

We're starting a new series today. This series is entitled *On Guard and Ready*. This is *Part 1*.

Basically, as a result of chapter 7, and having had that posted now, going through and talking about the various Thunders and the sobering realities that go along with that, thought it would be good to go in this particular series now. So again, that chapter was entitled, that chapter 7 was entitled *The Seven Thunders—A Prelude to WWII*.

Again, it is very sobering to go through those things and focus upon that as it talks about a horrifying prophetic end-time storm that is about ready to hit this world. As a part of that we have to truly be watchful, alert, and on guard.

So, that's the purpose of this sermon, in that respect, is that we have to be ready. We don't know the exact timing of things, of when they're going to take place, but things are speeding along very fast in the world if you look at world news and the like, which I'll probably get to in Part 2 or 3, talking about some of those things.

But there is a story that we haven't gone through for several years now, but we're going to go through it today to set the stage for this particular series. It's one in which I think a lot of us have a very close affinity, and the longer you've been in since the Apostasy, or even before, but since the Apostasy for those who have been around for a long, long time, this has even more meaning to it because, well, the likeness in the sense of what they went through and what we're going through. There are so many things in scripture like that anyway where God has used various experiences in times past that have happened on a physical plane, just like we've talked about recently, to teach us things spiritually.

We have a special kinship, if you will, to the story, and it's the story of Gideon. So, incredible what took place. We'll get to that portion later on that even adds more to this thought, this thinking of being on guard and ready because so many people have gone by the wayside because they haven't kept on guard. If you don't stay on guard spiritually, striving to be close to God, doing the things we've been talking about in the series that have led up to this, you're fighting the battle on your own. But there is a battle out there to be fought and God has to fight it, but we have to put ourselves in the midst of it and do all that we can knowing that God is the one that is accomplishing and performing everything that we're able to be a part of.

It's an awesome story here, the story of Gideon. Let's go over to Judges 6 where this story is. So we want to focus upon this one first. It's inspiring to see how God began to call Gideon, how He began to work with him and giving Gideon some tasks here and Gideon responding in

the manner that he did. It's really encouraging and exciting to see how some of these things transpired, how they worked out, and what God was doing, and then the spiritual lessons along the way for us in our journey.

Judges 6:1 it says, **And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Eternal, and the Eternal delivered them into the hand of Midian.** Now, interesting words. Names have meaning to them and this one here, "Midian," means "strife." So, basically they were turned over to strife, there were things that were going on in the midst of that particular region of the world at that time and Midian was used as a tool, if you will, to chasten, to correct the Israelites. God let them go through various things back and forth, back, and forth. He'd raise up a judge to deliver them when they began to cry out to Him (generally, not a lot), but they would cry out to Him, they wanted deliverance because they were being oppressed.

In this case here the Midianites were oppressing them, and other groups around there we'll see as we go through the story as well. But they were being oppressed. That's so often the way it is, when things are really, really bad human nature is more tending to turn to God at a time like that, whereas other times will not look to God whatsoever. But when it gets really, really bad people will sometimes then begin to humble themselves and ask for help. So, human nature.

That happens in the Church at different times in our life. Sometimes as well when people begin to go astray and do various things, sometimes that crying out when they know they have sinned. This is talking about sin and doing things that are evil and things that are wrong. Something can shake the tar out of them, and they can cry out to God. Sometimes God will answer and sometimes He won't depending on the situation, depending upon what they have done with what they were given.

So, all those judgments are a little bit different, but because we are being worked with on a spiritual plane. Israel was being worked with on a physical plane and so there were times that God would let them go, let them experience what it's like to be on their own. He lets the Church do that at times as well, people within the Church, what it's like to be on your own, to be cut off from God, to be weakening of God's spirit in your life. And without repentance, without that kind of change, there's going to be a lot of suffering before it's all said and done.

So here it's saying that this was taking place, **The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Eternal, and the Eternal delivered them into the hand of Midian.** He used Midian. He let Midian have power over them, as well as some other nations as we're going to see here.

It says, for **seven years**. So, they were being oppressed for seven years, and finally then He began to raise up a judge that would deliver them. Now, this repeated itself with the judges over and over again over a long, long period of time.

It says, **And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites the children of Israel made for themselves,** it says, “dens.” That’s not a good translation, but it’s a word that means “places to flow.” In other words, to flee to, places where you could hide and so forth, for being able to keep out of their sight and being able to have maybe some area where you could fight if you needed to. Some of that included caves and the like, but it also included other kinds of strongholds.

It literally means then, **they made for themselves places to flee, places to flow in the hill country, of caves and strong holds.** So again, this word “dens” is not so great.

So it was when Israel had sown crops Midianites would come up, and also Amalekites and people of the east. So as they began to see that the Israelites were not able to stand against the Midianites others began to come in and make a heyday of it as well. “They’re weak. This is a time to attack. This is the time to take what we can out of the land.” They were going in and taking the crops and taking livestock and things of that nature.

So again here, it says, **So it was whenever Israel had sown crops the Midianites would come up; also the Amalekites and people of the east would come up against them, to encamp and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza.** So, there were things they would destroy by (again, not a good translation), but they would come in and take what they wanted, but they would also destroy the rest behind them as well because they wanted Israel to remain weak. They wanted to be able to destroy them. But they were hiding, basically. They were fleeing into different areas.

It says, **and to leave no substance for Israel, neither for sheep, nor ox, nor donkey.** So they would take those things with them because that was wealth that they would take then, that they would have to themselves and be able to carry back into their country.

Now, this happened on a spiritual plane, if you will, as Satan was allowed to attack God’s Church that led up to the Apostasy. You can look at time periods, you can look at things that happen, and there are close similarities to things. But this happened on a spiritual plane, that God began to allow Satan, as He allowed the Midianites, to oppress.

That happened to the Church for years and years and years until finally the Apostasy, things—we’ve already gone through this in past sermons—things were spreading through the ministry, things where people were letting down, all the kinds of battling that was beginning to take place on a spiritual plane. People were getting weaker and weaker.

So again, it was also a time of famine for God’s Church, just like it is here in this example. Because when they take your crops, when they take your livestock, you begin to starve, you begin to hunger for food. Anyway, that same sort of thing happened in the Church except the

Church didn't grasp that, didn't know that was going on and didn't understand what was taking place.

Here and there people would cry out to God, pray to God, and in time, in God's time He intervened. But He allowed the Apostasy first—incredible—because of His plan, because of what He'd said a long time ago, that this had to take place before the end would come, before Christ would return.

So in the story of Gideon, going on, thinking about what happened to the Church as well, it's incredible what took place. It's hard sometimes to go back and think about some of those stories and think how bad we really got, how lukewarm, just lost it in many cases. I think how it only took a couple of years after Herbert Armstrong's death. By 1988, if you will, things started going south and a powerful weakening within the Church had begun.

And you have to think about things like this. What is it like when someone like that is removed from the presence of the Church? He was God's apostle. There are all these battles going on amongst the evangelists. Even throughout the ministry there were battles of people taking sides in things, and anyway. This weakening continued to happen.

That affected the Church, obviously, but there was a kind of sustained strength for a time. Laodicea didn't happen full throttle right away. It took a little time, a couple of years. But by 1988 you could tell all things were changing faster and faster, looking back in retrospect. By 1989 even far more so.

It began to become rampant within the Church. I think of that seven-year period. I mean, it doesn't have to be the same, but basically, that's about how long Herbert Armstrong's influence lasted. In other words, there was strong food, he was very powerful in what he sent out to the Church, what he was writing to the Church. He came back, especially after 1982 to 86', when he died, there was a period of time there where he was exceptionally strong. The fact that his presence was there, always having a sense of urgency and correcting the things he was striving to do, it strengthened a lot of people in the Church. But as soon as he died it started getting weaker. It didn't take long.

Verse 5—For they would come up with their livestock and their tents as they came in as numerous as locust, both themselves and their camels being without number. So, not that it's without number, it's just that there is so many you can't count them. There is no systematic way to be able to easily count the numbers of what is out there in a force that comes up against you like that, considering the Midianites and the Amalekites, and others, as it says, from the east.

It says they were like locust. They just covered the ground, the land. You could look out there and nothing but huge armies that were coming in. Again here, it's painting a picture of

something of how they would come in with their livestock because they had to eat. They obviously had to have their transportation. They had their camels. But they also came in and took much and took it back with them.

Then it goes on to say, **and they would enter the land to destroy it.** They wanted to destroy the people. They wanted the land. So, if you destroy the people who are there you can take the land as well and become a greater nation.

So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried out to the Eternal. So, we go through a lot of things sometimes before we'll actually begin to cry out, before we even begin to recognize, especially within God's Church as we went through that period of time when there was no apostle, and we didn't know exactly what was taking place, but there were people, obviously, who would cry out to God, "We need help. There are things that are changing. We're hearing this, we're hearing that." There was this unsettling thing that was taking place and it was obvious that there were divisions popping up in different places, so it was a difficult time.

The spiritual is far, far harder, far more difficult than something physical. Because it has to do with the mind, it has to do with God's spirit that lives within us. But there are analogies that are similar.

Verse 7—Then it came to pass when the children of Israel cried out to the Eternal because of the Midianites, that the Eternal sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, Thus says the Eternal God of Israel... So, it doesn't identify. It says He sent a prophet and the prophet said, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out from before you, and gave you their land.

So again here, they weren't focused. They weren't looking to God as having been the one who gave them everything they have or had, and that can happen in life. Sometimes even within the Church we get to a point where we don't grasp the richness of the blessings we actually have. We've had those sermons as well, that we have to be thankful, that we have to think upon those things and recognize what God has given to us and how blessed we are. Because we can begin to take things for granted, if you will.

That's why I'm dumbfounded. We're so small, but to understand that over 6,000 years very few have ever had any opportunity to have a relationship with God. It's a horrifying thing to think we can take that for granted, and yet it happens all the time. It happens all the time.

Also I said to you, I am the Eternal your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell, but you have not obeyed My voice. So repeating over and over again this history of carnal human nature and what they did - turning away from God, not keeping

God in the forefront, not thanking God for everything they had, not recognizing that they were there because God brought them out of Egypt and remembering the history.

That's why we go into history a lot concerning the Church. We need to know where we've been. We need to know what God's done within the Church through time and what kind of life this is then to fight these battles. And to be on guard is a matter of battle and warfare spiritually. It doesn't just go away; it's always there. That's a part of being ready, that's a part of being on guard. And too often if we're not careful that isn't what we're exercising in our thinking, in our minds.

Verse 11—Now, the angel... Now this, it doesn't say a whole lot here. It's rather difficult to know exactly what's being said here because the word "angel" can mean messenger, as it does in the New Testament as well, "an ambassador; a representative." Whether it was in the form of something like Melchizedek, we don't know. Whether God did this Himself, whether it was an angel specifically. But the way the conversation goes on here it very well could have been an angel, a representative, in that respect, who did some of this.

It says here, **Now, the angel of the Eternal came and sat under the oak tree, which is in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abi-ezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress in order to hide from the Midianites.** Now, wherever it was it was in an area that wasn't easily seen, normally seen. So, he went to this particular area here that he felt was safer in order to do this, to thresh the wheat there.

And the angel of the Eternal appeared unto him. Again here, I love this word, what "Gideon" means, because it means "a hewer; as a cutter of wood or stone." I think of the process God takes us through, how God worked with him to mold and fashion him, how God began to call him and how He works with us. This is our lifelong story. God is molding and fashioning something within us. I like the example of being like piece of stone because chunks are being chipped away that can't be a part of our life. Only God can do that, but we have to yield our self to the process. So again here, words have meaning.

...he appeared unto him and said to him, The Eternal is with you, you mighty man of valor. Strength. Strength that comes from God. Especially when God comes on the scene and gives you favor, begins to work with you. It's because of His strength. Something we need to grasp, how blessed we are that we have a power in our lives that raises us up, that strengthens us, that's awesome. To know, to see the things we do, to be on the road that we're on, to be on the journey that we're on, it's beyond our comprehension but we need to think about those things and thank God that we have such an incredible opportunity before us.

"The Eternal is with you." So, we've talked about that in sermons, something we have to know all the time. We're always in God's presence. We've just gone through that series. God's with us. We're always in His presence. Because His spirit dwells in us a portion of God

Almighty dwells in every one of us, and He give us of His holy spirit in that part that's in us, with that impregnation that's taken place in our being. And so, the flow of God's spirit to keep that alive, to help us to grasp and see things on a greater plane, to grow, to mature, all that that takes place as a part of a process.

The Eternal is with you, you mighty man of valor. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the Eternal is with us, why then has this fallen on us? I'm sorry, but I can't help but think about the Apostasy, when that happened and the thought that came into people's minds, "How can this happen to God's Church? If God is with us, if we're God's, how could such a thing happen in God's Church?"

That's why a third became so disillusioned because they didn't have any answers. It was like, where else do you go? We've learned all the things that are false in religion, and we thought this was true, but now this has happened, so they just gave up. They just gave up totally. Another third, they embraced what was out there, protestant world, went right back into it, in that respect. Then another third just scattered all over the place, massive confusion. But those thoughts were there.

And it led us—thankfully, God had mercy upon us, began to work with us—it led us to see the fault was ours. Just like with what happened to Israel, they began to do things that were wrong and so God let the Midianites come in and rampage, take from them, destroy.

That's what happened to the Church. God allowed it to happen because we have to learn. If we were not focused on God, if we're not on guard spiritually, we're not in it, we're not in the fight. We have to be in the fight. He allows things to happen to shake us up, to help convict us of what's important. We go through these things, this process. They went through it on a very physical plane, and we've had to go through it as a Church on a spiritual plane. Awesome, what we've experienced just to go through that, to have the experience of coming through an apostasy, to learn what we had to learn, "I was Laodicean. I fell asleep." Everybody had to say that that came through this who were a part of that. We fell asleep.

