

P_(h)urah

Gideon's helper

Judges 7:9-15

7:9 And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him [*Gideon*], Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand. **7:10** But if thou fear to go down, go thou with **Phurah** thy servant down to the host: **7:11** And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with **Phurah** his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host.

7:12 And 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 by the sea side for multitude. **7:13** And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. **7:14** And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host.

7:15 And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.

an overlooked helper

Gideon is well known as one of the key people in the Book of Judges. He led the fight against the huge army of the Midianites and others in chapter seven. His lowly servant, P(h)urah, however, is usually overlooked.

In part, this is only natural since servants are usually less important than their masters. Moreover, P(h)urah is only mentioned in one Bible passage, while Gideon's name appears 55 times, including once in the New Testament, in Hebrews 11:32. Thus Gideon is a hero of faith, while his helper is mostly unknown.

That said, P(h)urah comes to our attention at a critical moment in the life of Gideon, shortly before the famously successful, night-time attack by Gideon's three hundred (7:19-22). Perhaps that great victory would never have been if it were not for P(h)urah's help.

negatives

God did not directly say that Gideon was afraid to go into the Midianite camp by himself, but the conditional (“if”) clause in 7:10 and his subsequent action imply that he was. So was Gideon as cowardly as the twenty-two thousand people who were sent home in 7:3? (See line A-3.)

Gideon is easy to criticize, but we must be careful not to be overly critical. The same is true of Barak, as seen in 4:8-9. Like Gideon, Barak seemed to be fearful and hesitant to act on his own. So Deborah went with Barak much like P(h)urah went with Gideon.

As in other studies in this neglected people series, it is easy to complain about the lack of information. We know almost nothing about P(h)urah, other than the fact that he was Gideon’s servant. Points B-2 through B-4 below are similar and related complaints of this type.

What we do know is that Gideon was God’s man for the time and that P(h)urah was far less prominent. So why is P(h)urah mentioned at all? He could have been omitted or left unnamed. Is he included to help show how weak Gideon was or for some other reason. (See line A-5.)

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A	() Gideon needed help.
A-1	() He was probably afraid to go by himself (7:9-10).
A-2	() He often needed to be encouraged (6:36-40, 7:9-15).
A-3	() He was like the cowardly soldiers who were sent home (7:3).
A-4	() God was angry at Gideon because of his unbelief (6:39, 7:10).
A-5	() P(h)urah is included to help show how weak Gideon was.
B	() P(h)urah was only a helper.
B-1	() He did not do much.
B-2	() His background is unknown.
B-3	() He is not in any other passage.
B-4	() Nothing that he said is recorded.
B-5	() Gideon was much more important.
B-6	() He was only Gideon’s servant (7:10-11).
B-7	() Gideon should have gone without him (7:9).

positives

Gideon is often criticized for asking God to give him a sign to confirm his calling. Yet God answered him each time without showing any anger or impatience. See 6:17-21 and 6:36-40. Moreover in chapter seven God gave Gideon an additional sign that he would be victorious over the Midianites through an overheard conversation between two enemy soldiers (7:13-14).

All this shows that it was God who enabled Gideon and gave him victory. Yet P(h)urah had a role to play in this as well. How important was the servant's help?

It is difficult to find an adequate phrase to describe P(h)urah. Was he a good helper, a special helper, a fitting helper, a big help, timely help, necessary help, all of these, or something else? In a way, he was only a helper, as suggested on the negative worksheet on the previous page. But this phrase implies that he could have been easily replaced, which was probably not the case.

One interesting way to better understand P(h)urah's role is to compare his work with what Abishai did on a similar stealth mission with David in 1 Sam. 26:6-12. (See line D-6.)

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

C	() Gideon was helped.
C-1	() God instructed Gideon (7:2-8) AND reassured him (7:9-15).
C-2	() God used enemy soldiers to reassure Gideon (7:13-14).
C-3	() God used P(h)urah to strengthen Gideon (7:10-11).
C-4	() Everyone except God needs the help of others.
C-5	() God's reassuring was perfectly timed (7:9).
D	() P(h)urah was helpful.
D-1	() He was already with Gideon.
D-2	() He may have been Gideon's armorbearer.
D-3	() He helped Gideon overcome his natural fear.
D-4	() He was probably more courageous than Gideon.
D-5	() It was not good for Gideon to go all by himself.
D-6	() P(h)urah was like Abishai in 1 Sam. 26:6-12.
D-7	() P(h)urah was a fitting helper for Gideon.

conclusions

worksheet answers

Three lines are clearly incorrect. First, God was not angry at Gideon because he needed reassurance (A-4). If that were the case, the incident in 7:9-15 would probably never have taken place. Second, since God himself recommended P(h)urah (7:10), it is wrong to say that Gideon should have gone alone (B-7). Perhaps he could have gone by himself, but God did not expect him to do so. Again and again, the Scriptures show that two are usually better than one. (See Ecc. 4:9-12.) Third, and in a similar vein, P(h)urah was probably no more courageous than Gideon (D-4). Undoubtedly, the two men encouraged each other.

In addition, it is only partly correct to say that P(h)urah did not do much (B-1). He was available to help as needed (D-1), and helping Gideon was important because Gideon's mission was vital (B-6). Also there is probably more than one reason why P(h)urah is included in the passage (A-5).

Finally, the lines which require comparing various people are some of the most difficult. Though Gideon was fearful (6:27, 7:10), he probably was not as much so as those who were sent home in 7:3 (A-3). And P(h)urah was like Abishai in some ways but unlike him in other ways (D-6).

So what?

The main point for Gideon and for us in Judges chapter seven is that God is the one who gives victory. Moreover the chapter shows that God can lead his servants in triumph even in extremely adverse conditions, including when there are almost no human allies present to help.

Above all, God wanted Gideon—and likewise wants us—to be confident in him rather than in our own abilities. (See 7:3.) Therefore, Gideon's need of assurance from God was a virtue rather than a fault to be criticized. Best of all, the Lord (re)assured Gideon again and again. In 7:9-14, he even did so without being asking.

God could have done all this by himself, but it was more natural for him to also use P(h)urah to help Gideon overcome his fear (D-3). This, of course, shows that Gideon was weak and fearful (A-5), but everyone other than God himself often needs the encouragement of others (C-4). As seen in 1 Sam. 26:6-12, even David did not go into Saul's camp alone.

Perhaps the most important point about P(h)urah is that he was the helper that Gideon needed at the time (D-7). May we be willing to serve the Lord by assisting other God-given leaders as P(h)urah did Gideon.

applications

Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most useful.
