

Judges Chapter 7 Part 2

When you hear of a military force of 300, you may think of the 300 Spartans warrior who faced the Persian army at Thermopylae. But before the Greek 300 held back the Persians, there was Gideon who defeated a Midianite army of 135,000 with only 300 untrained farmers by the power of Yahweh/God.

Judges 7:8 So the three hundred men took the people's provisions and their trumpets (shofar) 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.

Took. That is what it means.

Provisions. The emphasis is on “food.”

People's. The “people's provisions” does not communicate clearly. What people? Something is missing in our understanding of this phrase. The TDOT suggests there is an “...ancient meaning of ‘am as “troops”” This makes sense if understood as “military rations.” But there is no Israelite standing army with logistics for food and supplies. They were likely supplied by “the people” more specifically by the families of the individual troops. You can read exactly this in 1 Samuel chapter 17 when Jesse, David's father, sent David to the military camp with supplies for his brothers.

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1 Samuel 17:17 Then Jesse said to his son David, “Take now for your brothers an ephah of this roasted grain and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to your brothers.

1 Samuel 17:18 Bring also these ten slices of cheese to the commander of their thousand, and look into the well-being of your brothers and bring back confirmation from them.

1 Samuel 17:19 For Saul and they and all the men of Israel are in the Valley of Elah, fighting the Philistines.”

Translating this as “people’s provisions” only leads to questions. But when it is translated as family-supplied provisions that is close. But then there are people who would ask, what about those men that had no family? OK, so perhaps a better translation would be “citizen-supplied provisions.” That keeps the idea of “people” while avoiding the problem with those with no families.

Or in our context:

Judges 8:4 Then Gideon and the three hundred men who were with him came to the Jordan and crossed over, exhausted yet still pursuing.

Judges 8:5 And he said to the men of Succoth, “Please give loaves of bread to the people who are following me, for they are exhausted,

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and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.”

Judges 8:6 But the leaders of Succoth said, “Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?”

In the case of our passage in Judges 7:8, the provisions are citizen provided. In 8:7, Gideon tries to get citizenry of another tribe to provide provisions and they refuse. More on that at a later date.

Trumpets. The Hebrew word is “shofar” which is both militarily and theologically charged. Per the TDOT, “The horn functioned above all as a means of signaling.” and “The horn was also used to assemble the army for battle (Jgs. 3:27; 6:34; cf. 2 S. 20:1), to announce the beginning of battle, especially in a holy war (Jgs. 7:8, 16, 20; cf Jer 51:27), though also during the battle to signal, for example, the end of the battle (2 S. 2:28; 18:16; 20:22), announce victory (1 S. 13:3), or to fulfill an otherwise unidentified function (Job 39:24-25; Jer. 42:14; Am. 2:2). The account of Jericho occupies special status in that here the sounding of horns clearly exhibits cultic features (Josh. 6:4, 6, 8, 9, 13, 16, 20).” By signaling is meant “communication.” The question will be who is communicating with whom and what is the message.

Dismissed. This is our word for to send on a mission. He sent them on a mission back to their tents in the field. This is in the *piel* stem which is the intensive stem. It does not say they went home.

Each to his tent. This is to their individual tents, not their homes. They are still in the field and ready to react once their fear is allayed.

Retained. This word can mean to be strong, to prevail, keep, seize, grab, retain. The *hiphiel* stem or causative stem is translated to grab or grasp.

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Per the TDOT, “Probably the ritual appointment to office plays an important role: when a person in power appoints someone else to a specific office, he grasps him by the hand. Through this act, “power” flows from the hand—itsself a symbol of power—of the stronger into the hand of the new official, in other words, the one appointed to office is made strong through the ritual gesture of “grasping the hand (cf. Isa. 41:13; 42:6 45:1).” So it is possible that Gideon, somehow grasp each of the 300 identifying him as one of the men on Gideon’s “team.” Perhaps, he looked each man in the eye as he grasp his hand or arm and said, God picked you to be on this team that will save Israel. A personal encounter. The English translation seems so inert and cold. But, the emotions are running high. There is bonding taking place.

When you watch a movie, do you watch with detachment, from afar. Or are you inside the movie experiencing the emotion of one or more of the characters? When you are reading the book of Judges, put yourself in the scene next to Gideon. See what he sees. And also see what God wants us to see as well.

The camp of Midian was below him in the valley. This becomes important later in the narrative.

Judges 7:9 Now on the same night it came about that the Lord said to him, “Arise, go down against the camp, for I have handed it over to you.

One more time, God Himself addresses Gideon directly.

The previous verses make it sound like the troops had a long day and are ready to sleep. You can just see Gideon about to go to his tent heavy eyed ready for sleep when God says, “Get up, it’s time to attack!” No rest for the weary. Not in war.

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Arise. This word, which is an imperative, is used up to this point in Judges in association with the deliverance of Israel. It is used by Deborah to Barak almost in the sense of “charge.” The TDOT suggests something more akin to an initial march toward the battle line. As mentioned in a previous lesson, it is used as a description of God of what He does in the paradigm of the cycle, God raises up a judge who saved them out of the hands of their enemy (Judges 2:16-18). From God, it is a call to action.

Against. Young’s literal translation has “into” instead of “against.” The word you would expect for “against” is not here. The word for “to” or “into” is used. The English makes it sound like it is time to attack. Indeed this is what some say. There is some ambiguity here. God didn’t say gather the army and attack, although that is a possible interpretation. The verbs are in the singular addressing Gideon directly.

So does the Hebrew say God told Gideon himself to go down to the camp. No doubt, Gideon was probably thinking, “You want me to do WHAT??? So you want me all by my lonesome to just march down into the Midianite camp and say here I am, Gideon. Surrender. Yeah right! Even if I take all 300 are we going to walk into the camp and tell them they are outnumbered?”

I have handed it over to you. Literally, “I have given it into your hand.” Here is Robbie Dean’s explanation. He says that God wants Gideon to go down to the Midianite camp alone not taking his army of 300 with him.

“Here we have a perfect tense which is called a prophetic perfect in the Hebrew and it means that the giving of victory has already been accomplished in the counsel of God and it is not to be doubted, and I have already done this, it's already accomplished, it's already in your bank account but you need to go down and get a little confirmation because Gideon is having third thoughts. Gideon is like we are; we trust God and then we want to take it back and then we trust Him again and

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then we want to take it back, and we just sort of grow in fits and starts. Gideon is not a man of tremendous unrealistic faith in God. We see that he tested God with the fleece, which was just another way of trying to avoid responsibility and he's still concerned about this whole situation. So the Lord comes down, notice how God continually meets us where we are. That's grace. This is a lesson for parents. It's important for parents to be strong disciplinarians with their kids but it's also important for you to understand who your kids are and their weaknesses and deal with them in terms of those weaknesses and not in terms of some autonomous absolute that you've generated out of thin air. See, that's how we think God deals with us. God knows our weaknesses, He knows our sinfulness and He deals with us on the basis of who we are and where we are and not on the basis of what we should be and where we should be. So He comes down and He's going to give a little extra confirmation to Gideon.”

**Judges 7:10 But if you are afraid to go down,
go with Purah your servant down to the camp,**

God's got it covered.

If you are afraid. If this was Greek, it might be in the 1st class condition meaning if and it is true.

Afraid. This is one of the mental attitudes that should have disqualified Gideon from battle. It was so used in Judges 7:3 and Deuteronomy 20:8. We dealt with this last week. But, God is about to remedy this.

Your servant. This is not the word for slave or servant. This word is used mostly of young boys or young men. The Young's Literal Translation uses “your young man.” It can mean a servant like an aide. In this context, may I suggest something like “aide-de-camp,” per Trent Butler. Gideon is the man in charge. So it would be normal for him to have an aide to accompany him.

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Judges 7:11 so that you will hear what they say; and afterward you will have the courage to go down against the camp.” So he went down with Purah his servant to the outposts of the army that was in the camp.

Hear. This is the usual word for hear.

What they say. This is the *piel* or intensive form of the word *dabar*.

God is telling Gideon what is going to happen. Prophecy?

Purah. The name of his aide. The root of the word that the name comes from means “fruitful.” Gideon takes “fruitful” with him. Remember Gideon is already “clothed” with the Holy Spirit. Perhaps some divine humor.

