

Judges Chapter 7 Part 1

Tonight we start Judges chapter 7. But we need a running start to get us to verse 1. So a review is in order.

Remember Gideon's starting point in this narrative. He is immersed in Canaanite culture. He worships Baal and Asherah, Canaanite gods, not Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The gods he worships are the gods of the land. But, they are only represented with stone and wood, although lurking behind them is demon worship. Hence, my previous mention of the Angelic Conflict. They are not The living God. Yahweh/God is the living God who the Israelites have abandoned as we saw documented in Judges chapter 2. He is not visible. The Israelites walk by sight, not by faith.

Let me emphasize this point again. When we read about Gideon and other like him, we have to understand the culture he comes from. But, I like others started to look at Gideon as a Hebrew growing up in a Hebrew Torah-dominated culture. But that is wrong. That is obvious from Judges 6:25-31 when Gideon tore down the altar to Baal and cut down the idol to Asherah. This was on his father's property. His father was the apparent custodian. The townspeople were ready to defend these religious sites to the death. His culture was Canaanite, not Hebrew. As a result, God has to help him discover his "roots."

Up to this point, Gideon is the judge who least understands God and who has the most doubts. Certainly, Barak demonstrated doubt when he insisted that Deborah accompany him into battle. But Gideon has constant doubts. He appears to have been exposed to the Mosaic Law and Israelite culture. But as Phil said on Sunday, there is a difference between knowing at an academic level (gnosis) and understanding and believing (epignosis) which results in living it.

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When I was a child, one of my teachers said there was the easy way to learn something and the hard way. The easy way was to listen to parents and teachers and learn the right way based upon their knowledge and experience. The hard way was to duplicate the mistakes of others and learn what works and what doesn't. That was the hard way. That can take a lot of time and involve much suffering. That assumes, of course, that you actually are successful and learn. Many never make it "to the other side" and actually learn the right way. You can either "look at the back of the book" and start there, or go through the whole book only to finally arrive at "the back of the book."

For Gideon there was no one to show him the answers in the back of the book. But God understood that eventually, under the right circumstances, Gideon would learn and eventually believe. We know that Gideon eventually understands and believes. We will get to that in Judges 7:15.

So God stepped in to show him the back of the book, the answer called faith.

Here is a beautiful quote from J. Paul Tanner (DTS educated):

"No character in the book receives more divine assurance than Gideon and no one displays more doubt. Gideon is, significantly, the only judge to whom God speaks directly, though this privilege does not allay his faintheartedness."

Just look at all the help God provides. First there is the prophet that explained why there were in their current situation. Then the Angel of the Lord, the second person of the Trinity, the pre-existent Christ, then Gideon provided two tests (who are you and are you stronger than Baal) which God graciously indulged Gideon, then Gideon was clothed with the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. Eventually, Gideon has to hear God's promise from the enemy. Then he believes.

Previously, my lessons hinted that the Gideon narrative was in some manner more important than the other deliverers in the book of Judges.

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I just quoted J. Paul Tanner about Gideon. Here is his representation of the place of the Gideon narrative in the book of Judges.

"Within the main body of the book, seven major narrative blocks can be noted. Moreover, there are certain parallel features between these narratives so that the entire book reflects a carefully worked symmetrical pattern. Furthermore this pattern has as its focal point the Gideon narrative in 6:1-8:32."

Here is his graphical representation showing the "chiasm" or as Tanner calls it, symmetrical pattern.

- A Introduction, Part 1 (1:1-2:5)
- B Introduction, Part 11 (2:6-3:6)
- C Othniel Narrative (3:7-11)
- D Ehud Narrative (3:12-31)
- E Deborah-Barak Narrative (4:1-5:31)
- F Gideon Narrative (6:1-8:32)
- E' Abimelech Narrative (8:33-10:5)
- D' Jephthah Narrative (10:6-12:15)
- C' Samson Narrative (13:1-16:31)
- B' Epilogue, Part 1(17:1-18:31)
- A' Epilogue, Part 11(19:1-21:25)

Continuing the quote from Tanner:

"This arrangement suggests that the Gideon narrative has a unique contribution to make to the theological development of the book. As the nation went from one cycle of discipline to the next, there was a continual deterioration. Also there was a shift in the "quality" of the judges themselves as the book advances. The Gideon narrative seems to mark a notable turning point."

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A summary of J. Paul Tanner's PhD dissertation on the Gideon narrative says:

“Finally, the theological implications of these structural observations were made for both the Gideon narrative and the book as a whole. The textual patterning of the Gideon narrative is carefully composed in a symmetrical introversion so as to highlight Gideon's struggle in faith to come to grips with God and His word. As a major theological concern of the book, it is thus placed dead center in Judges to underscore its importance.”

The best is yet to come, so let's finally start with chapter 7 verse 1.

Judges 7:1 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him got up early, and camped beside the spring of Harod; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley.

Got up early. This is a single verb in the Hebrew. It means just that, to arise or get up early. It often precedes some action taken by the subject. In this case, they got up and went and camped. The “went” is implied in the context. It is interesting to note that this word was used earlier in the last chapter:

Judges 6:15 When the people of the city got up early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal had been torn down, and the Asherah which had been beside it had been cut down, and the second bull had been offered on the altar which had been built.

So here in Judges chapter 7, Gideon and his people get up early and move resulting in their being discovered by the Midianites. The actual discovery is not included in the narrative but is implied by the following events.

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Jerubaal (that is Gideon). We already know his name. What is the author of the book of Judges trying to tell us? There are a variety of people in the Old and New testaments that have two names. They often indicate something.

Abram => Abraham's: God renamed Abram to indicate the blessings He was giving Abraham.

Jacob => Israel: Once Jacob is renamed to Israel, he is sometimes still referred to as "Jacob." One pastor suggested that this name is used when Jacob is not operating according to faith.

Here in chapter 7, we have an explanation of the two names. Jerubaal is based upon the Canaanite god Baal. The people of Israel have abandoned their God and now worship idols of wood and stone. Gideon means "hewer" as in chopping down the idols. So we have in this passage indications that Gideon, at times, is the faith hero of Hebrews chapter 11 and sometimes, perhaps most of the time, he operated from a Canaanite frame of reference. A believer has two natures: a sin nature operating like a Canaanite and a spiritual nature which we use when we are walking by faith. Do you remember that song "Walking Like an Egyptian?" For this narrative you could change the title to "Thinking Like a Canaanite." Jerubbaal is living in the ditch of Canaanite culture. God has to pull Gideon out of that culture and get him into the culture of faith.

Gideon has already hinted, that if indeed God gives the Midianites into his (Gideon's) hand, then perhaps he should get some credit. Human work from the sin nature is really challenging and demands payment, according to the sin nature.

Spring of Harod. The word "spring" has the same consonants as the word for eye. Harod is a name, but it means "trembling." When was it named? Did it get its name for the test that follows? An army needed a source of water when going into battle. Also, the word for "trembling" is used twice

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more in chapter 7, but in reference to people being afraid and trembling. The NASB does not mention this. Kudos to the NIV (which many consider to be an inferior translation) actually does mention this: “Harod. Means “trembling” and may refer to either the timidity of the Israelites (v.3) or the great panic of the Midianites when Gideon attacked (v.21). The Hebrew verb form is translated “routing” in 8:12.” In this context, verses 1-3, it seems apparent to me that this is where there were many Israelites who were trembling. Twenty two thousand according to the text of verse 2. In verse 3 God says that if there are any who are “afraid and worried.” The root for “Harod” and “worried” are the same. This is the spring of fear and trembling. Remember what Moses said in Deuteronomy about going to war? Open your Bibles and let us read Deuteronomy 20:1-9. Pay particular attention to verse 8:

Deuteronomy 20:8 Then the officers shall speak further to the people and say, ‘Who is the man that is afraid (word used in Judges 7:3 & 7:10) and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, so that he does not make his brothers’ hearts melt like his heart!’

What God is doing is trying to teach them some principles of warfare. He said they needed to learn. But on their own, they have shown little concern for it. And even less concern for God Himself.

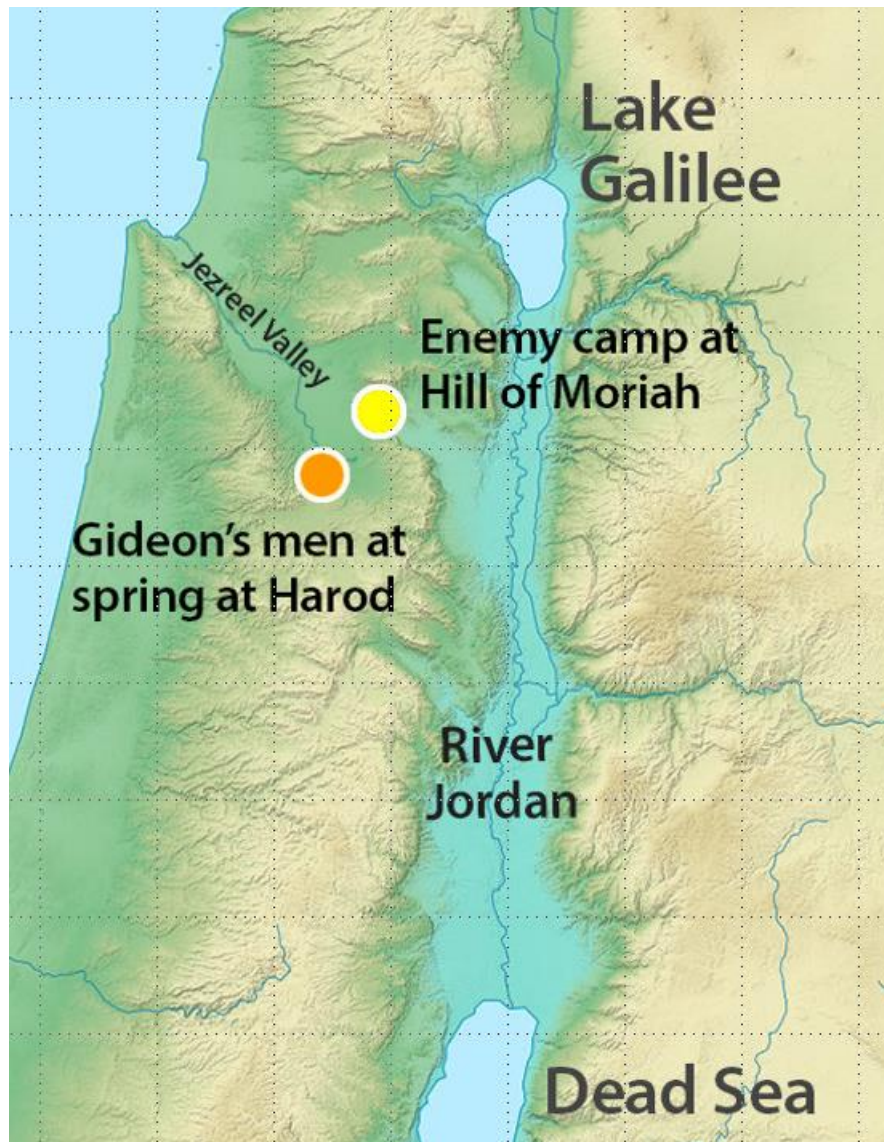
Judges 3:1 Now these are the nations that the Lord left, to test Israel by them (that is, all the Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan;

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Judges 3:2 only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it previously).

Gideon was south of the Midianite army. The Midianite army was located at the bottom end of the valley of Jezreel, which is sometimes known as the valley of Armageddon.



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Note that we are once again talking about the area of the Valley of Jezreel (Judges 6:33) or the valley of Armageddon.

Hill of Moreh. It is a name of a hill. Moreh comes from a Hebrew stem that has three roots: 1. to throw or shoot like arrows 2. revive, rain, water 3. Instruct, teach. The TDOT seems to place “Moreh” under the “teach, instruct” category. Certainly, we are supposed to learn something about war here. So perhaps, “the hill of instruction.” Others go with “hill of archery” or something like that.

Gideon and the Israelite army of 32,000 troops were camping (verb) in an area opposite the established camp (noun) of the Midianites of 135,000 troops. The battle lines are now set. But God is not ready to let 32,000 troops win the day.

Judges 7:2 And the Lord said to Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to hand Midian over to them, otherwise Israel would become boastful, saying, ‘My own power has saved me.’

Here is a quote that would be difficult to improve on from Gary Inrig.

"Judges 7:2 is one of the most important verses in the Bible for understanding God's principles of spiritual warfare. God is not interested in simply giving His people victory. He is concerned with teaching us trust. In fact, if our victories make us self-reliant, they are ultimately more disastrous than defeat." Quoted from Constable who is quoting Inrig.

Now I find that Gary Inrig revised his book, “Hearts of Iron Feet of Clay.” Now it says, “As thoughts like these were running through Gideon’s mind, the Lord came to him with one of the most amazing sentences I think any many has ever heard. “Gideon, you have too many people. You are too big. We have to cut down your numbers” Judges 7:2 is an incredibly important verse for understanding one of our God’s basic principles at work in our

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lives. God is not interested simply in giving us victory and prosperity. He is after something more enduring than that. He is concerned with teaching us trust. In fact, if our victories make us self-reliant, they will quickly become more dangerous than a defeat.”

Both are quoted because the point Gary Inrig is making is indeed important. Take it to heart.

Too many. It means too many. But don't let this simple phrase fool you. The idea in context is that with a genius for a general, this force might be able to defeat the Midianite army. At times, God must put us into impossible situations just so we depend upon Him. I have recounted a couple from my person life. You may already have encountered such a situation in your life.

Hand over Midian to them. Literally to give Midian into their hands. Perhaps there is an implied nudge against Gideon. He has already eyed the possibility that he would get credit by God giving the victory into his (Gideon's) hand (Judges 6:36).

Would become boastful. The translation is OK, but there is more to this. The verb is in the hithpael stem which means it is intensive (like the Piel) but also reflexive. The basic meaning in the qal stem is used to honor or to glory. So here, this is an intensive to honor or glorify oneself.

Perhaps a quote from the New Testament, which is actually a quote from the Old Testament would be helpful.

2 Corinthians 10:17 But the one who boasts is to boast in the Lord.

2 Corinthians 10:18 For it is not the one who commends himself that is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends. (quoting from Jeremiah 9:22-24 but using a different Hebrew

word for glorify; it is also quoted again by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:31)

And of course, there is the similar thought in

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Ephesians 2:9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Power. Actually, this is “hand.” So the sentence would read, “My own hand has saved me.”

Judges 7:3 Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is afraid (afraid) and worried (trembling), is to return and leave Mount Gilead.’” So twenty-two thousand from the people returned, but ten thousand remained.

Afraid and worried. Fear is a recurrent theme in the Gideon narrative. It is sin because it is not faith. Let’s develop some points concerning fear in chapter 7.

1. There are multiple words for fear. These points deal only with those in Judges chapter 7.
2. We encountered fear in the name of the spring of Harod. “Harod” can mean trembling. Commentators bring this out and relate it to the actions that take place here.
3. The verb form of “harod” is used in Judges 7:3. It is “worried” in the NASB. The Young’s Literal Translation translates it as “trembling.”

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4. So at this place, the Spring of “Trembling,” those that tremble are to depart the battle scene. Interesting play on words.
5. The first of the two words for fear in Judges 7:3 is a word for “afraid, fearful.” These also, are to depart the battle scene. This word is one of the two words used in Deuteronomy 20:8 which lists criteria that would disqualify a man from going into battle.
6. But, this same word is used by God of Gideon (Judges 7:10)! And that is after God told him not to fear in Judges 6:10 & 6:23! Should he have departed the battle scene? As we will see in verse 10 below, God has a remedy for that.

Judges 7:4 Then the Lord said to Gideon, “The people are still too many; bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. So it shall be that he of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go with you; but everyone of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.”

Please don't miss the link to water, again. Gideon tested God whether He could control the dew which was the supposed purview of Baal. Now God has His own water test for the troops. Whereas God passed both the water tests of Gideon, the majority of potential troops “fail” the test.

Go. This is the word for walk. So it may have a double meaning. Clearly God is referring to physical movement, walking, going. But it may also have a spiritual connotation. They are not ordering their lives around faith in The God. these people are perhaps not fit mentally to engage in the first battle scene.

Judges 7:5 So he brought the people down to the water. Then the Lord said to Gideon, “You shall put everyone who laps the water with his

tongue as a dog laps in one group, and everyone who kneels down to drink in another.”

