

TOO MANY

Weylan Deaver

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, ‘Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us’” (Exodus 1:8-9, English Standard Version). Pharaoh — this new king who was ignorant of his own country’s history with Joseph — looked at the Israelites and saw “too many.” In Pharaoh’s eyes, the “too many” were undesirable because he perceived them as a threat. In Pharaoh’s eyes, the “too many” needed to be reduced. To accomplish that, he ordered the murdering of all newborn Hebrew males by having them drowned in the Nile River. The other prong in Pharaoh’s strategy of dealing with the “too many” was to put the Israelites to work. More precisely, he made them slaves and oppressed them ruthlessly. It was a not-so-subtle way of keeping the “too many” in their place and making clear who was in charge in Egypt.

Flash forward to a liberated Israel, finally living in Canaan, but now finding themselves oppressed by Midian. With an army of 32,000 Gideon prepared to battle the Midianites. But, there was a problem. God told Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me’” (Judges 7:2). In God’s eyes, the “too many” were undesirable because a victory with large numbers might help the Israelites forget it was God’s doing. In God’s eyes, the “too many” needed to be reduced. That was accomplished by allowing everyone who was afraid to go home, followed by a test at the waters which reduced the fighting force to an unimpressive 300. After slashing Gideon’s army 99%, now that they were no longer “too many,” God was ready to put the remaining men to work, vanquishing the Midianites in a not-so-subtle victory that made clear Who was in charge in Canaan.

And God is still in charge: in Egypt, in Palestine, in America, in Iraq, around the planet. He does not need a majority in order to work his will. He does not even require a sizable percentage. For every 100 men Gideon had, God sent 99 home and then won the war with what was left (and they were more than enough). Compared to Catholicism or many Protestant denominations, the church of Christ is small in number. The war is on against a sin-sick culture, against false religion, against unbelief of every stripe, as we uphold the truth of the gospel in the midst of seemingly overwhelming odds. But we trust to be on the winning side. Will you come with us?

[Weylan in 1989 taking a drink from the spring of Harod (Judges 7:1), where Gideon’s Army was tested.]

