

The Story of Gideon: Part 5—“Outnumbered”?

Ever feel outnumbered? It's not hard to feel outnumbered if you are a Christian in this world today. I sort of felt like giving into that feeling when I read an article this week about the legislation recently passed in the U. S. House of Representative dubbed the so-called “*Equality Act of 2019.*” The amazing thing is that this law passed in the House by an overwhelming margin of 236 votes to only 173. It might as well be called the “*Christian Persecution Act,*” because that is what its ultimate effect would be. If you are not familiar with the *Equality Act*, a good summary is provided in the most recent issue of *Decision* magazine, which is a publication of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. It tells us that the *Equality Act* “**would forbid churches, religious schools and other religious nonprofits from drawing their workforces from among those who are willing to abide by organizational standards on these subjects.**”¹ In other words, churches and faith-based organizations would be required by law to hire any member of the LGBT community even though the practices of those individuals are directly contrary to the Word of God. Furthermore, the article informs us that “**the rights of parents to make choices for their children on questions of sexuality or gender, including medical treatments, would be superseded by federal civil rights codes. The law would also strip parents of their right to raise and educate their own children if their beliefs contradict government mandates.**”² Kelly Shackelford, president of the conservative *First Liberty* organization, warns that “**the Equality Act attempts to make sure that in all cases LGBT rights trump religious freedom—in every situation. It makes religious freedom a secondary freedom or right.**”³ And, Todd Chasteen, vice president of *Samaritan's Purse*, adds that “**the Equality Act is a federal act, which would mean that we would have to walk around hiding what our belief systems are in all 50 states if this thing ends up being approved.**”⁴ And while it is presently unlikely that the Senate would pass this legislation into law, all that could change with the next election cycle. In fact, Democratic Presidential candidate, Joe Biden, recently spoke at a dinner in Ohio sponsored by a gay rights lobbying group and proudly proclaimed that, if elected, passage of the *Equality Act* would be “the first thing I [will] ask to be done.”⁵

Wow, when there are enough people in this country to elect legislators who have the strength of numbers to move forward with the passage of laws that are so contrary to God's plan for men and women—well, it can just make you feel out-numbered as a Christian in America today. But, I've got good news for you: The reality for Christians is that we never need to feel like we're outnumbered or that we are being overpowered by the forces that stand against us. The Bible repeatedly gives us examples of those who relied upon God, and trusted Him no matter how badly the odds were stacked

up against them. And, these faithful people never came out on the short end of the stick. And in Chapter 7 of the Book of Judges, God teaches Gideon that exact lesson.

If you want to talk about overwhelming odds, then listen to this: ¹ So Jerub-baal (that is, Gideon) and his army got up early and went as far as the spring of Harod. The armies of Midian were camped north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. ² The LORD said to Gideon, “You have too many warriors with you. If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength.” ³ Therefore, tell the people, ‘Whoever is timid or afraid may leave this mountain and go home.’” So 22,000 of them went home, leaving only 10,000 who were willing to fight. ⁴ But the LORD told Gideon, “There are still too many! Bring them down to the spring, and I will test them to determine who will go with you and who will not.” ⁵ When Gideon took his warriors down to the water, the LORD told him, “Divide the men into two groups. In one group put all those who cup water in their hands and lap it up with their tongues like dogs. In the other group put all those who kneel down and drink with their mouths in the stream.” ⁶ Only 300 of the men drank from their hands. All the others got down on their knees and drank with their mouths in the stream. ⁷ The LORD told Gideon, “With these 300 men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites. Send all the others home.” ⁸ So Gideon collected the provisions and rams’ horns of the other warriors and sent them home. But he kept the 300 men with him. The Midianite camp was in the valley just below Gideon.

Judges 7:1-8 (NLT2)

Now, what were the odds that Gideon was going up against in fighting these armies from Midian? Well, he started with 32,000 soldiers—and that’s a pretty good sized army. But what was Gideon up against? As it turns out, this passage doesn’t say how many enemy troops were facing Gideon, but if we peak ahead to Judges 8:10,⁶ it indicates that there were 135,000 fierce warriors in those Midianite armies. In other words, Gideon’s army was less than one-fourth the size of the Midianite forces. Now, with that being the case, you’d think that Gideon needed to do a lot more recruiting before heading into battle. And I would have to believe that Gideon expected the Lord to beef up the number of his troops before proceeding into the fight. But, God did exactly the opposite. Last Sunday, we saw how Gideon tried to test God by “*putting out the fleece.*” And now, God, in turn, was testing Gideon by cutting down the body of his troops. Looking over the situation, the Lord turns to Gideon and tells him, in effect, “***Man, you have way too many guys on your side. Just so you understand that you will not prevail by your own strength in numbers, but only by the intensity of your faith in Me, you need to whittle down the size of your army considerably.***”

So, God tells Gideon to announce that anyone who's afraid of the upcoming battle would get a free ticket home. Now, I have to admit that if I had been one of those soldiers in Gideon's ranks and looked ahead and saw that our army was outnumbered more than by over 4 to 1, they wouldn't have had to make that announcement twice. When they asked if anybody happened to be afraid, I would have been catching the first fast camel back to Goochland. And apparently, I wouldn't have been alone, because there would have been 21,999 guys joining me in booking it out of there.

