

## Number 4 Issue 1

"Diggings" Subscriptions  
c/o Melanie McNutt  
6425 Ridge Run Drive  
Knoxville, TN 37921  
mamcnutt@aol.com

Explorations in Antiquity Center  
130 Gordon Comm. Dr.  
LaGrange, GA 30241  
(706) 885-0363  
www.explorationsinantiquity.net

Jim Fleming  
Lecture Bureau  
c/o Sally Dowland  
212 Knox  
Houston, TX 77007  
Phone: (713) 863-1769  
sdowland@mindspring.com

Biblical Resources  
Educational Material  
P.O. Box 3900  
LaGrange, GA 30241  
Phone: (706) 885-0363  
Fax: (706) 885-0364  
www.biblicalresources.net

Biblical Resources  
Study Center  
c/o Hannaniah Pinto  
P.O. Box 3900  
LaGrange, GA 30241  
biblicalresources@earthlink.net  
www.biblicalresources.net

## LESSONS FROM THE MOUNTAINS

### GIDEON'S STORY

There are many stories in the Bible which take place on mountains. In this series of Diggings we will be exploring the settings and people involved in those stories, and in the process, learn new insights about how God works in our lives.

We begin on a mountain called Mt. Gilboa which is mentioned initially in Judges 6-8. This mountain is the scene of Gideon gathering the Israelites for their confrontation against the people of Midian. Before we get to that story, we need some historical background.



*Midian (lower right) and Mt. Gilboa (top left)*

Most of the desert people are "ites:" Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, and Midianites. Midian territory included a huge plateau on the southeastern side of the Dead Sea in the country now called Jordan. In the time of the Judges Midian also included the southwestern side of the Dead Sea now called the Negev of Israel. These two regions are desert areas receiving only 5-12 inches of rain a year. The desert peoples were shepherds who live in the "land of milk". Their main produce was goat milk and goat cheese which they traded for grain and other produce from towns at springs and nearby oases. The Book of Exodus records that when Moses fled from Egypt, he went to Midian, married the daughters of a Midianite priest named Jethro, and became a shepherd. The Midianites worshipped God sometimes used bronze snakes to ward off evil. You may remember there was one occasion when the Israelites were in Midian that they were told to make bronze snakes and raise them above the congregation. (Num 21:8)

In our story Gideon and his people were living in the "land of honey," in the northern area of Galilee. The Bible calls the land of farmers the land of honey because their main produce was jam (honey) from the fruit of the trees. The land of Israel described in the last chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy as not being like the land of Egypt "from which you came and watered your garden with your feet." They actually had a wheel with cups on it that you could

pedal which would bring water up and pour it in an irrigation trench. It was predictable and it was your responsibility. The land of honey was described as a land which God water from the heavens. Galilee receives 20-40 inches of rain per year and has rich soil, making it a wonderful place to grow crops and fruit trees.

Due to the fact that Midian and Israel lived so close together, there was constant potential conflict between them. When the farmers were strong, they drove the desert peoples south and eastward. When the farmers are weak the desert peoples encroach north and westward with their flocks and herds. These cycles played out in the Book of Judges, where our story is found. There was no standing army in Israel during this period of time, so the Israelites raised up a series of judges to help free them when an enemy began to push into their territory.



*Threshing in a grape press at EIA*

The story of Gideon is found in Judges 6-7. The Midianites were encamped on the Plain of Jezreel. Their black goat-hair tents were so numerous they looked like a swarm of locusts. The Midianites would have slingstones, bows and arrows to intimidate the Israelites. Gideon, was threshing his wheat harvest low in a pit carved out to collect grape juice. Had there been no enemies around he would have been threshing on a high place where the wind could easily blow the chaff away.

While Gideon was threshing wheat in the grape vat, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him that God has chosen him to free the Israelites from the Midianites. Gideon then gathered an army on top of Mt. Gilboa in preparation for confronta-

tion. He had at his disposal a total of 32,000 warriors. When he looked down at the Midianites in the Jezreel Valley, the Bible described their number, “as impossible to count their men or camels” (Judges 6:5). He naturally wondered if he understood God’s plan.

