

Judges Chapter 7 Part 3

The focus of tonight's study will be the Midianite dream and its interpretation. It was covered last week in a cursory fashion. This week, the verbs will tell a story and point to their importance in the unfolding of the following events.

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 7:14 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."

The dream is not easy to understand. Here is a quote from one commentator, Trent Butler: "Younger rightly characterizes the dream as "absurd: a round loaf of barley bread tumbles into the Midianite camp, smashing into the tent with such force that it overturns and collapses" (190, n. 44). Bluedorn submits, "The symbols in the dream do not have any apparent equivalent in the interpretation" (*Yahweh versus Baalism*, 35), though he catalogues a number of past interpretations for the loaf of barley bread (Heb, 'alil) (134, n. 231)."

The picture is not of an actual situation but allegorical. If there is a good direct correspondence, then once we start to match up one action in the dream to something that really happens, the others may be easier to

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match. We already have two difficulties to deal with. First, we are Westerners separated from Gideon in time, place and culture. Second, we are not Gideon worshipping Baal. It is difficult for us to place ourselves in his shoes. So we will take a circuitous route to look at the Hebrew and try to understand what is going on.

As we approach this dream and its interpretation, we need to review some information to put the dream in context.

The first challenge is to understand what Gideon knows. By knowing I mean what we might call gnosis, information he has gained through stories from his father and other people. He may be living the Canaanite way of life, but he still had a vestige of Hebrew history. We know this from chapter 6 when Gideon is talking to the Angel of the Lord. He says:

Judges 6:13 Then Gideon said to him, “O my lord (adonai), if the Lord (Yahweh) is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, ‘Did the Lord (Yahweh) not bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the Lord (Yahweh) has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian.”

We will assume for our lesson, that Gideon is familiar with the “miracle” stories from the Exodus through Joshua’s exploits and possibly even Ehud and Barak. In particular, let us read Genesis 41:1-39, Pharaoh’s dream, and then Joshua chapter 6, the conquest of Jericho. There is much in Joshua chapter 6 that factors into Gideon’s thinking and his understanding of the dream. There is vocabulary that is reused in the dream as well as some concepts that are employed.

Read Genesis 41:1-39.

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Notice the detail in the interpretation of the dream. Joseph explains each detail. That does not happen in the interpretation of the Midianite dream. There are items that are not explained. There is a contrast you need to see: detailed interpretation in Genesis but almost no detail in Judges. Indeed, the interpretation is simply “the sword of Gideon.” And, Gideon doesn’t use a sword. But after the interpretation is told, Gideon knows exactly what to do. He understands the dream even though we are not given the details. So in order to “fill in the blanks,” we need to know something about Gideon, which we already did with the quote from Judges 6, and recall a particular story from the book of Joshua.

Read Joshua chapter 6.

Note the following points:

1. Take notice that God gives Joshua a promise similar to that of Gideon:

Joshua 6:2 But the Lord said to Joshua, “See, I have handed Jericho over to you, with its king and the valiant warriors.”

2. Now look at all the times God reassured Gideon that he would be successful in battle against the Midianites.

Judges 6:14 And the Lord looked at him and said, “Go in this strength of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?”

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Judges 6:16 Yet the Lord said to him, “I will certainly be with you, and you will defeat Midian as one man.”

Judges 6:36 Then Gideon said to God, “If You are going to save Israel through me, as You have spoken,

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.’”

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.”

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.”

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.”

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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!”

All these quotes are presented to show that God told Gideon multiple times that God would give the Midianites into Gideon’s hand, i.e. that he would defeat the Midianites and deliver Israel. But Gideon didn’t believe until he heard this from the lips of a Midianite. Then he can command the 300 with a plan he understood from the dream’s interpretation.

In Joshua chapter 6, Joshua only had to hear it once to believe and go forward. But Gideon got the message multiple times before he believed.

Back to Joshua 6:

3. Valiant warriors in Joshua 6:2 is the same basic wording with which the Angel of the Lord addresses Gideon: valiant warrior.

4. Look at the importance of the shofar as a weapon of war in that narrative. It is used to wear down the people in Jericho and apparently has a devastating effect on the wall.



