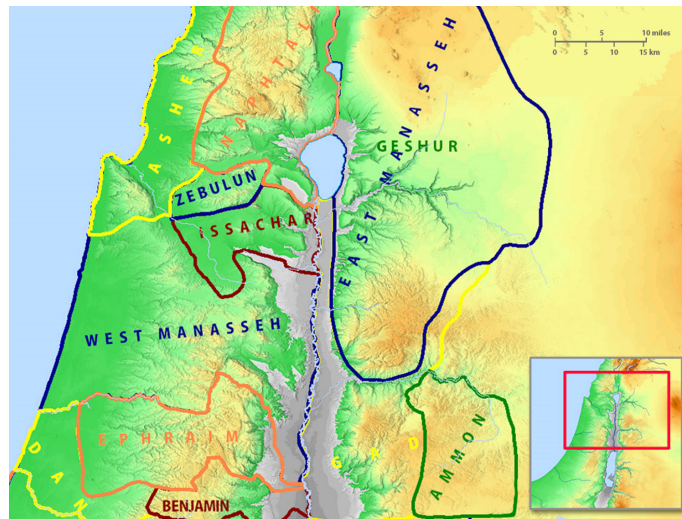


Judges Chapter 8 Part 1

The action in chapter 8 starts at the end of chapter 7. Last week, we saw that a successful military force follows up a battlefield victory with pursuit of the enemy.

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



(from freebibleimages.com)

Location of tribes: Naphtali, Asher, Zebulun and All Manasseh

Remember, the initial force Gideon had assembled consisted of these people.

Judges 6:35 And he sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him; and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them.

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Only 300 men of these were suitable for God's purpose. The rest:

Judges 7:7 And the Lord said to Gideon, "I will save you with the three hundred men who lapped, and will hand the Midianites over to you; so have all the other people go, each man to his home (not "home, but "place")."

Judges 7:8 So the three hundred men took the people's provisions and their trumpets in their hands. And Gideon dismissed all the other men of Israel, each to his tent, but retained the three hundred men; and the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

They were not sent home, but sent back to their tent in the field. Now, in Judges 7:23, they are being summoned.

Summoned. This word was sometimes used when Israel "cried out" to the Lord. They "summoned" Him. Here, Gideon is summoning the tribes.

Pursued. Once a military force is winning, they don't just say, OK we did enough to scare them away for today. No, the idea is to impose total defeat on the enemy. That is especially true in the Bible.

Here is what Ehud did:

Judges 3:28 Then he said to them, "Pursue them, for the Lord has handed your enemies the Moabites over to you." So they went down after him and took control of the crossing places of the Jordan opposite Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross.

Here is what Barak did:

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Judges 4:16 But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not even one was left.

And:

Judges 4:22 And behold, while Barak was pursuing Sisera, (the enemy commander) Jael came out to meet him and said to him, “Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.” So he entered with her, and behold, Sisera was lying dead with the tent peg in his temple.

Remember, God wanted the sons of Israel to learn war.

Judges 3:1 Now these are the nations that the Lord left, to test Israel by them (that is, all the Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan;

Judges 3:2 only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it previously).

So now, Gideon does the same, he pursues the enemy. His farmer army is pursuing the enemy with the intent of destroying them so they never return. As far as the Midianites are concerned, they were never a serious threat against Israel again.

Just a comment on current events: A war is not over just because one combatant force leaves a battlefield. It may mean that there is now a different battlefield.

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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.

Sent. This is the Hebrew word that is translated into the Greek as “ek-apostello.” In Hebrew it is often used to send someone on a mission. I won’t revisit the passages since I did that some time ago.

Messengers. This is the same word sometimes translated “angels.” This meshes well with “sent.” Messengers (Angels) are sent by someone to do something, usually deliver a message. The word sent means to send someone on a mission. In Judges, we have seen that the Angel of the Lord had a mission to the sons of Israel. He gave them information, Biblical messages. The context does not say that God the Father sent the Angel of the Lord, but we understand that from our perspective. Jesus says this clearly in the New Testament. He is the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament. He is the Messiah sent by God the Father in the New Testament Gospels. This is terminology all through the Gospel of John.

It is interesting to note that here Gideon does the sending. Gideon was appointed a deliverer by the Angel of the Lord. Now, Gideon uses that appointment to send the sons of Israel into battle. Also note that those called are not to sit idly by while God works a miracle and confuses the enemy. Now, they are to engage in battle. They are to learn war. Apparently, Gideon, having been “clothed” with the Holy Spirit and has

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been gifted with battle smarts. It is like a science fiction movie in which someone is connected to a computer and all of a sudden is an expert on the function of some complex machine. During the desert wanderings, God the Holy Spirit empowered workmen to aid in the construction of the tabernacle. When we get to Samson, he is gifted with extraordinary strength. Here, Gideon is apparently gifted with military tactics.

God the Father → Angel of the Lord & Holy Spirit → Gideon → tribes

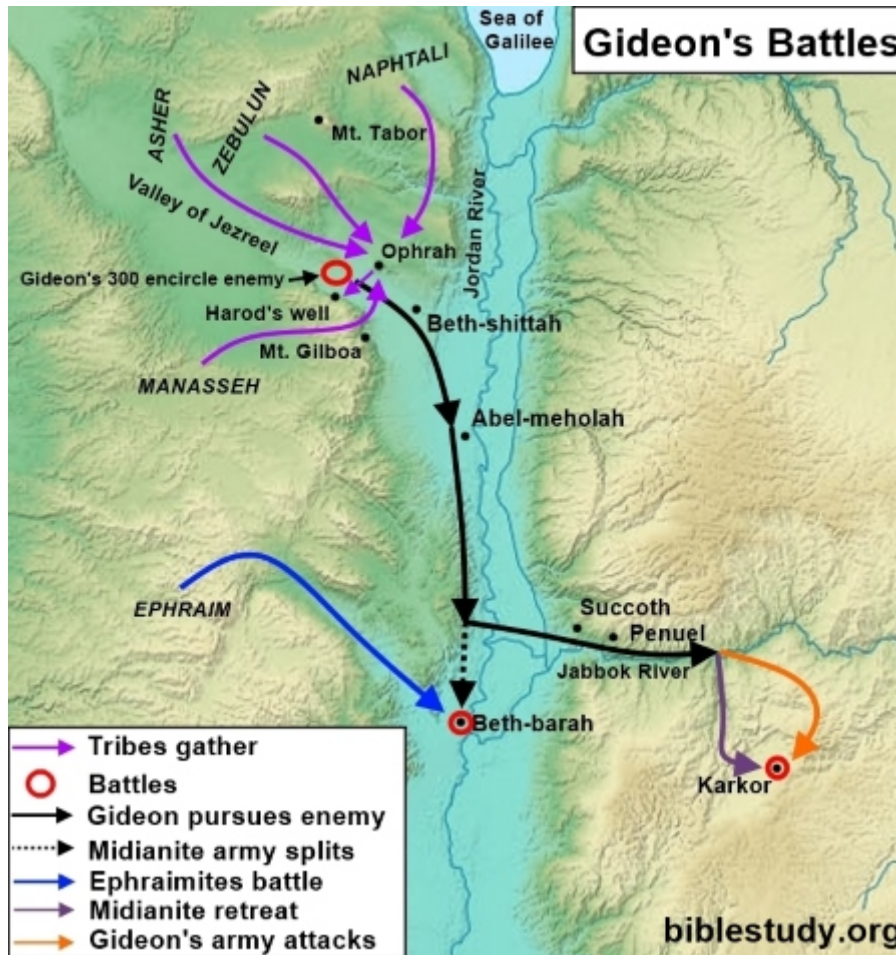
Another point: Gideon had to call them because they were not in the original call. Only the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali were called (Judges 6:35). So, this is an additional call, likely due to the proximity of the tribe of Ephraim to the Jordan and the location of the escaping enemy troops. See the map below that shows the location of Beth-Barah.

Ephraim. Joseph, the son of Jacob/Israel had two sons: Ephraim and Manasseh. Manasseh was already in the battle.

Hill Country/Come down. They had been hiding in the mountains (Judges 6:2)

Judges 6:2 The power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds.

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(from biblestudy.org)
Gideon's Battles

This exact tactic of cutting off the retreating enemy forces by blocking the Jordan crossing took place under Ehud in Judges chapter 3:

Judges 3:28 Then he said to them, “Pursue them, for the Lord has handed your enemies the Moabites over to you.” So they went down after him and took control of the crossing places of the Jordan opposite Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross.

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Is this something that the Holy Spirit enlightened Gideon with or is it possible that Gideon was a student of history and knew this. Or perhaps, this is something that was a well known tactic.

Take control/took control. The verbs are the same in both passages. Capturing and taking control is what they did. This verb is also used in the next verse to indicate that the tribe of Ephraim captured two leaders. This was a military objective assigned by Gideon and accomplished by Ephraim.

The waters. In Judges chapter three, it actually uses the word for “crossing.” Here the text uses the term “waters.” The NIV Study Bible suggests this is “Probably the river crossings in the vicinity of Beth Shan. By controlling the river the Israelites could prevent the escape of the fleeing Midianites.”

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.

Oreb. Means “raven” (NIV Study Bible). Years later, Isaiah will refer to this as an accomplishment of God:

Isaiah 10:26 26 The Lord of armies will wield a whip against him like the defeat of Midian at the rock of Oreb; and His staff will be over the sea, and He will lift it up the way He did in Egypt.

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There is always a temptation to think we accomplished something and take credit for it when it was God that empowered us.

Rock. This is the same word as used in Judges 6:21 where the Angel of the Lord caused a fire to come out of a rock to consume the meat and bread that Gideon had offered to Him.

Zeeb. Means “wolf” (NIV Study Bible).

Winepress. This story started at Gideon’s winepress. He had to “flee” (hide) the wheat from the Midianites. Now the tables are turned. The fleeing Zeeb was killed at his own winepress. An unwritten but possibly implied picture is the blood of Zeeb on his winepress instead of the juice of red grapes.

Trent Butler says, “Younger observers, “Ironically, a winepress and rock in Ophrah were the setting for Gideon’s call to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites (6:11-20)””

Why bring the heads of the Midian leaders? Per the NIV Study Bible, “Frequently parts of the bodies of dead victims, such as heads, hands (8:6) and foreskins (1 Sa 18:25), were cut off and brought back as a kind of body count.”

There is a subtle déjà vu here. Barak pursued Sisera and Jabir. They were killed after they fled. Under Ehud, Eglon was killed prior to battle.

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

Ephraim did not complain to Gideon before the miracle at the spring of Harod. Only after the enemy was on the run did they complain. Perhaps

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they were afraid to engage in a fight with impossible odds from a human viewpoint. But once the enemy force is fleeing, there is a tremendous plunder. Everyone hits the lotto in plunder. Interestingly, “plunder” is not mentioned until Judges 8:25. But, it is mentioned confirming that it did happen.

There is another aspect related to plunder. Not only do they not reap the reward of plundering the enemy camp, their job is to block the retreat of the fleeing force. Probably not a lot of plunder involved here. However, later we will see that the Midianites adorned their camels with gold rings, which became part of the plunder.

Quarreled. This is an OK translation. But, there is history with this word. The prophets, like Hosea (4:1) use the noun form to indicate the Lord has a legal “case” against Israel. The idea is not just that I don’t like you and complain because of that, but that I have grounds for my complaint. In this case, they lost plunder as well as glory.

Vehemently. I would have thought the author would have used the infinitive absolute to express the intensity of this quarreling. But this is another word. It means strongly or vehemently. This word has already been used once in the book of Judges:

Judges 4:3 The sons of Israel cried out to the Lord; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years.

So, the criticism of Gideon, like the oppression, is not fair.

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?

Gideon shows skill in dealing with the tribe of Ephraim. He shows finesse and grace. Interesting that there is previous mention of winepresses. Now there is mention of grapes and vintage (wine). He appeals to their pride in their vintage wines.

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.

Now Gideon mentions that God was working through them to capture and kill the Midianite leaders.

God. This is "Elohim." He did not say Yahweh, the name of the covenant God. Perhaps the tribe of Ephraim has not had the spiritual awakening that Gideon had, so he has to stoop to their line of thinking in order to communicate with them.

Leaders. This word is used in chapter 4 for Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army. So here, this should be understood as military leaders or commanders.

What Gideon is referring to is the glory in capturing and killing the enemy commanders.

Anger. Mental attitude sins.

This caused me to look at the individual groups of people that Gideon had to deal with and their predominant motivations. There is a spectrum of responses.

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1. Reluctant. Gideon, himself. God revealed Himself to Gideon. The result was eventually that Gideon believed and is logged in Hebrews chapter 11 as a “faith hero.” But, he was a reluctant believer who was imperfect and eventually caused many to stumble.
2. Fear: Men from the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali. They camped at the spring of Harod (trembling). The text does not say these men were afraid, but the context would suggest that. These men are called to engage in battle against a superior force. From a human perspective, victory over the Midianites was impossible. But of course, nothing is impossible for God.
3. Witnesses. 300 men. These men are the witnesses God chose to participate in the initial thrust against the Midianites.
4. Angry/greedy. Men of the tribe of Ephraim. They were angry at Gideon because he called them after the initial thrust into Midian. The context suggests there was booty/loot/plunder. Ephraim would have been no less afraid than the originally-called tribes. But after the initial success and likely plundering of the empty camp, Ephraim is angry because they didn't get any. But Gideon appeals to their desire for glory. They captured and killed the enemy leaders.
5. Loyal to the enemy. The men of Succoth and Peniel would not help Gideon unless he defeated the Midianites.

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.

The retreating Midianites were terrified, adrenaline kicking in causing them to flee rapidly. The 300 are trying to keep up without the adrenaline rush. They probably have more than the normal backpack of supplies.

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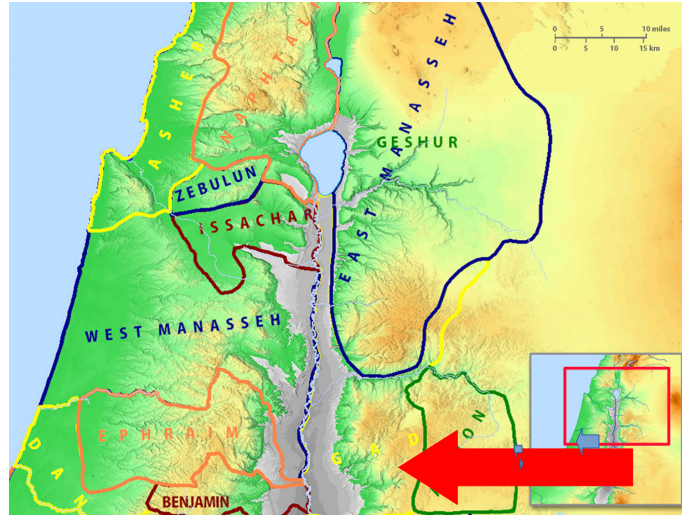
Likely they went on a plundering spree once the Midianites started to flee. So they are not just carrying their normal supplies, but heavy plunder as well. They haven't had much sleep, little to eat, ran out of water and running to keep up with the fleeing Midianites. They are exhausted.

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."

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.

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(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?”

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 briers.”

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

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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>