But, to Gideon's credit, he stood his ground at that point with an army of only 10,000 men, to fight against 135,000. Now that sounds bad enough, but God wasn't finished trimming down Gideon's numbers. God would turn up the heat on this test of faith. And so, He tells Gideon to take his men down to a stream, and to watch how they went about drinking water. The only ones who Gideon was to take into battle were the ones who scooped up water into their hands and drank, rather than putting their mouths down to the water in the stream. You could almost imagine Gideon using his body language to encourage as many as possible to use their hands as ladles—but only 300 men drink in that manner. And that's what Gideon was left with—this tiny band of brothers, so to speak, to fight the mighty Midianite horde. I know that I have been critical of Gideon these past few Sundays, but here we have to admire him. God had tested him, and he passed the test—because Gideon moved forward, even against the terrible odds against him.

Today, when we look around and see the shifting sands of public attitudes as they are piling up against Christians, God is testing our faith as well. And, He does this for at least two reasons. First of all, God does this to reveal to us whether our faith is solid, like a rock, or as spongy as that dew-soaked fleece that Gideon squeezed all the water from in the passage we read last week. Secondly, these tests of faith can serve to build us up in order that God can use us for tasks that are more demanding. Faithful Christians are put through "*the valley of testing*" before they can reach the summit of victory.⁷ I know that most of us are not put at the head of some large army and asked to slay some great foe. We are not necessarily handed such huge tasks. But, we are given daily tests of faith: Will you offer a hand to someone, even though they have treated you badly in the past? Will you refrain from laughing at that dirty joke told at work—and in so doing condone its filthiness? Will you not shake your fist or express your displeasure with some other hand signal when that driver so rudely cuts you off? Yes, these are all little tests to be sure—but, they are daily tests of faith, all the same. You see, we need to pass these tests, if we want to grow in faith—for there are surely much more difficult tests on the horizon, if not from the U. S. Congress, then from some other seemingly overpowering force. Passing

the little daily-life tests of faith is extremely important. Jesus said: “If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones.” Luke 16:10 (NLT2)

Gideon was beginning to see that, because as the story goes on, he led his little band of 300 and routed the massive enemy armies before him by using nothing more than some little tin trumpets and clay pitchers with some small torches inside. Doesn't sound like much of an arsenal does it? Oh—I failed to mention one other weapon that made all the difference for Gideon. It wasn't M-16 rifles or M1 Abram tanks or rocket launchers, or F-35 fighter jets. It wasn't an ICMB armed with multiple nuclear warheads. It was something infinitely more powerful than any of those things. It was the power . . . of God. Gideon and his band of 300 had God on their side. And when you have God on your side supernatural things happen. Miraculous things come about that cannot be explained in any other way but that the Hand of God was at work.

But, here in modern times, does God really offer us miracles in the face of what might seem to be a dark and hopeless situation for Christians? Can we really expect such miracles today? In the past week, I was watching a DVD movie that came out a couple of years ago in which the actor, Gary Oldman, did a remarkable job in playing the role of Winston Churchill. The movie is entitled, *The Darkest Hour*.⁸ The film is, for the most part, historically correct and depicted those dark days in May of 1940 when the Nazi war machine was gobbling up western Europe and had pressed the entire British professional army to the beaches of Dunkirk and was about to drive them into the sea. Approximately 370,000 British and Allied troops, unsupported by any significant friendly air cover, faced an overwhelming onslaught of German troops, spearheaded by armored Panzer divisions, not to mention the German Luftwaffe that ruled the skies. The situation looked hopeless. Some politicians in Britain were crying out for a negotiated peace with Hitler. Prior to this, any *“negotiated peace with Hitler”* usually meant national ruin and disgrace for whomever Hitler was negotiating with. Things, indeed, appeared quite dark. But, through the initiative of Churchill and Admiral Ramsey of the Royal Navy, an expedition of thousands of small civilian fishing boats and pleasure crafts went sailing across the English Channel in a desperate attempt to evacuate all those stranded British soldiers. They dubbed this last-hope plan, *“Operation Dynamo.”* And just before these little boats sailed, King George VI declared a national day of prayer. In fact, the King personally attended a special service at Westminster Abbey in a display of faith during this time of national testing. His faith, and that of the British people, was not unrewarded, for just before the evacuation started, it was estimated that, at most, only 45,000 men could possibly be rescued. And yet, by the fourth of June 1940, approximately 330,000 allied troops had been successfully removed

from the beaches of Dunkirk and ferried across to safety in England. It was rightly named the “*miracle of Dunkirk*.”⁹