It wasn't a matter that God wasn't there, like Gideon is asking here, "Oh my Lord, if the Eternal is with us, then why has this fallen on us?" So, the parallel of the story here on a spiritual plane is right there. It's very powerful, it truly is, and God has given a lot of these things—we've already gone through many, and we went through some here recently—where a lot of things that have happened in times past had been written for this period of time. For us, what we're living, as small as we are, but they've happened and they're recorded, and they'll be recorded for the future as well. For people to look back, just as we're able to look back here, the things of Philadelphia, of Laodicea, of a remnant Church are going to be things that people are going to read about throughout the Millennium, throughout the Great White Throne. We're blessed to be a part of that process. How awesome is that? What happened to

Gideon and them on a physical plane (for him spiritual in part), but on a physical plane as a whole. For us, as a part of God's Family through a process that is awesome, it truly is.

Verse 14, it says, **And the Eternal looked upon him, upon Gideon, and said, Go in this your might.** So again here, it says the Eternal is saying this, but it's talking about this messenger. The story isn't fully complete as to how this is taking place, whether God spoke through the angel. But it's more as though God had more of a direct relationship here with whatever was taking place.

And the Eternal looked upon Gideon and said, Go in this your might, and you shall save Israel from the Midianites. Haven't I sent you? You know, if God has a purpose, and we're blessed to be a part of it, He's letting us know, "You have the victory! I am with you!" If God is with us - not just with us, He's in us! It's hard for us sometimes to grasp how awesome that is, that God Almighty is not just with us, He's in us. We have that strength and that power, and with that should go that kind of confidence and boldness to do what we have to do regardless of what happens to us. It really doesn't matter. What matters is what's beyond, what we're working for, what we're fighting for, the life that God is creating inside of us. That's what's important.

"Haven't I sent you?" We've all been sent. When you're called by God Almighty, by His spirit, into a relationship with Him, He gives us work to do. We are a part of a support of the Body of Christ. We all support it. We're all a part of it. Our prayers are a part of it. Our focus, our goals are all a part of it. What we do together is all a part of it in a very powerful way. God works with us to teach us, to mold and fashion us.

I think of all the truths God has given to us. We really don't grasp to the fullness of what it really is, how great it is all that we've been given. It's a spiritual thing. So we grasp various measures of that, but to fully grasp it, we're still growing in that. That's why we have sermons every once in a while to remind us of some of those things and to build upon some of those things so that we can begin to see it even more clearly how awesomely blessed we are and how God is working in our lives at this end-time just before His Son returns.

So, He says, "Haven't I sent you?" So, we all have work to do. We all have a job to do, and first and foremost it's to fight self. It's to conquer and overcome self. That's your primary job, one you can't ever let up in. You've got to fight and fight and fight because this mind is at enmity with God. Only that which is begotten and that spirit that's within us is growing that can fight that, and something else then is growing within us. That's hard to grasp. But to see some of the things that we do, it's a beautiful thing. But there's that battle that goes on and we have to be on guard continually, constantly ready, mostly to fight this, and to fight what's out there around us.

We're getting ready to go into a period of time here that's going to be hard. It isn't going to be easy. It's going to try some of our thinking in what's going on around us in ways that we really can't comprehend yet. But God gives us the strength, He'll give us the power to go through it successfully.

Haven't I sent you? And he said to him, Oh my Lord, how shall I save Israel? "All these armies, look how great they are. They're like grasshoppers out there. All the camels you can't count." Powerful forces that are coming up against Israel. "We're hiding in different areas and trying to keep away from them and we're no strength, no power." That's what he saw in his mind.

Sometimes it's hard for us to grasp what kind of a battle we're even in, and if we really grasp even more fully that which fights against us, which we see occasionally from time to time in our lives, there are powerful forces that work to destroy what God is creating.

I think of what one being is doing right now because he wants more time. You think he's not stirred up to attack God's people, especially those who are being molded and fashioned as 144,000? He doesn't know specifically who, so he attacks the whole in different ways on a continuing basis. He doesn't let up. We're the primary thing he hates on this earth. Not the rest of mankind. He hates mankind, period, but he hates most of all this Body and he fights against it, he broadcasts against it.

He went on to say, **Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh**, "We're not great." That's what he's saying. "How can I have any part in this? Look at the family I'm a part of. We're poor in Manasseh." ...and **I am the least of my father's house. Then the Eternal said to him, Surely I will be with you, and you shall strike (to destroy; conquer) the Midianites as one man**, in other words, **one power**, powerfully so.

So he said unto Him, If now I have found grace in Your sight, then show me a sign that You do talk with me, that You're communicating with me, that You're working with me.

So again, I look at us, how small we are, and it's just really hard for us sometimes to grasp and comprehend that this is all there is right now in the world. Not a lot. But then, it's wise to think back how God over 4,000 years worked with an individual here, a couple here, two or three here, much smaller than what we are, but all for the same thing, to become a part of God's Family. It just depends on, in that respect, where God is placing them and what they were to experience and go through until it's all completed.

In that respect, we tend to think, those who have been in the Church a long time, going back before the Apostasy, tens of thousands, nearly a hundred thousand baptized at that point in time, and you think, what's a few hundred? If we're not careful we don't see things in the

right perspective of what God does, and that God is making it clear to everyone He is doing it. It's not going to be a great organization, a large organization, it's going to be very small.

God's making it very clear to the world and to the Church He's doing it. We're just blessed to be a part of it. Awesome!

So, he wanted a sign. I know we know this story, but again here, there are spiritual analogies of things we go through in our lives and how we think from time to time, and so much of it is a matter of coming to grasp and comprehend when God calls you and He has a purpose for you, this is no small thing. But if we're not careful we can kind of treat it that way, "Who am I?" "Who am I?" Look, every one of us, wherever we are listening today, who are we? We're not recognized as leaders in communities and large corporations and whatever it is. Even if we were, what would that mean when it's all said and done? So, that's what Gideon is saying, "Some of the poorest in our family, of all of Manasseh." So?

Verse 18—I pray that you do not depart from here until I come to you and bring forth my offering and set it before you. So again, he's speaking back and forth here in saying, "I want to offer this up before you." **Then he said, I will wait until you come again.** So whomever he's talking, the messenger, he's going to wait there until Gideon goes there and then comes back. And so he said, "Yes, I'll wait here for you."

And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour. Now, this doesn't happen over, you know, a couple hours or so. It took a while. You go get a kid, what is that? A young goat. So to go get the young goat, to dress it, to get it ready, to start roasting it, whatever, over the fire type of thing, getting the bread ready? Today, we have all these contraptions. We just go get it out of the refrigerator and things are fast. This wasn't fast. So he asked him to stay there and wait and he did.

Then the meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel (or the messenger; the ambassador) of God said to him, Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth. So here it is, here are the rocks, here's the meat, pour out the broth on top of it. **So he did. Then the angel of the Eternal put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes.**

It just took it all. I mean, to be in a situation like that where you experience something like that would be kind of strange. It'd be a strange sensation indeed. Here you're talking to this individual, and all of a sudden, you put this stuff on the rocks and it just, the fire comes up and it consumes every bit of it. It would be a little scary, candidly, because you don't experience things like that. It takes time to get the fire going, it takes time to cook

something, and here it's just like it's lapped up instantly. So, you know where it came from. That's what He was putting in his mind, this comes from God.

Then the angel of the Eternal departed out of his sight. Now, when Gideon...

We have different things that happen in our lives from time to time that give us encouragement. We have to have that as God's people. We don't have to have something like this of a physical nature to where we have to see something like this. Especially at a time like this. He didn't have an organization of a church or people that he could talk to about this, this was between him and God, and God was telling him these things. So a little bit different in that sense.

We have a body, we have a Church, we have an organization, the Body of Christ. We're able to come together and have fellowship with one another, discuss things together. We experience different things in our life, whether it be on a job, whether it be in family, whether it be with relatives or with others in the Church, and so we have different experiences. There are some of those things that give us encouragement when we see that God's intervened in our life. Perhaps something we've seen new, that God has given us a new understanding of something and the excitement of that. Something individually happens in our own life, whether it be something physical where you know, you feel convicted that God has intervened to bless you, to help you in a situation. Some of those things, or a lot of those things, are just very private. With this, with Gideon, this was private.

There are things in my life, and I'm sure in your life, as you look at things that have taken place, that give you encouragement from time to time. We have to have those things from time to time. God works with us; He helps us to grasp things that we otherwise wouldn't. So we have special things that happen in our life.

I go back into my life and think of different occasions that are highlights of things where you see God at work even more so that just give you encouragement. Now, what we receive is on a spiritual plane so often. It's an encouragement, a lifting up. I think the Feast of Tabernacles is a good time like that because you experience something there every year that is unique as you come together with others in God's Family. But to have sermons every day, to be away from your work, to be away from your environment, there's a peace and a freedom and an encouragement there that is awesome. We only get that to that level once a year.

But we have other things from time to time that happen in our lives that give us encouragement. But they're personal. There are things you can't convince somebody else of, some other family member or whatever. They're going to think you're nuts anyway. But there are things that just encourage you, and those are personal. That's a part of God's relationship with you that's unique.

Now, when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Eternal (a messenger of the Eternal), **Gideon said, Alas, O Lord Eternal! for because I have seen an angel of the Eternal face to face** – a messenger of, a representative of, whatever.

The reason I'm mentioning this in the degree that I am and the way that I am is because there are other occasions where there were angels and it's very clear that there were angels that said specific things. But there are other times, too, it's not as clear as to who the messenger is. Because God has represented Himself as a being, sometimes as a priest, sometimes as Melchizedek, some other form that He has given for individuals to see.

Even with Abraham it wasn't just with Melchizedek. There was an occasion, there are occasions where you read about where it was almost like it was an angel, but it wasn't recognized as being Melchizedek, but it was God. Again, He can manifest Himself as a human being to someone and communicate to them through a messenger like that. But it's not God, we understand that, because God can't be contained in a physical body. But He can do that at will.

So, the reason I'm saying that is because this tends to be more in line with some of that, that "I have seen a messenger of the Eternal," and that closeness then that he felt with God, that it was unique because He knew that this was coming from God because of what took place.

So anyway, going on. **Verse 23** it says, **Then the Eternal said to him, Peace be to you; do not fear, you shall not die.** Now, why would He say that? Because these things were in his mind. "I'm going to send you out to help deliver Israel, to fight against the Midianites." It reminds me of some of the things that are sometimes made comical when Noah is talking to God and He says, "Going to save you and your family on a ship." You know, it's "Riiight."

Anyway, the things we are as human beings because we're told things by God or people have been told things by God that are just so far out as far as the human mind can conceive, God has to give us encouragement. He did to him and told him what He did. "Peace to be to you. You're not going to die." This had to be on his mind.

Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Eternal. So, he was moved. So again, we have these things that happen in our lives at different times. This is over a small, short period of time, but we have things that happen in our lives that are unique to us in a relationship with God. Those are the things we hold on to. Whether it be the moment of your calling? I think of that. But for different ones, it works differently.

So whatever thing it might be at different stages of your life, things that happened for some of us during the Apostasy, things that happened later, there are moments there that you know God is with you and they encourage you. It's a powerful thing. Those are the things we hold

on to, this relationship that we know we can have with God through prayer, whatever it might be, whatever it is we pray about.

I think of times praying about some things and being a whole year later and I finally realize, you know what? God intervened and I didn't even know when it happened. You think back about various things you prayed about and all of a sudden you realize it didn't happen right then, but it's happened very powerfully so. So again, we all have unique experiences.

Verse 24—Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Eternal and called it Yahweh-shalom, meaning “the Eternal sends peace.” So again, this was something that Gideon needed. God knows what we need. He knows what's in our minds and there are times He gives us a certain encouragement, a certain ability to see something, a certain boost that we need. Doesn't mean we're not going to go through other problems and trials and hardships, because that's all a part of our change, that's a part of going through the fire. It's part of going through what we have to go through to be tested. It's meant to be difficult; it's meant to be hard.

But along the way and along the path there are those times where you have this peace that you know God has blessed you, that God has given you a peace of mind to be able to deal with something. It doesn't mean that it wasn't hard to go through, but there is that knowing, that confidence that God is with you that is a spiritual matter, a spiritual relationship with God.

...and called it Yahweh-shalom. Unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites. Now, it came to pass the same night, that the Eternal said to him—this is a good one—He says, Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years. Now, this is not a small thing because he's already said, “We're not wealthy. We're poor among the Manassites, even,” and bulls are valuable. This is speaking of something that is prized within the family. This is something that is expensive, if you want to look at cost and whatever.

He's saying, **Take your fathers young bull, the second bull of seven years, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image,** which is the word for, it's about “asherah” the Canaanite goddess. So these things were there. So, this is how far the Israelites had strayed. They'd taken on some of the other things of some of the Gods of different ones around them. And yet, here is a stand, something that God wanted Gideon to do.

I think of things we do. I think of things we have to do, especially the beginning of our calling, that you have to take a stand. I've had some conversations while we've been out here, about different ones who have come to a point in life where they just don't take a stand. Yet that's what we have to do constantly. We start in the beginning that way and we have to continue on that way, that there are times whether it be with an employer, a mate, whatever it might be, a relative, whatever.

When individuals fail to take a stand because of what they're living, meaning they're not going to compromise, and they're going to know where you stand. But if we fudge with things, if we kind of give into certain things, whatever it is that is going on that maybe is pulling us in a wrong direction or in a direction that we realize this isn't really healthy, this isn't really good, so many have gone by the wayside because of that, because they wouldn't take a stand.

That's what we're required to do continually in our lives. We have to stand firm. We are God's people. We are living this way of life. We don't mess around with the Sabbath, we don't do things on the Sabbath, Friday night sunset or whatever to Sabbath sunset. There are things we do, and we stand firm in it, regardless of what anybody else thinks or does.

When people don't, when individuals don't, they become weaker and have to come to a point somewhere along the line where they're going to have to take that stand. They may be given another opportunity. Oftentimes, they're given another opportunity. But again, what an incredible thing.

So, here is an example then about this young bull. It says, "Tear down the altar of Baal that your father has." Kind of mind-boggling here then what happened to his father and how his father responded when all this took place. Because it came to a point where there were those who wanted to kill Gideon. We'll get the story here in a minute. But it's kind of unique to see the story here of his father and what his father said when this was all said and done.

And so it says here, again, he took **the wooden image that is beside it, the asherah, and build an altar to the Eternal God on top of the rock, in the proper arrangement.** Now, don't know how this was communicated to him, how he knew what he was to do, but it was given to Gideon. **And take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down.**

So, cut down the wooden image, use that wood as the fire to offer up the bulls. You think, this was no small thing. It was his father's. We're talking about wealth, the wealth of the family here, and yet God is telling him to do this.

Sometimes we're asked to do things that may seem really difficult. They're difficult especially toward the beginning perhaps, and they may be difficult at some stage. We're going to go into a period of time where we're going to stand up to some very difficult situations. But to stand firm, we must. We're God's people. We're not going to flinch regardless of what happens.

Again here, it says take this and offer it up. **So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the Eternal had said to him.** So ten that he knew there that were of the servants went with him. **But because he feared his father's household and the men of the**

city too much to do it by day he did it by night. See, so human nature is still there. This is the beginning of his calling. We can all understand that.

He's still going to do it, but not in the daytime because he fears the father's household, fears the rest of the town around there and what they're going to do when they see their idol, basically, being destroyed, and then building an altar to God and...anyway.

So others around us at times? It doesn't matter what people think, we do what we have to do. We should learn to enjoy it, that we're able to serve God in such a way. If something comes up in our life, whatever it might be, to stand firm, to stand tall for God's way of life, that's an awesome thing, it really is. We're the only ones who can do that or not.

I've known tons of people who have come to those points in their life, and they won't do it. They haven't done it. I've known tons in the ministry who came up to certain moments in time and they wouldn't stand firm, wouldn't stand for God's people. I think of so many just that are rattling through my mind right now, different instances of things where people should have stood.

I think of what I wrote about recently, about some in headquarters who could have told the ministers out in the areas, because we didn't know that there was something in the planning for two years. Region after region after region with all the churches across the United States, didn't know what was going on at headquarters in the sense that there were plans of things for printed material and stuff, to change the Sabbath and the things that were in the hopper that they had gotten wind of. If we had been told those things we could have been better prepared.

So again, there are times to take a stand, whatever it might be, that affects the entire Body or a part of the Body, whatever it might be, and there are times we're called upon to do that individually within the Church, and if we don't do our part then we're not doing what God gave us to do. Because that's part of our calling, to stand for Him no matter what. It doesn't matter what people think. Who cares what the world thinks? You know? It's immaterial. We know how they're going to think toward us.

I know how they've going to think toward the book that's coming out when they see the title of it, and if you're a part of that, it's not going to go over well, when people know about it. That's just the way it is.

So, he did it by night. **So when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal torn down, and the wooden image that was beside it, it was cut down, and the second bull was being offered on the altar that had been built.** It's kind of comical. I mean, you think, here is what he's doing, and the people wake up and this is what they see, he's using the asherah, the wooden image, they can see it there in the fire, and the

bull is there on top as part of an offering. They're not happy campers. So, it's totally against them. They hate it. They hate what he's doing.

And you know what? That's a good thing in a relationship with God. When you stand for something like that when everybody else around sees you and what you're doing, you think God isn't well pleased with that and can't use that? Because He can. And that's our part. It doesn't matter whether somebody does, in this sense, like they wanted to take his life. It doesn't matter, we're in God's hands. If that happens we're in God's hands. What can be better?

Now, do we want to experience certain physical things that are hard and difficult and painful? Absolutely not. But sometimes those things happen, whatever it might be. But sometimes even the disdain of others around us, of people we know, sometimes people can't stand against that. Because we don't want to be seen as "that different," whatever that definition might be at a moment in time, to be looked down upon, in the sense of our human nature, to be disliked, to be hated by others. But if there's a purpose in it you have to do it because it doesn't matter. We already know what people think.

We have to understand that's what's coming more and more because there's going to be a lot of mixed feelings out there when things begin to happen, of things we don't really comprehend yet. So if this is in our minds, if we understand our relationship with God, and to understand yes, it's going to be difficult. It's not going to last long; we're going to get through it to the other side here and it's going to be swift, but it has to happen because this is the end of an age and we're all called to be a part of that.

There are different situations where we're going to be sent out, in the sense of situations that happen in our lives, that we may not know until we're there to that moment, and we have to take a stand.

So they said to one another, Who has done this thing? So when they enquired and asked it was said that Gideon, the son of Joash, had done this. Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out your son, that he may die. This is how they felt! What do you do? Well, in this case here it was up to the father here and what he was going to say and how he was going to respond. But Gideon already knew, that's why he felt the way he did when God told him to do what he did. God told him, "Peace. Peace be with you. It's going to be with you. You're not going to die. I'm here."

So they said, bring out your son that he may die because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image, the asherah that was beside it. But Joash said to all who had made their stand... In other words, this is what the words mean here as to what they were doing. They made a stand, in essence, for what they believed. Gideon made a stand for what he believed. He was going to do what God had given him to do.

They were making a stand for Baal, for asherah, and so forth. That's what these words are about.

It says, **But Joash said to all who made their stand, to contend or to strive for Baal...** That's what the proper translation of this is all about because this is what they were doing. They were upset because of what had happened to Baal. It'd been torn down. They were upset because of the wooden image of Asherah that was underneath that bull in the offering that was there. They were taking a stand for what they believed in. Gideon had made his stand.

So again, a very physical thing, but for us they're spiritual (and physical), because they both go together. There are things that happen physically around us or with people around us, and again, this thing of where we're headed. That's why we're talking about these things. Because of the Seven Thunders, and we're not even to the events of the Trumpets yet. But as things continue on this is going to become far, far greater and this world around us is going to turn more like this. It truly is. Because when it's being destroyed, when things are happening to the level they're going to happen, people are going to be tested to their limits in the world; and we're going to be tried as well. But God's with us just as He was with Gideon and with his army and what took place.

But Joash said to all who make their stand, to contend or to strive for Baal, Do any need to save him? Do you need to save Baal? Do you need to save asherah? Let any who would contend for him be put to death this morning. In other words, if you have to do this they should be put to death. If you have to go fight his battles for him, he can't do it, then that individual should be put to death. Pretty strong language coming from the father, who says this, part of this belonged to him. Here is his own bull, bulls that had been used.

If he is a god, let him contend for himself because that his altar has been torn down. Now, there is no doubt here that he was given help by God to say the things that he did, moved to say those things that he did. Because there's a reason why things are written the way they are sometimes. Because God's involved. He can inspire, move, and motivate individuals in what they do and how they do it. This was because of his love for his son and so he's able to be helped and worked with in that regard.

Verse 32—Therefore, on that day he called him Gideon-Jerubbaal. It's a word that means "Let Baal contend." That's what the word means, "Let Baal contend for himself." So, that's what he called Gideon. So, you have put people to this point, to let Baal contend. You are the responsible one for having done this and let them contend for Baal. Fine. "Let Baal contend for his altar torn down."