Picture of a shofar From Wikipedia

5. In Joshua 6:4 we have “blow the shofar.” Again, the word for “blow” in Hebrew is the same as “thrust” a sword and “thrust” a peg in the Ehad

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narrative. So that word links sword and shofar. As an aside, what hand would a warrior wield a sword in? Most people are right-handed, so they would hold a sword in their right hands. The same is true when holding a shofar. People would hold the shofar in their right hands. (Judges 7:20)

6. In Joshua 6:5 the people are to shout a great shout after the people march around Jericho on the seventh day just before the attack. In Judges chapter 7:18, the people are told to say (NASB) or shout (NIV), “(a sword) for the Lord and for Gideon.” In Judges 7:20 they shouted (both NASB & NIV) this phrase. The response of the Midianites was “crying out” (both NASB and NIV).

7. There is an order to the employment of weapons against Jericho in Joshua 6: shofar, shout, edge of the sword, fire. As we will see in Judges 7, Gideon uses shofar, shout and fire. He does not need to engage the enemy with swords. God did that for him. But the order is similar.

8. In Joshua 6, the people go around, encircle Jericho as they march. In Judges 7:18 the 300 were told to be on every side of the camp.

Is it possible that Gideon is using the “miracle” in Joshua 6 as a template? He was familiar with the “miracles.” With the interpretation of the dream from the Midianite as “the sword of Gideon,” Gideon sees the similarities in the situation and employs the Jericho template in this situation.

Here is Robert Chisholm’s comment on this: “The blowing of trumpets also reminds one of the Lord’s great victory over Jericho, when the Israelites blew trumpets outside the city’s walls as a prelude to God’s miraculous intervention (cf. Joshua 6). The parallelism is probably not coincidental—the Lord was renewing his mighty deeds in Gideon’s day, in response to the reluctant hero’s earlier question (cf. 6:13).”

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Lets return to Judges 7. We need to revisit some words in the dream and then look at the progression of the verbs. They hold an interesting view on the action about to take place.

Loaf. When I saw “loaf” I thought of a loaf of sliced bread that I might purchase at the local grocery store. But that is wrong. The Hebrew noun can mean “a round cake” (Gesenius). This exact word, according to BibleHub is used only here in the Old Testament. But the verb means to “roll down.” So instead of a picture of an American loaf of bread there is something that is closer to a tortilla or pita bread or maybe even a jelly roll. The idea is it is round.

Barley. From Unger, “a well-known grain, cultivated from the remotest antiquity, and frequently mentioned in the Bible.” “Barley is the universal provender for horses, mules, and, to a certain extent, for asses (I Kings 4:28), taking the place of oats with us. It is still used for bread among the very poor (II Kings 4:42). It was sometimes mixed with other cheap grains, for making bread (Ezek. 4:9).” “...a barley cake expressed the low rank and poverty of Gideon (Judg. 7:13).” And, as I mentioned last week, Ruth was involved with the barley harvest in the book of Ruth. And remember, Ruth lived in the time of the Judges.

“The firstfruits of grain offered during the Festival of Unleavened Bread would have been barley. “In the early stages of the Israelite settlement the most important cereal was barley...because of the necessity to settle fringe areas and barley’s tolerance of harsh conditions” (Oded Borowski, Agriculture in Iron Age Israel, 1987, page 7).” From: <https://archive.gci.org/articles/harvest-seasons-of-ancient-israel/>

That is interesting. Barley could tolerate harsh conditions. So could Gideon—the harsh conditions. But that is soon to change.

Bread. As previously mentioned, this bread was likely something like a tortilla or pita bread. It was round, like a wheel.

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Tumbling. When a wheel turns on its center, it moves smoothly. So, it may be permissible to translate this “rolling” instead of tumbling. This makes sense of the illustration. In the dream then, it is possible that the round tortilla shaped bread was rolling down the hill.

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.

I covered the meaning of the other words in the dream last week. Now, I want to cover the “progression” of the action.

God provided the dream. But not one commentator I read gave a satisfactory understanding of the dream. In what follows, Gideon immediately knows what to do. From my perspective, all of the preparations Gideon made are tied to this dream.

The tense of the verbs used show a progression. The first verb is a participle. The rest of the verbs are in the imperfect except the last one that is a perfect tense.

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 (round disk) of barley bread was tumbling (1:rolling/hithpael participle) into the camp of Midian, and it came (2: qal imperfect) to the tent and struck (3: qal imperfect) it so that it fell (4: qal imperfect), and turned it upside down (5: qal imperfect) so that the tent collapsed (6: qal perfect).”

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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 (tortilla-shaped barley bread) was rolling into the camp
2. The bread (while rolling down the mountain) came (with intent and direction perhaps ‘was going straight for the tent’) to the tent
3. The bread was striking it (the tent)
4. It (the tent) was falling over
5. It (the tent) was spinning
6. It (the tent) collapsed

So what is the significance of the imperfect versus the perfect in Hebrew? Here are some quotes from Davidson’s Hebrew Syntax:

“The simple impf. expresses an action incomplete or unfinished.”

“The simple perf. Is used to express an action completed either in reality or in the thought of the speaker.”

So, in this dream, the action is on-going until the last verb which, in the perfect, indicates a completed action. And in this case, the end of the dream.

There are two objects, bread and tent, and six verbs, 3 for each object. But there is a logic and progression to these verbs. We have seen the type of action. Now look at the progression of the meaning.

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The Nouns of Judges 7:13:

1. Loaf of Barley Bread (NASB) is more like a round cake or like a tortilla, perhaps a little thicker. In the illustration, we might call it a disk of Barley Bread. This obviously represents Gideon in the dream. The bread and its actions are called the sword of Gideon.

2. Tent. The Midianite camp is composed of a “tent city.” Verse 13 has the definite article in front of tent. This could be the tent that Gideon is crouching next to while listening to the dream. “This” tent. The disk of barley bread has an impact on the tent as a representative of the Midianite camp.

The Verbs of Judges 7:13. Let me summarize the verbs in a table.

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The Dream		The Execution	
Subject	Verb	Subject	Verb
Bread	Rolling (participle) into the camp	Gideon & 100 men	Came to the edge of the camp
	Coming to the tent	Gideon & 100	Came to the edge of the camp
	Striking the tent	Gideon & 300	Blew the shofars, broke the pitchers and shouted the sword for the Lord and for Gideon
It (the tent)	Was falling	Midianites	All the Midianites ran
	Overtured or was spinning		Shouted in terror. Their minds were spinning and overtured, they were in a panic.
	Collapsed or laid flat		Historically, the Midianites would no longer be a problem for Israel – they had been “flattened.”

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Repeatedly, the focus of the narrative has been against Midian. After this incident, Midian is no longer a serious enemy of Israel. Here is Unger's comment: "The whole account (6:1-8, 28), from the Midianite invasion at the beginning to the panic and route and final disappearance at the end, is the story of a mob, formidable from its numbers and its hunger. This ends the story of Midian. Henceforth it is hardly mentioned except as a historical reminiscence (but see Isa. 60:6; Hab. 3:7). Certainly Midian is never again mentioned as a source of terror."

See Isaiah 10:26, Psalm 83:9.

As a side trip, look at the picture of pitcher. The question is what kind of "torch" would fit in it? Judges chapter 7 does not explain how the 300 put a torch into the pitcher and then light it and subsequently break the pitcher in order to remove the burning torch without burning themselves.



Ancient pitcher reproduction for sale on eBay.

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

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Israel and said, “Arise, for the Lord has handed over to you the camp of Midian!”

Notice that Gideon left his camp in fear, unsure of what exactly to do. After hearing the interpretation at the enemy camp, he was confident and had a plan. The dream and its interpretation was orchestrated by God for Gideon.

Arise. Let us review this one more time. This will not be the last time we encounter this word. It is a thread that goes from one end of Judges (2:10) to the end (Judges 20:33). It is used with different meanings. But one of the more important meanings deals with deliverance of Israel. God rose up judges (Judges 2:10), commanded deliverers to arise (Judges 7:9)) which prompted Gideon to command the 300 to arise (Judges 7:15).

Judges 7:16 And he divided the three hundred men into three units, and he put trumpets (shofars) and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers.

Judges 7:17 Then he said to them, “Look at me and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do.

Judges 7:18 When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets around the entire camp and say, ‘For the Lord and for Gideon!’”

Judges 7:19 So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle night

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watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands.

Judges 7:20 When the three units blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and shouted, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!”

Judges 7:21 And each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled.

Judges 7:22 And when they blew the three hundred trumpets, the Lord set the sword of one against another even throughout the entire army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.

Judges 7:23 And the men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian.