

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Twenty-Fourth Week - Thursday

A CAKE OF BARLEY BREAD

"Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. And Yahweh said to Gideon, 'The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, "My own hand has saved me." . . . Then Yahweh said to Gideon, 'By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place'" (Judges 7:1-2, 7).

At the proper moment the spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon and he knew the time for him to work for the deliverance was come; and he felt his heart equal to the work to which he was called. He caused the trumpet to be blown for volunteers. The Abi-ezrites, the men of his own clan, were the first to join him, which is highly favorable both of his character and to theirs. The northern tribes alone were summoned to come.

Having now around him what seemed an adequate number of troops, Gideon asked for a sign, which the Lord graciously provided. Therefore, immediately upon receiving the assurance he desired, he marched with his men to the nearer neighborhood of the enemy's camp. If he had any remaining misgiving, it probably was that his warriors were too few to cope with the myriads of Midian. How he must have been astonished to receive the intimation that they were too many! Any why too many? "Lest Israel vaunt themselves, saying, My own hand has saved me." The law of Moses was then enforced, allowing all who were fearful and faint-hearted to withdraw and go back home. Twenty-two thousand went away and only ten thousand remained.

We cannot but suppose that Gideon looked upon this result with amazement and concern. And then he was told that they were still too many! Another experiment for reducing their number must then be made. The mode of reduction adopted in this instance was very singular. The whole army was to be taken down to the water and everyone that "lapped the water with his tongue as a dog laps" was to be set apart from those who bowed down on their knees to drink.

Some difficulty has been found in explaining this test. The explanation which we give is founded upon our own observation of the different modes in which men in haste drink when

coming to a stream without vessels to raise the water to their mouths. It is to be observed that this class is further described in verse 6 as "the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth."

The chief distinction between them and the others is that they did not bow down on their knees to bring their mouths near the water in a more leisurely manner. They instead continued standing, stooping only so far as to be able to reach the water with their hand, the hollow of which they filled. They then brought the hand rapidly to their mouth in a quick jerking motion, partaking of the cooling water. Now the human tongue is not designed for "lapping" in the manner that a dog drinks. Supposing such lapping to be at all possible for a man, it certainly would not be resorted to by one who had already succeeded in bringing a handful of water so near his mouth, for that would have been a needless if not silly delay in quenching his thirst.

The motion expressed by "lapping" must therefore apply to the rapid motion of the hand between the water and the mouth. It might aptly be compared to the rapid projection and retraction of a dog's tongue in drinking. This "lapping" action, then, was an indication of character, denoting men of rapid and impulsive action, too earnest in the work before them to endure satisfying their thirst with the leisurely action of men at ease. A few hasty handfuls of water was all that the impatience of their spirit in the great interests before them allowed. These were the men to save Israel. They were but three hundred in number, and all the rest of the ten thousand were to their great amazement sent away.

God now gives Gideon another sign suited to strengthen his faith, beautifully illustrating the Divine consideration for the frailty and feebleness of man. Gideon is to go down by night to the very camp of the Midianites, taking his armor-bearer Phurah with him for reassurance. The two quietly make their way down to the camp in the darkness of the night. Presently they hear a soldier at the outpost speaking to his fellow about a dream that had troubled him that night: "To my surprise a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed" (vs. 13). Josephus says it was the royal tent, which is not unlikely; for the word rendered "tent" with the definite article (which the original has) means the fairest and strongest tent.

The man to whom the dream was told readily interpreted it: "This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp" (vs. 14). This was enough for Gideon. It was of no importance to him whether the interpretation was correct or not. One thing was true and certain--the Midianites were afraid of him and believed not only in the possibility, nor even the probability, but in the certainty of their own overthrow. In that conviction of theirs, the victory already belonged to Gideon.

It is curious that the man should have seen in the humble cake of barley meal a symbol of Gideon. It was, however, an apt and recognizable symbol of the oppressed condition of the Israelites. Hear Volney as regards the condition of Syria in our own times under a like state:

"From all these causes we may easily imagine how miserable must be the condition of the peasants. They are everywhere reduced *to a little flat cake of barley* or dourra; to onions, lentils, and water."