Some commentators have trouble with the two different descriptions of drinking water. Verse 6 summarizes and gives two easily identifiable categories.

Judges 7:6 Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people kneeled down to drink water.

Symbolically, the men who “bowed” down to the water were worshipers of the water/Baal. Indeed, verse 6 “bowed down” is exactly the same word used by God to Elijah of those who had not bowed down to Baal. That is the issue here. Perhaps the remaining 300 had not worshiped Baal. If so, they were more faithful than Gideon.

1 Kings 19:18 Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

Here is Robbie Dean’s perspective on this:

“Now what's going on here is that they're thirsty, it's a dry land and they come down to the water and there are those who are thirsty and they fall down on the knees and they just bury their heads in the water and they're just slurping up and then there are those who come along with a warrior's mentality, with their focus on the job at hand, scanning the horizon for the enemy and they will stop and scoop the water up with their hand and throw it into their mouth but their focus is on the watchfulness; their priority is on God's plan, they understand why they're there, they understand what the priority is and it's demonstrated by their actions. And so God says

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okay, now we're going to get rid of the people who still don't understand what the plan and priority is here, and that this is My plan and My priority and not your agenda. So that leaves Gideon with only 300 men.”

Judges 7:7 And the Lord said to Gideon, “I will save you with the three hundred men who lapped, and will hand the Midianites over to you; so have all the other people go, each man to his home.”

I will save you. Here God is emphasizing who is doing the saving work: God without the help of man.

Each man to his home. NO! It does not say his home. It says “his place.” The word for place comes from the word to arise or stand up. These troops may be used for reserves later, after the initial “battle.”

Will hand over to you. Literally, will give into your hand. The word “give” has been present throughout the book of Judges. In the end, it is God who “gives” in grace.

Judges 7:8 So the three hundred men took the people’s provisions and their trumpets in their hands. And Gideon dismissed all the other men of Israel, each to his tent, but retained the three hundred men; and the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

To his tent. It is interesting that they were not sent home to their “house.” They were sent to their tent which would indicate the base camp of the deployed troops. They will be needed after God deals with their fear.

A review of tests. I mentioned tests last time. Let’s review some information on tests both of those Gideon gave God and those that God

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gave Gideon (which we start on this week). Some of this is repetition. Good. It is important that you understand these.

Gideon tested God:

The backdrop of these questions is that Gideon is thinking like a Canaanite. His father had a temple of worship to Baal and an idol to Asherah. Yahweh/God has been abandoned. In that culture, everyone is walking by sight and not by faith (everyone did what was right in his own eyes.)

1. Gideon wanted to know who he was dealing with. Are you really God? That God that we abandoned and no longer are familiar with. The answer is yes, this is God. My impression is that after the first test, Gideon may have accepted God as a god, little g, a god like Baal.
2. Gideon wanted to know if Yahweh/God is up to the task of delivering Israel by Gideon's hand. The answer is yes. Yahweh controlled dew which was in the supposed purview of Baal. So Yahweh/God is greater than Baal.

Now God provides a test to Gideon. Gideon is filled with doubt and fear.

1. God enforces a law in Deuteronomy saying that fearful people should not go to war. Remember, God wants the people to learn war (Judges 3:2).
2. God requires witnesses who are attentive. Remember Barak's 10,000 witnesses. He is not looking for fighters because God will fight for them.
3. God posed a water test of His own. Those who "bowed down" to water were excluded from the first battle. Those who stood and drank while observing were accepted, all 300 of them.
4. God must deal with Gideon's fear which is also a lack of faith (which should have disqualified him). Instead, God provides an enemy soldier with a God-inspired dream. Gideon must hear the dream and its interpretation in order to finally apply faith to the battle situation.

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As J. Paul Tanner says, “What Gideon sought to gain by the sign of the fleece was brought to nil. So he had to go back to the choice to believe God’s promise simply because God has spoken. To help him see that, God devised a sign for him. In the fifth episode (7:12-14), God confirmed His will through a Midianite’s dream, which Gideon overheard being retold and interpreted by the Midianite. The statement “God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand” repeats the promise God had been making all along to Gideon, but now God allowed him to hear it from the lips of a Midianite soldier. The irony is stunning: hearing the promise directly from the Lord did not convince Gideon, but hearing from the Midianite soldier did.”