We now find that Gideon, in a sincere desire to discern God’s will, decided to put God to the test. He laid out a sheep’s skin to see whether it would or would not get wet with the dewfall that night. It was this story which has given us the expression, “Putting out the fleece.” Dewfall occurs heavier at higher elevations, such as the tops of mountains, which were often covered by clouds.

Gideon’s first test was to lay the fleece out and then he challenged God to soak the fleece with dew but keep the rest of the ground dry. He was very generous and gave God eight hours to act! The next morning when he awoke, just as he had prayed, the fleece was wet and the ground around it was dry.

We can see the human side of Gideon with what happens next. Perhaps the reader has noticed sometimes when someone seeks God guidance in demanding circumstances, one later wonders, “Is this a coincidence?” Gideon is not so sure he should do this, but he came to God again and said, “Don’t let your anger burn against me, but let me ask you one more time. This time let the fleece be dry and the ground be wet.” He again gave God eight hours to act. When he woke up the next morning, sure enough the fleece was dry and the ground was wet! Did you know that if there had been a heavy dewfall accompanied by wind, fleece’s moisture above ground would evaporate, but the moisture on the ground would remain wet. If on one night the weather remained calm, the fleece would remain wet; but if another night had a slight breeze, the fleece would become dry.



*Ein Harod Spring from the cave at Mt. Gilboa*

Gideon had gathered all of his troops together on Mt. Gilboa, probably for security purposes. At the bottom of Mount Gilboa there was a cave from which a beautiful stream flowed, known as Ein Harod (Judges 7:1). The spring, however, was near the Midianite encampment. The Lord “tested” Gideon, who felt it was sufficient cause to go into battle merely because a fleece was wet or dry. The text has God telling Gideon that his army was too large! He was told to let those “whose hearts were not in the battle” go home. If they had stayed, they might have demoralized the others. Unexpectedly (at least to Gideon) 10,000 soldiers took him up on his offer and left for home.

Clearly Gideon must have been discouraged by the withering of his army. But his testing is still not finished. The Lord tells Gideon to take the men to the spring of Ein Harod, near the plain where the Midianites were encamped. There may have been some forest cover that allowed them to sneak down to the spring. Gideon then watched them drink. 9,700 of them were on their knees scooping water with their hands and drinking. The other 300 laid down and lapped the water like dogs. Gideon was told to go into battle with the 300. Perhaps their posture enabled them to watch the movement of the Midianite army while drinking. The Israelite army was now narrowed down from 32,000 to 300. Gideon must have felt overwhelmed to say the least. But we know that before the 22,000 went home they left their 220 trumpets. In military custom, one ram’s horn was used for each 100 men. Before the 9,700 went home they left their 97 trumpets. So now Gideon’s remain three hundred men have at least one trumpet for each man. Now that Gideon has only 300 men he began to use his head, as he should have

from the beginning. He sent spies down to the Midianite camp at night, to report back on the morale of the Midianite army. They heard them talking about their dreams and visions which they believed were omens about something bad about to happen. This was a very important piece of military intelligence to have as he planned his attack. The Israelites then made 300 large earthen jars to use as part of a surprise attack. They lit the torches as a test and stuck them into the jars. The oxygen depletion made the torch become glowing embers, then they pulled them out and they reignited in the air.

During the changing of the Midianite guard at about midnight, the Israelite army of 300 snuck up to the perimeter of the camp. Each man had a torch in a jar in one hand and a ram’s horn trumpet in the other. They encircled the camp as the Midianites changed guards. The Israelites broke the jars and shouted, “The sword of the Lord and the sword of Gideon,” and then they blew the trumpets. The Midianites, knowing that every trumpet is for 100 men, believed they were surrounded by an army of 30,000. Confusion filled the camp and in the darkness they ended up fighting some of their own troops. Those who remained alive fled from the valley.

This is an interesting story for many reasons. May I remind you that Gideon, eventually used his head, trusted God with courage, and tried to make a wise decision, not relying merely upon a sheepskin being wet or dry.

