

Deuteronomy 20:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart.

Analysis

Fearful warriors dismissed: 'And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart.' Fear is contagious—one fearful soldier demoralizes others. The Hebrew *yare verak levav* (יָרֵא וְרַק לִבָּו, 'fearful and soft-hearted') describes paralyzing dread. Such men must leave 'lest his brethren's heart faint'—fear spreads. Gideon's army illustrates this: 32,000 reduced to 10,000 after fearful dismissed (Judges 7:3). Quality matters more than quantity; faithful few triumph over fearful many. This applies spiritually—halfhearted, doubting believers hinder corporate faith more than help it.

Historical Context

This law seems counterintuitive—shrinking armies during war. But morale mattered more than numbers. Fearful soldiers flee during battle, causing rout. Better to fight with confident few than panic-prone many. Gideon's 300 proved this—God further reduced 10,000 to 300, ensuring victory credited to Him alone (Judges 7:2-7). Jesus similarly said 'count the cost' before discipleship (Luke 14:28-33)—halfhearted commitment is worse than honest rejection. Better fewer committed disciples than crowds of uncommitted followers. Church growth focused on numbers over depth repeats this error.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. Why is fearful, halfhearted participation sometimes worse than absence?
2. How does one person's fear or doubt affect corporate faith in churches or families?
3. What does Jesus's 'count the cost' teaching share with dismissing fearful warriors?

Interlinear Text

וְיִסַּפּ וְ	הַשָּׂטָרִים	לֵדַבֵּר	אֶל	הָעָם	וְאָמְרוּ
further	And the officers	shall speak	H413	unto the people	and they shall say
H3254	H7860	H1696		H5971	H559
מִי	הָאִישׁ	הַיָּרָא	וְכִי	כְּלִבְבוֹ:	יֵלֶךְ
H4310	What man	is there that is fearful	and fainthearted	as well as his heart	H1980
	H376	H3373	H7390	H3824	
וְיָשָׁב	לְבֵיתוֹ	וְלֹא	יִמָּס	אֶת	כְּלִבְבוֹ:
and return	unto his house	H3808	faint	H853	as well as his heart
H7725	H1004		H4549		H3824
אֶם יוