

Logistics: Not by Bread Alone

Pharaoh finally surrenders and tells the Israelites to leave Egypt. “Up! Leave my people, you, and your Israelites.” The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. For otherwise, they said, “we will all die!” So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing.” (Exodus 12: 31, 33).

“With the dough they had brought out of Egypt, they baked cakes of unleavened bread. The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves.” (Exodus 13: 39).

The Lord’s reasoning for the unleavened bread is understandable. There was no time to stop and prepare meals; bread with yeast would spoil. Israel only had 10 days to make it to the ambush site planned by the Lord. Even before the journey begins, God spells out how and what the people are to prepare. Repeatedly we find timing to be all-important in God’s war plans. Not just for ambushes, but for food, water and other supplies.

Logistically, feeding an army is an immense endeavor. For this reason, modern armies train draftees to survive on short rations. Lack of food or even the fear of not having necessary nourishment can destroy a fighting force. Every army that has ever existed has struggled with feeding its soldiers. Vegetius, a Roman military writer about

400 A.D., noted; “An army unsupplied with grain and other necessary provisions will be vanquished without striking a blow.”¹

The Lord understands the nature of logistics and provides, but not what people expect or desire. However, He does provide in a manner, which reduces pressure on the soldier. Obtaining food is a logistical nightmare.

Keegan, a military historian, notes that the maximum a soldier can carry is about seventy pounds, half of which is food, for about ten days of marching.² The Lord was the daily supplier of rations for the Israelites. Israel did not have to find it, scrounge for it, store it, or carry it. Yet, food was a source of constant complaint. The people could not see beyond the wants of each day.

Have you ever had a “limited vision” like the Israelites? Did you expect or desire something that was contrary to the Lord’s plan? I did. I related how I finished my undergraduate training with honor. The honor was the Lord’s doing. I knew it. He knew it. The Lord had a purpose. His intent became plain I was to go to graduate school. I did not want to go.

In faith, Mary, my spouse, Timothy my son and I headed to Memphis with almost no money, or provisions. We were so poor we had to spend the first few weeks living in a tent in a state park. Funds were sorely limited. Finally, the Lord provided a job and a place to live.

¹ Flavius Vegetius Renatus: *The Military Institutions of the Romans* (1767/1944) translated by Lieut. John Clark. Thomas R. Phillips; Vegetius: *Epitome of Military Science* (1996) translated by N. P. Milner.)

² John Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, Vintage Publisher, 1994, p.301).

Daily living was difficult. However, the real test was mental. The Masters program was a 90-hour degree program. Every minute of it was grueling. Every course challenged my limited abilities. Finally, after three long years, it was over and things would be easier, I thought.

I began looking for employment with a church. For weeks, we would go from congregation to congregation but no one wanted us. It looked hopeless. Finally, a small congregation in Arkansas wanted us to come and try out. We went. After we got home, they called and wanted us to come and work with the congregation. I did not ask the Lord, I said yes, for I was desperate. He told me immediately after I hung up the phone that was not where He intended me to go. Four hours later, I received a call from a Bible Chair at a large University. They wanted to hire me but because I had given my word, I had to refuse.

Within three months of taking the job, I resigned midst lies, deceit, and complaint. My spirit was broken. I no longer cared for God's people. It was worse than that. I did not intend to bring anyone to the Lord. I no longer cared and wished all of them lost. I took another church but my heart was not in it and left the ministry a year later. For ten long years, I wandered in the wilderness.

If school had been grueling, there was no comparison with the hardship of the next ten years. Finally, I returned to the Lord. I agonize even now over the lost ten years and my rebellion. The same rebellion Israel displayed in the wilderness. I was unable to see the Lord's larger plan for my life. I am a slow learner. Finally, I discovered that man cannot live by bread alone, nor can he exist without the 'living water'.

A person may be able to live a month or more without food; however three days is the typical time a person can survive without water. Water is a serious logistical problem for mobile armies. It takes about four gallons of water per day to meet human's basic need. Two or more million Israelites would consume about ten million gallons per day. This is before they even start to take care of their animals. Water is a necessity. The Lord used thirst to harden His people for war.

“For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water because it was bitter. “(Exodus 15: 22b). It is maddening to see a goal in sight only to have it withdrawn. Israel desperately needed water finally; they find a large watering hole only to discover the water bitter. The Lord is hardening Israel. The hardening process is a modern military training technique utilized to prepare troops for combat. God was preparing His people for combat.

Israel only complained. God's warriors are faced with a myriad of unexpected situations. Proper training prepares one for the unexpected. Adversity is an integral part of preparation. What these warriors were to achieve forty years later at the battle of Gibeon reflects the need for the training here.

A month and half-later lack of water again becomes a problem. The Lord again withholds water to train Israel to be prepared and to trust in Him. “They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink!” (Exodus 17: 1b-1a).

Looking at the context of this passage the Lords' purpose for withholding water becomes transparent. Israel has to stop complaining. Full obedience is imperative. Israel

is on the brink of being attacked from the rear by the Amalekites and does not even know it. Desire for water blinds Israel to anything else, even great danger.

Moses relates in Deuteronomy 25 what was happening even as the people are complaining. Amalekites raiding parties are attacking the weak and faint in the rear of the column. Moses gathers an armed force to repel the enemy. The survival of the nation is in jeopardy. Trusting in the Lord's provision whether for food, and water, or protection is a lesson all must learn.

This lesson was brought home to me growing up. Mother was the sole provider and often there was not enough. Several days ago, I was reminded of this while reading a letter my godly mother had written to her sister. In it, she was relating how she had just finished paying all the bills and she had \$2.52 to last for two weeks. It brought tears to my eyes. My lack of gratefulness for the long hard hours she worked to provide for four children breaks my heart. If only I could go back and thank her for her sacrifice. Mother spent many hours praying for financial wisdom. Seeing those prayers answered serves as a continual reminder of God's provisions now.

The children of Israel are going through a wilderness. The only resource is God and He provides 600 tons of food and ten million gallons of water per day. Yet, the Israelites complain bitterly. "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt. There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted..." (Exodus 16:3). How could these people say such a thing!

The Lord gives them manna and they demand meat! Evidently, the manna was an excellent source of protein, carbohydrates, and fat. Manna was prepared in various ways and long-term storage was not necessary. The people gathered about two quarts of manna

per person per day. It took almost 600 tons to feed the Israelites. The manna was in addition to the dairy products produced by the cows and goats. Israel ate better than any other ancient nation during the wilderness training! However, the people demand meat.

Meat they shall have. God tells Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat. ’”Exodus 16:11b The Lord sends quail for their craving, and with it a great plague. “ (Numbers 11:33).

The ability to persevere in hardship without complaint is an important factor in warrior training. This is the central reason the Lord left Israel without water for two or three days, not only to develop faith, but endurance. The Israelites shortsightedness doomed them to forty years of wandering. On occasion, however courage and trust may arise in God’s warriors this will be evident in the lives of Joshua and David. It happens now as well.

The story of Desmond Doss is a modern day example of perseverance in the face of hardship. God honored this man’s devotion. Desmond was drafted into the Army in April 1942. The Army ignored his conscientious objector status.³

Doss was a devout Seventh Day Adventist who believed it wrong to take life. Because of his beliefs, he found himself at odds with his battalion commander and the men in his company. Doss, holds fast though hounded day and night, given all of the worse jobs, even threatened with death because of his beliefs. Throughout it all, he refused to learn how to use or carry a weapon. Finally, he was allowed to enter the Medical Corps. After training, he returned to the 77th Division. He served in the campaigns on Guam and Leyte in 1944.

³ Peter Collier, Medal of Honor, “Desmond Doss, “Artisan Publishers, 2003, p.64

By now, the men with whom he served accepted him and no longer cursed him.

In the spring of 1945, his battalion was readied for the invasion of Okinawa. On May 5, a Saturday, Doss's Sabbath day, his unit was tasked to assault a 400-foot escarpment. Doss was the only available medic. Reminding himself that Christ healed seven days a week Doss joined his men. On the top of the escarpment, Doss and the battalion found themselves pinned down by massive artillery, mortar, and machine-gun fire. The battalion driven from the escarpment leaves nearly a company of wounded. Doss was the only one to stay.

He protected the wounded from enemy fire and tended to their wounds. Under heavy fire, he dragged the wounded to the edge of the escarpment and lowered them down in a sling.

In speaking of it later, Doss said that each time he lowered a man he prayed, "Dear God, let me get just one more man." The Lord heard his prayer. Though the citation reads that he saved 75 men those present said it was closer to 150. "It was if an angel was on the battlefield carrying for the wounded some would later say."

The hardship in basic training and Doss's total dependency on God saved the lives of many who would have never left that battlefield. Many in the beginning had made Doss their personal enemy. Yet, Doss with the Lord's strength returned good for evil. Desmond Doss was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions. Adversity; physical, mental, and emotional, is an integral part of warrior training.

The Lord provided other provisions during the wilderness wandering. People are given special abilities to make the Tabernacle and other items.

Exodus 36 gives insight into the magnitude of skills with which the Lord blesses Israel. These abilities, though not discussed, must have extended to weapons. An example is the bows of this period. Composite bows took special workmanship. Superior to most of the bows used today the bows of that period took about 18 months to produce a finished product. Israel becomes expert in the use of the bow.

Slings are simpler and just as deadly. The slings, bows, swords were all weapons of a lightly armed fighting unit. By God's design, Israel depended on lightly armored combat units because they were easier to outfit and produced less drain on the economy. More importantly light armor meant quicker maneuvering ability in the face of the enemy.

Other nations had to produce heavy weapons like chariots, maintain animals necessary for their use and produce body armor for the soldier. God revealed tactics to Israel that would make these expensive items unnecessary.

Still thousands of weapons had to be constructed. The few battles fought in the wilderness no doubt provided some of these weapons but with the exception of the Amalekites, those battles fall near the end of the 40 years. The sickle sword, knives, bows, slings, and other weapons are produced during the wilderness period. The Lord inspired His people with these skills.

The Lord provides clothing as well. In Deut 8:4 we learn that Israel's clothing, including their sandals, was worn for forty years and did not wear out. The wilderness would not have been able to provide the materials necessary for making clothing. There was no neighborhood clothing store down the street.

Part of the reason the military issues clothing is so that it will be readily recognizable by others during combat. Surely one would know their neighbor after looking at his

clothing day after day! Like food, water, and weapons, the Lord thinks of everything including the clothes on the backs of the nation.

The magnitude of the training, organization, communication, and other skills involved reveals the depth of grace in God's provision.

Rules of engagement, our next topic is a hot topic in the military community today yet before Israel ever went into battle each warrior knew the rules and the consequences for breaking them.