You see, it doesn’t matter whether God is working with 300 hundred guys armed with nothing more than pitchers and trumpets, or just a bunch of fishermen and non-professional sailors in little boats crossing the English Channel—God specializes in performing miracles with small and weak things. Now the world has never understood that. The world believes in the mighty and strong crushing the helpless and the weak. But, we are not of this world. We are of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God doesn’t work according to the principles of this world. ²⁷ Instead, God [chooses] things the world considers foolish [“weak” Christians, like us] in order to shame those who think they are wise [like the Joe Biden’s and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s of the world]. And He [chooses] things that are powerless [again, like us] to shame those who are powerful [including both Democrats and Republicans alike, and whoever else who may oppose God’s Will]. ²⁸ God [chooses] things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and [uses] them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. ²⁹ As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God. 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 (NLT2)

Yes, if we go forward alone, we are very weak. But, we are not alone if we have faith in God. And there is nothing that can overcome us if we trust Him through whatever tests we are put to. John Wesley, the great pastor and theologian of the 18th century, could have well been thinking of Gideon and his little band when he said, “***Give me a hundred men who fear nothing but sin, and love nothing but God, and I will shake the gates of hell!***”¹⁰ So there is no reason to be discouraged if you hear that the number of God’s faithful are shrinking in our country. Numbers don’t really matter. ***Faith matters.*** For as Jonathan said to his armor bearer before he whipped up on 20 Philistines: “Let’s go across to the outpost of those pagans. Perhaps the LORD will help us, for nothing can hinder the LORD. He can win a battle whether he has many warriors or only a few!” 1 Samuel 14:6 (NLT2)

It’s a bit sad that some churches today are so caught up on numbers and give so little attention to the Word of God. They may think that they are strong because of their huge attendance and their budgets. But, God’s blessings are not a function of numbers. Rather, God’s blessings are a function of faith. I’d rather be among a band of faithful believers in a small church, than be part of a mega-church with a 2,000 seat cathedral whose members adhere to the immoral tenets of the *Equality Act*. Maybe it’s time to ignore the numbers, and just trust in God. If you have faith, it doesn’t matter if thousands of Midianites and all their war-camels are standing against you. We may appear as weak and vulnerable as those little boats that bravely sailed the English Channel toward the beaches of Dunkirk. And yet with faith, it doesn’t matter if you are being pursued by Panzer tanks or being pommelled by Stuka dive

bombers. And it certainly doesn't matter if you are being harassed by the left-wing members of Congress who look upon God's Word with utter disdain.

Again, if you have faith that makes all the difference in the world, because it is then that God is on your side. And, "if God is on our side, who can ever be against us?" Romans 8:31 (TLB) Someone might wring their hands in fear and answer by saying, "***Oh, but the entire world will be against us!***" True—but Jesus reminds us that, "The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world!" John 16:33 (TEV) So we can say with confidence, "The LORD is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?" Hebrews 13:6 (NLT2) Think of it this way. When Moses was reflecting upon the exodus from Egypt, thinking perhaps of the time that Pharaoh's army was descending upon the people of Israel before the waters of the Red Sea crashed down on the Egyptians, he composed a Psalm. It was Psalm 118. It's likely that Jesus sang this Psalm with His disciples after the Last Supper, just before He headed to the Garden of Gethsemane, and ultimately to Calvary and the Cross.¹¹ It is a Psalm of faith that says: "My enemies did their best to kill me, but the LORD rescued me." Psalm 118:13 (NLT2) Keep the faith. He will rescue you as well—no matter how badly the odds may be against you.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
July 14, 2019
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¹ Jerry Pierce, "The Equality Act: A Clear and Present Danger," *Decision*, Vol. 60, No. 7-8, July-August 2019, p. 8.

² *Ibid*, 10.

³ *Ibid*.

⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵ *Ibid*, 8.

⁶ Judges 8:10 (NLT2) By this time Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with 15,000 warriors—all that remained of the allied armies of the east, for 120,000 had already been killed.

⁷ Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Available (Judges)*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2003), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 120.

⁸ *The Darkest Hour*, distributed by Focus Features and Universal Pictures, 2017.

⁹ Luke Slater, "10 Facts About the Miracle of Dunkirk," www.historyhit.com, Nov. 23, 2018.

¹⁰ Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Available (Judges)*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2003), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 120.

¹¹ Matthew 26:30 (NLT2) Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives. See: MacArthur Study Bible, fn. on Matthew 26:30, p. 1991.)