Servant. This is the same word used in the previous verse. It is not the word for slave or servant. It means young man. Or as Gary Inrig translates, “attendant.”

Courage. Literally, your hand will be strengthened. “Courage” is an interpretive translation, not literal.

Outposts of the army that was in the camp. There is some clarification that is possible here.

One of the words in the phrase means “extremity” or in this case could be the “edge.” The NASB used “outposts” to translate this.

Another of the words in this phrase is literally “the fifties.” This refers to a unit of 50 men. It can be an organizational term. It would have been advantageous if there was no moon, to better hide Gideon and Purah. There is no mention of the moon here, though.

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In the camp is OK. The idea is that Gideon is going to the edge of the camp to one of the units. Not in the unit, hidden but close enough to hear.

Here is the Young's Literal Translation of this verse. Notice the differences with the NASB:

Judges 7:11 and thou hast heard what they speak, and afterwards are thy hands strengthened, and thou hast gone down against the camp.' And he goeth down, he and Phurah his young man, unto the extremity of the fifties who [are] in the camp;

As Gideon and Phurah are on the verge of descending the mountain to get close to the Midianite camp, perhaps Gideon takes a look across the valley at the amassed combat troops ready to pounce on his 300 men.

Judges 7:12 Now the Midianites, the Amalekites, and all the people of the east were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore.

This takes up back or links us to Judges 6:5 where the Midianites and associated tribes are as numerous as locusts in a swarm.

Judges 6:5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts in number, *and both* they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to ruin it.

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So, the forces against Israel have not been reduced. The full force of the enemy is facing Gideon. Also, locusts are associated with swarms that devastate crops. The Midianites have devastated the land. The same thing had happened in Moses day against the Egyptians. You can read about that in Exodus chapter 10.

There is a stark contrast in Gideon's sight: his 300 untrained perhaps unarmed men versus a valley full of highly trained well-armed men ready for battle. Here is an impossible situation. Do you walk by sight as previously? Or do you walk by faith. At this instant, Gideon may be "trembling" in his boots. He needs some spiritual spectacles.

Judges 7:13 When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. And he said, "Behold, I had a dream; (behold) a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent collapsed."

Judges 7:13 (YLT) And Gideon cometh in, and lo, a man is recounting to his companion a dream, and saith, `Lo, a dream I have dreamed, and lo, a cake of barley-bread is turning itself over into the camp of Midian, and it cometh in unto the tent, and smiteth it, and it falleth, and turneth it upwards, and the tent hath fallen.'

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Please understand, this dream and its interpretation are for Gideon. Yes, the immediate effect is on the Midianite men. But God set this up to “strengthen” Gideon. Look at the progression.

Behold. In a single verse, this interjection is used three times: once by the narrator and twice by the Midianite storyteller. Thanks to Trent Butler for pointing this out. Here is something very important. Like a teacher, during class, saying, “Pay attention! This will be on the final test.” Here (Judges 7:9-15) is the heart of the Gideon narrative.

Loaf of barley bread. There are many questions concerning this loaf of barley bread. Barley was considered a poor man’s bread by some commentators or even food for animals. Wheat was what normal people ate. However it seems to be a common food in the book of Ruth. One commentator suggests it was a “moldy” bread. God provided the dream. But not one commentator I read gave a satisfactory reason why this is used here or what it represents. In what follows, Gideon immediately knows what to do. From my perspective, all of the preparations Gideon made are tied to this dream.

Look at all the verbs used of this loaf of barley bread (I have added subject and object to clarify where needed):

1. The bread tumbling into the camp
2. The bread came to the tent
3. The bread struck it (the tent)
4. It (the tent) fell
5. It (the tent) overturned
6. It (the tent) collapsed

There are two objects, bread and tent, six verbs, 3 for each object.

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Let's take them one by one:

1. **Tumbling** can mean “whirling” or “overthrow.” It is in the hithpael which means it is intensive and reflexive. It is whirling itself. There is an interesting use of this word in Genesis 3:24 when God kicked Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden and left cherubs as guards:

Genesis 3:24 (YLT) yea, he casteth out the man, and causeth to dwell at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubs and the flame of the sword which is turning itself round to guard the way of the tree of life.

Interesting that it is used of a sword in Genesis.

Also, remember that the Midianites are in the valley below the Israelites who are on a mountain. So a loaf of barley bread from the Israelites would be tumbling down the mountain into the Midianite camp.

2. **Came to** is an often used word for going. Here it came to a tent. There is a definite article before tent so it can be translated as “the tent” as the Young’s Literal Translation does. The bread has direction and intent. It is going somewhere, not just tumbling in any direction. It is coming for the Midianite camp, and the tents with the sleeping warriors inside. Remember, this is night time. Here is a usage associated with a sword:

Genesis 34:25 Now it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob’s sons—Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers—each took his sword and came upon the city undetected, and killed every male.

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I am emphasizing references to sword because the Midianite interprets all this as the “sword of Gideon.”

3. **The bread struck the tent.** Struck is often used in military contexts in the Bible. Here is one example from the book of Judges:

Judges 1:8 Then the sons of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it, and struck it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.

Look at that! In this verse, struck is associated with a sword, again.

4. **It fell.** The first three verbs have the loaf of barley bread as the subject. The remaining three verbs have the tent as the subject. There is an obvious structure crafted here. Here is a comment by Trent Butler: “The use of [the Hebrew word], “fall,” to depict the tent’s collapse should strike the reader as more than coincidental, for this same word was used to describe the fallen Eglon (3:28) [sic, probably meant 3:25] and Sisera (4:22; 5:27). Interesting to note for future reference, that Ehud “thrust” a sword into Eglon and Jael “thrust” the tent peg into Sisera’s temple.

5. **The tent overturned.** This verb has already been used once in this very verse. It is the “whirling” bread. Instead of the bread, it is now the tent that is overturned. This is in the normal qal stem. Picture a tent that is struck such that it instantly comes loose from the ground and begins to spin around and around. No emphasis. No reflexive. But the “whirling” bread caused this. In Genesis 19:25 God “overthrew” the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

6. **The tent collapsed.** This verb has also already been used in this verse, when the tent “fell.” So there is an implied emphasis. It really collapsed! The end!

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Here is the fulfillment of the “prophecy” that God gave Gideon.

Judges 7:14 And his friend replied, “This is nothing other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has handed over to him Midian and all the camp.”

Sword of Gideon. This is the first mention of a sword in this context. God said He would give the Midianites into Gideon’s hand. There was no sword mentioned. And, all the verbs used had at one time or another been used in a context with a sword. Most people are right-handed. And when using a sword, the warrior will “thrust” the sword to the enemy. So perhaps, this is a link to the shofar/trumpet. What do you do with a shofar? You blow the shofar. But, in the Hebrew “thrust” has the same root as blow. If you were Gideon and your troops had shofars (Judges 7:8) in their hands instead of swords. There was no previous mention of swords. So when the Midianite says the “sword” of Gideon, a light went off in his brain – thrust a sword, blow the shofar. And as we see in verse 15, Gideon gets it. When we get to the following verses, it is obvious that based upon this dream and its interpretation, Gideon immediately has a plan formulated in his brain. The path forward, in faith, is clear.

Judges 7:15 When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. Then he returned to the camp of Israel and said, “Arise, for the Lord has handed over to you the camp of Midian!”

Have you been in a class and learned something? Then all of a sudden you understand what was taught so that you could not go and teach it. Here, God had already told Gideon that He was going to give the Midianites into his hand. But he didn’t believe God. First, he didn’t even

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know who God was. After the first test, Gideon said, “OK, you are god (little g), but are you stronger than Baal?” After the second test with the dew Gideon says, “OK you are stronger than Baal.” But he was still unsure of this thing called faith. “Why should I believe God?” After the Midianite repeated what God told him, then he believed and trusted God enough to take action based upon what God promised. Hebrews 4:1-2. And from there it goes into Hebrews chapter 11. Not only that, but he is now emboldened in his faith to tell others to go to battle because God will fight their battles.

For me, the point of the Gideon narrative is Judges 7:15 when Gideon “worships.” And subsequently, he acts with conviction. He knows exactly what to do.

He bowed in worship. This is a single word meaning to bow.

The dream was orchestrated by God for Gideon. Everything Gideon needed to know was in that dream.



Ancient pitcher reproduction for sale on eBay.