**LESSON ONE:** *It is not always wise to make important decisions based only on unusual circumstances.* If you’re like me, many times I wish I had two phones on my desk. A black phone and a red phone. I wish that whenever someone wanted to speak to me, they would use the black phone. But when God wanted to say something to me I wish God would use the red phone to clarify this is a message from God. Part of our faith journey is discovering God likes to use the black phone like everybody else. God wants us to grow in faith, and courage, and insight. One wonders with 32,000 men in his army, if Gideon’s men would have yelled, “The sword of Gideon and the sword of the Lord.” But you can bet your boots with only 300 they yelled, “The sword of the Lord and the sword of Gideon.”



*Mt. Gilboa and the Jezreel Valley Plain*

**LESSON TWO:** *God wants us to grow in courage, faith and insight.* The battle against the Midianites certainly looked differently climbing back up Mt. Gilboa after the victory than they did walking down. At the start they trusted their numbers. At the end they understood that God had provided the victory for them. They had grown in courage, faith and insight. I am sure the same has happened to you. Your Midianite experiences are always easier to understand looking backwards than forwards. Yet, you realize after the victory how much you have grown spiritually. The next time you are faced with a Midianite situation you will have more courage, faith and insight which will help you through the battle.

I was speaking at a conference in a Latin American country and some people were driving me from the church to the next engagement where I was speaking. Along the way they were talking about the lecture and other things, and I was able to overhear a fascinating discussion. The driver and the man in the front seat were talking about a new house and the passenger seat man said the address was 3200 such and such street and that he had \$32,000 in his bank account. He believed that unusual circumstance was a sign from God that he should buy the house. The driver asked a wise, insightful question: "What other debts do you have?" We honor the Lord when we act wisely; God never asks us to be foolish.

The world of God's Spirit is within. Sometimes unusual circumstances happen around us and we should note them. Maybe the Lord is trying to say something through them. But if you make a decision based only upon that unusual circumstance you might not be seeing the entire picture. An unusual circumstance is a yellow light, not a red or green light. Note unusual circumstances.

**LESSON THREE:** *Don't limit God with preconceived choices; seek right decisions.* One of the problems with using unusual circumstances for guidance is that when one puts God to the test as Gideon did, one limits the possibilities. If one says to God, "A or B, wet or dry," then one is limited by those two possibilities. What if God wanted to say "C" or "none of the above?" What if God had wanted to tell Gideon, "Your answer is later. We really need to be confronting the Midianite problem so let's spend the next year inspiring and preparing the people"?

The same thing happened when the Church was

young. Do you recall Judas' tragic suicide? Now there are no longer twelve disciples, only eleven. The voters decided that they needed to replace Judas immediately. They limited themselves to two possibilities: to vote or not to vote. And so they cast lots and Matthias was chosen. Now, I'm sure the Lord used Matthias, but isn't it interesting we do not hear of Matthias again after this event? What if the Lord had wanted to say, "We probably will have a replacement for Judas, but he hasn't gone down the Damascus road yet." By limiting God to "yes or no" about Matthias, there was no way the Lord could say, "wait, not yet." Paul had a very hard time in his letters convincing people that he should be considered one of the apostles. How did Matthias' selection affect Paul's ministry? We will never know.

Surely the Lord can work in spite of our bad decisions. The Lord never tires of trying to work with us. Yet it may be easier for God to work with us when we remember these lessons from the Gideon story on Mt. Gilboa:

1. Note unusual circumstances. Note them, but they do not determine yes or no.
2. Any unusual circumstance is a yellow light, not a green light or a red light. It means pay attention, something is going to change. Listen and watch carefully.
3. Don't limit God. Base decisions on insight and reflection because the decision should be based upon insight into what is right, not just on what is astonishing or unusual.

In closing we should be reminded that the realm of God's Spirit is within. In our uncertain times we are to pray, we are to read Scripture, we are to be wise and speak with one another about ideas and counsel and see if a sense of rightness, (not necessarily ease), comes with that decision.

**NOW AVAILABLE:** Hannaniah Pinto and Jim Fleming's new book: *Jesus' Last Night with His Disciples*. Over 500 photographs, 2,214 subject index, over 970 Biblical texts illustrated. For more information call 706-885-0363 or email: [biblicalresources@earthlink.net](mailto:biblicalresources@earthlink.net).