So again, they took their stand around him, and he said what he did toward the group there, that Baal can do this on his own. That's the name he gave, added name, if you will, just an expression for him, about his son, referred to him in that regard.

Then all the Midianites, Amalekites, and all the people of the east gathered together, and crossed over, and encamped in the valley of Jezreel. So here they are gathering together now in a greater force coming up against them.

But the spirit of the Eternal came upon Gideon to blow the trumpet. Now, we don't know exactly how long this was, but some of these things, they're not a very long period of time here. But it talks about this particular case here where it says that "the spirit of the Eternal came upon Gideon." So, God was working with him. He was moving him to do the things that he did, and He moved him in this respect to blow the trumpet, and special significance that all this has because it's about war and it's about them gathering together in war.

...and the Abi-ezerites gathered behind him. So, because he took the kind of stand he did, because his father took the stand that he did, that family took a stand and they got behind Gideon. The knowledge of God, because the prophet had already been sent in to tell them, to warn them of the things they had done, "You haven't obeyed God," this is in their minds.

"And so, the reason these things are happening to you is because you have not been obeying God. He delivered you out of Egypt, He gave you this land, and what have you done?" "So, Baal is one of the things you've done. The asherah is one of the things you have done." Now his son has been moved to destroy them and they're moved by this, incredibly so, so they get behind Gideon.

It's amazing how God can work with people, and large groups of people to move them. He was doing this. God was moving them to respond to various things here. There were certain things, inclinations that they had desire for as far as family is concerned, and then God can work with that to encourage that, to motivate that. And that's what He did, very powerful so.

But the spirit of the Eternal came upon Gideon to blow the trumpet; and the Abi-ezerites gathered behind him. Then he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. So it's kind of difficult to grasp all this. But again, God has to move people, and this has happened over and over again throughout the Old Testament, where God moved different ones to respond at times like this because of the power of His holy spirit working in them to call them. It's like being drawn, to be motivated to do something that you want to be behind.

And so here it is, they understood what the prophet had said. He'd been sent throughout the land to do this, to tell them this. This was sent and people listened. Then they see the armies

coming in there like they were up against them, so it's either be destroyed now or fight. They're moved because of Gideon's actions, because of what he did.

These stories, they spread. So, it doesn't go into a lot here about why all of a sudden now what did he say, what was the message that went out to them, but they were moved by it enough to gather together.

And so it says here, **the messengers went throughout Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet him.** So, this is an awesome thing that took place, that God moved them.

I think of things we're going to go through and go into that we don't grasp the power of Almighty God to move people, that there are going to be people who are going to begin to change because of what's happening out here as well. There is going to be an affinity towards you. There are going to be far more masses of individual who hate you. But to those who take a liking, to those who are moved to receive you, to those, there are scriptures about this end-time that have to do with favor that God gives, and even of certain tribes that are involved, in the sense of still part of Israel, who are going to, in essence, help take care of God's people.

So again, God has the power to take care of us, to deliver us. It doesn't mean it's not going to be hard, doesn't mean it's not going to be difficult at times, but we take our stand, God takes His. He gives us what we need. He gives us the favor we need, whatever it is.

So again, we need to understand some of those analogies of a story like this, and that's why this is being given as a series, because of where we're going. Because there's going to be a lot behind this when it's all said and done, before we're finished here, and it's going to be quite swift. But again, awesome that God can give us the favor and the help at any time by different peoples because of what He does in their life.

So it talks about Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali, they came up to meet them. **Verse 36—Then Gideon said to God, If you will save Israel by my hand, as You have said, behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the floor, and if the dew is on the fleece only, and is dry upon the earth, then I will know that You will save Israel by my hand.** So, there is this normal, natural, human doubt. This is a vast army!

I mean, what they saw on the plains there when you talk about Jezreel and what they could see out there, this was no small thing. It was scary. What we're going to see is scary. It's not a small thing, and yet there is favor that God is going to give to us through those things that take place. In this case here it's kind of comical in part here about the fleece. And again, we know the story very well. But it's an awesome thing here, here the fleece is going to have dew on it but all the ground around it is going to be dry. "Then I'll know. That'll be an

encouraging thing when this physical thing takes place and I know that you're going to save Israel by my hand."

And it was so. For he rose up early in the morning and thrust the fleece together, and wrung the dew out of the fleece, a full bowl of water. Then Gideon said to God, Do not let your anger be kindled against me, as I ask to prove one more time here, as I ask this time that the fleece be dry and that the ground around it be wet.

Verse 40 it says, **And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on the ground.** Gideon knew he was having a battle here of doubting that he was really going to be used by God to accomplish this. And so, he'd already seen the things that God had done with him, and it was like, "Just one more time." So, with great respect he came before God with this, and yet pleaded for one more time and God said, "Fine." So, he did the exact reverse.

So again, it's stories like this we know ever so well, and I have made comments how that on a spiritual plane there are things that have happened in my life, like the fleece, with the first two books that were written. That's how they affected me. I've had this affinity toward Gideon for a long, long time, and we've had sermons about it. But there are analogies all the way through here that should be very encouraging to us, that there are times we need help, and we need encouragement, and God gives that to us in different measures.

Judges 7:1—Then Jerubbaal, again, this "Let Baal contend," who is Gideon, and the people who were with him, rose up early and set camp, it says, beside the well of Harod, so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. Later in the story it reveals that in this particular area there were 135,000 who had gathered there. Mind-boggling.

135,000 in this one little area ready to come up against you and there are just a few in their tribes there compared to this vast army and all the camels that were out there and all the animals that were out there. Because they brought them with them to eat, obviously, on the journey, and then they would take whatever they wanted from the Israelites as well. But they'd already been fleecing (no pun intended) them of all their wealth anyway, meaning crops and animals and the like.

Then verse 2 it says, **Then the Eternal said to Gideon, The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, unless Israel lift themselves up against Me, saying, I have saved myself by my own hand.** Again here, as we go through some of the story here it's really incredible what takes place here when you think about the vast numbers, all that were there, and then the few tribes who did come together.

Then in **verse 3** it says, **Go, therefore, and proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead.** So, in other words, of all that had come together there to fight against the Amalekites or the Midianites and that Amalekites and those from the east, it's starting to show the numbers here now of who had come together to fight against them.

Here they are with Gideon. It says, **So of all the people, there were twenty-two thousand who returned.** Mind-boggling. Now, when you have this army together here you know you don't have enough anyway, when you look at the numbers here and look at the numbers that were out there. There's a vast difference in 135,000 in a vast area of the plains out there ready to come up against you, and all of a sudden there, because this was what was given to him to say, to tell them, this is too many, and so basically tell those who are afraid, and so forth, and 22,000 take off? So again here, an incredible thing that God was doing with Gideon at this time. That wasn't the end of it.

And there were ten thousand who remained. Only about a third remained. Now, I think of some of the things even in some of the counts of things that have taken place and where we were at different times within the Church, what had happened after the Apostasy and those who were scattered. We talk about the thirds and so forth. Here we had two-thirds that were already gone. There are about a third that remain.

Then the Eternal said to Gideon, There are still too many people; bring them down to the water and I will put them to the test. So, here you have 10,000 people that are with you and God's telling you this is too many people. You can't have that many go out there to fight them.

I think you'd be about at the point where you'd really be ready to quit, go hide somewhere else, take off, whatever it might be. Anyway, he was really put to the test, and sometimes we are put to a test. I mean, we really are. In the things that are coming, that's why we're going through this, you have to have and ask God for this kind of a mind that regardless of how opposing it seems you take your stand, and you keep going forward. God's there. He'll give you what you need.

He said, "I'm going to put them to the test when they do this." **And it shall be that of whom I say to you, These shall go with you, the same shall go with you; and whoever I say to you, These shall not go with you, the same shall not go.** They're really going to get whittled down now.

So he brought the people down to the water. And the Eternal said to Gideon, Everyone who laps the water with his tongue like a dog laps, him shall you set by himself. Now, I can't comprehend this. This many people coming down and you having to watch all this to see who is going to be separated out and who isn't. So, this was no small task and there had to be

others involved with Gideon to help him in measuring this out to know what to do. It says, **likewise everyone who bows down upon his knees to drink.**

So, this has a lot to do with the story of why we've started with this story in this series of sermons that we're going to go through. It's because this is the mindset that revealed who was of a ready mind, who was on guard, and those who were not. God wasn't going to allow them to be with Gideon, those who were not. Those who had a mindset that was unique in this regard He took and received.

I think of the things we've gone through as a Church that have whittled us down continually in size. And to me, it's by no error or coincidence that we are living this in a very powerful way, we truly are. I think God's been showing that over and over and over again since the first two books.

...likewise everyone who bows down upon his knees to drink. The number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men. So these individuals, they brought the water up and lapped this way as they were looking out. They didn't bow down their heads to the water to lap. They were different. They were marked as being different. That's the story here to learn from this.

So it goes on to say here, **The number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth...** So they brought the water up to their mouth in order to lap it. That's different than the others who bent way over, as it talks about here, that went right down to the water with their heads down.

So it's about war. It's about fighting. It's about being on guard. It's about being alert. Those others, the others, they weren't being alert at all. But there were others who were. That's the story here to learn from.

But the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. 9,700 of them out of 10,000. Mind-boggling. Only 300 brought the water up to their mouth like this in order to drink as their eyes were on the horizon around them. They knew what was around them all the time. The others, they didn't.

And the Eternal said to Gideon, By the three hundred who lapped I will save you—Incredible!—and deliver the Midianites into your hand. And let all the other people go every man unto his place. So send them back, let them go. Wherever they came from, let them return to their place. But the 300, you're going to take with you. Incredible.

That's why sometimes I get a bit of a charge out of different ones, and especially in the beginning, when there were different groups and different organizations that were dividing up out of the third that was scattered. A lot of people made choices and decisions by the larger group or the second largest group, because it's almost in people's minds as though

that's where God is because there are more people. It's kind of like those who came to look at the land when they came, when they sent out the spies, and people tend to associate themselves with a larger number. The fewer? It's just carnal human nature.

And so it is in a case like this, and so it has been in the Church of God, that people make choices like that. A lot of people made those choices, and it's not the right choice. It's because of the truth. It's because of what you believe that people should have made their choices when it comes to God and the truth of God and so forth. That puts people to the test.

A lot of people made choices because of friends or because of family, because they went with a certain larger organization so others went together because they're friends and they're close. That's not the reason. The reasons? For what is true. You have to make your stand, and it's not going to be comfortable. You have to stand up against others.

Verse 9—Then it came to pass the same night, that the Eternal said to him, Arise, go and descend upon the army; for I have delivered it into your hand. But if you fear to go down, go down to the host with Phurah your servant. So it's like, go down, take them, fight them. But He says, basically, "If you're hesitant here, you're not ready to go down, take your servant and sneak down into the camp" and you shall hear what they're saying. Afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down and descend upon the army.

So in other words, by what you're going to witness, because you're going to sneak down there with Phurah, and the two of you go down into the camp, by what you're going to hear it's going to give you strength, by what you're going to experience here.

Then went he down, and it says here, with his servant outside of the armed men, it says, of the host. And then the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand of the sea for multitude. I can't imagine armies being like that back then where you just look out over a plain. You're up on a hill and you look out over this plain and all these fires and all the people that are out there, like it says here, like grasshoppers, spread out.

I remember Big Sandy when there was about 5,000 or so, in Big Sandy campground. About 5,000 in Piney Woods. So down over this area here there are about 33 streets, if I remember rightly, paved roads, and in between these pines and places where people could put their tents. It was massive, and to see them come out of the campgrounds in the mornings up to what we called the Tabernacle Building, was just a giant building, metal construction. Anyway, they'd come up out of there in droves to go into the building. Then people were staying in motels, hotels, and other things. I think that place held around 12,000 or so.

Incredible experience to have something like this, but 135,000, to look out over a vast area where people are camped with all of the animals that are there, this was kind of condensed because they were all real close to each other. But when you're in a military situation like this you're spread out over an incredible area. That would be terrifying. It really would. And 300 of you? So, Gideon and Phurah, they go down to the camp that night, and this is a part of the story.

So Gideon, it says, had arrived and there was a man who was telling about a dream to his comrade, a dream that he'd had, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and all of a sudden a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian. Now, I don't know why you would have this big cake of barley. It doesn't seem too terrifying to me. I don't get all this, of why this analogy is being used, but it must have had some meaning here to Gideon that I don't fully comprehend or why even was the individual saying this.

But he said this is what I saw, I had this dream, **and all of a sudden this cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and went into a tent, and struck it so that it fell, and overturned it, and the tent remained flattened.** So again here, here is a tent. I don't know.

Then his comrade answered and said, This is nothing except the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash. Now, anyway, how he was given this, what was in their minds, whether some of the story of what Gideon had done, why this came out of his mouth, I don't know. But for the other individual to say this, perhaps God just giving him these words in order to inspire Gideon, it doesn't say.

But anyway kind of a strange thing here, this big roll of bread came tumbling down and flattened the tent. He says, **This can be nothing except the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash.** So, I guess in this particular case, whatever it was, because he heard that it encouraged him. It's like, how can you go down to a camp and they don't know us and he's saying my name and this tent of the Midianites, the Amalekites, it's destroyed.

So it was when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he bowed down, and returned to the host of Israel, and said... So again, that's all it took. Whatever God worked with in his mind to give him encouragement. He's going to do it. He's going to follow through now. **Arise; for the Eternal has delivered into your hand the army of Midian.** Still had to be an incredible experience. I mean, 300 people and you're going to go fight against a massive army of 135,000? Seems insane.

Verse 16—So he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and torches within the pitchers. So they were hiding it so it couldn't be seen. Here they have these pitchers, they have the torches, they're lit, they're going to go down the hill. **And he said to them, Look on me, and**

do likewise. It's reflecting here that things are to be done in a unified manner, orderly manner.

I think of God's Church, as small as we are, we're still to learn those things and do things in a unified orderly manner. I think of the Covid thing we've gone through, and it doesn't matter what side of an issue, it doesn't matter anything about any part of it except for what God's Church decides to do in a unified manner.

It's as simple as what Herbert Armstrong said about make-up, no make-up, make-up. You can kind of get whiplash there, but you do it because that's what God gave to us, so that's what we're going to do. It's just the way it is.

And yet there are still murmuring to this day in God's Church over some of this stuff. Some who don't agree with some of the things that have gone on. Some who don't agree with some of the meetings and getting together in some areas. I still hear rumblings week by week, time to time on some of that kind of stuff.

So anyway, what an incredible thing. After all we've gone through to not understand it's what we do in unity and oneness that God's concerned with. As God told Gideon, "You're going to do this as one person." It's as if you're one. That means your unified because that's just the way it is.

And yet it blows my mind that some of this still goes on. I would say to certain individuals who feel that way, if you still have these things you disagree with, you still have these things that you're holding on to because it's your own personal belief, you know, a mask or no mask, a shot or no shot, you don't understand what was given to God's Church and why. So where is God and where is God working with you?

Can you do something separate that the Body is not doing? Can you not be in agreement on a little physical thing? It's a little physical thing. It's like, "It's going to creep up later on in life and I may die! I may get the twinges or something, you know." If God is in the picture and you do something because it's God and you believe that? "Well, I believe God. I'm trusting in God, that I don't have to do this because God will take care of us."

When you do something opposite of what God's apostle has told you and you think that somehow you have this relationship outside of that, it's not understanding how God's spirit works. It's not understanding how God's government works. It's a very minor and small thing.

So, even to this day after all that's happened I still have to chasten verbally some who are still resisting and fighting. Think, what on earth? What army are you in? Maybe of one or two or three that are out there? You all need to get together or something because this isn't it. So, candidly, I question, who are you with? Because it's not God, it's not God's Church.

That should scare the you-know-what out of somebody, but it doesn't. They hang around, they continue to chirp, to chirp at others, send things out to others, want to communicate why they believe what they do, want you to agree with them. I hope everyone is taking their stand. It's an opportunity to take your stand. We don't do that in the Church of God. It's divisive. It's spiritual. It's not a physical thing, it's spiritual. And what is incredible to me, it's about the Body of Christ. It's about family, and some don't understand that.

I'm sorry. I hate to have to go through those things at different times, but I think we all need to be sobered by the reality this is still going on. That speaks volumes to me about those from whom it comes, because you're cut off from God. You're so cut off from God you don't even grasp it. You think you're not cut off from God? I'm telling you, you're cut off from God. You don't have God's spirit coming into your life; you're doing it on your own.

Why should I have to say something like that? But I say it so that maybe all of us can grasp and understand how serious the calling God has given to us, how God communicates His word, His truth to us. It's not somewhere where we're doing it alone somewhere and He's talking to us differently than He is the Body. It doesn't work that way. So either we have those kinds of convictions, or we don't. I'll boldly speak those things. Because someone has the audacity, the boldness to speak against it, I'll have the audacity, the strength, and the boldness to correct it. I don't flinch from that one iota. I've been through this too many times to protect the Body of Christ.

So again here, it talks about how he divided the 300 into three companies. **He put a trumpet in every man's hand, with an empty pitcher, and torches within the pitchers. And he said to them, look to me and do likewise.** That's what God says to His people, "Listen to this and do likewise." This is where God speaks to us. This is how God communicates His truth to us. This is how we've come to know the truths we do since the last 18 with Herbert Armstrong. All the rest then God has given to us in a certain way.

That's why this last book it's gone through to specify those things, that this in itself is a testimony as to where God and how God is working. I know that the vast majority then are convicted of that. And those who aren't, then I don't get that. Why be around?

So we're to do things in an orderly, unified fashion. That's what God wants. He wants us to be together, to be at one, to work together as one. That's why I love that expression, "You're going to be as one man," one person. "You're going to accomplish it." That means because you're unified, you're of the same mind.

And behold, when I come down to the outside of the camp, it shall be that as I do, so shall you do. When I blow with the trumpet, I and all who are with me shall then blow the trumpets. So there are times that come in our life where we're to do certain things. We

don't know what's coming or how certain things are coming, but if we have attentive ears we're going to hear when it comes.

He says, "When I blow it, then you blow it." ...also on every side of all the camp. So here these three different companies are going to come down into the camp from different directions, coming down on the sides of the hills in the way that they are, spread out, divided up like they were, but all in unity.

He talks about then coming down, it says, and this is what they're to say, **The sword of the Eternal, and of Gideon.** Keeping our eyes on God. God is the one that is having us do this, but this is from God and we're doing it because God is with us and He's given us, He's sent us to do this task, whatever that task might be.

So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch. So even this is interesting how God works and sets things in array. So they came to the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; so they had just set the watch. Then they blew the trumpets. So here hadn't even gotten settled yet in the next watch, just barely getting into place, and this is the moment that God inspired Gideon to do what he did.

It says, **Then they blew the trumpets, and broke the pitchers in their hands.** And so, imagine having these torches in your hands and you break the pitcher on the ground, whatever, because now the torch is being held up so that there is this fire that is coming off this torch because they were coming down the side of the hill with the torches inside, and you couldn't see it, but all of a sudden when it's broken now this flame is there. All along the side of the hill and these trumpets, "The sword of Gideon and of the Eternal!" Awesome!

And they blew the trumpets, and broke the pitchers with their hands, and it says, and the three companies blew the trumpets, and broke the pitchers, and held the torches in their left hands, and the trumpets in the right hand, and they blew with it. And they cried, The sword of the Eternal, and of Gideon. They took their stand with every man in his place. What a beautiful thing.

So this is something physical and we do it spiritually. We're together, we all are at one with those through whom God is working. Because sometimes it becomes apparent that God is not working with everyone because they're not at one, we're not at one. That reveals who is at one when we do things the same in unity and harmony and oneness. So different things will bring those things to the surface and reveal what is true.

Anyway, it says, **They took their stand with every man in his place round about the camp, and all the host ran, and cried, and fled.** I can't comprehend that, that God moved in a very powerful way to send fear throughout the camp. Because it wasn't just because of what they

saw. God magnified what was there and the sound that was there to start some moving, and as that begins to move throughout the camp and they're heading away from it the others want to go in the same direction. It kind of has a rippling effect. Here they don't know what they're running from, but they're running, they're taking off.

So again, I love stories like this because we are to take our stand. We move forward in a battle together. We have to see it as a battle. We have to grasp what God is doing in our lives, that He hasn't called us just to sit and listen and go our merry ways and then come back next Sabbath. Because in time some things became that way in the Church, especially through Laodicea, and the reality is that's not our life. We have battles to fight constantly.

So anyway, I wanted to go through that particular story here today just to set the stage of the importance of those 300 who lapped in a unique way. They were alert, they were on guard to dangers around them. All things that we're looking at in here, this is what we have to live day-by-day-by-day, to be spiritually on guard, to be spiritually alert and understand, we're getting ready to go into a horrible time in front of us right now and it's a matter of our being prepared and spiritually ready.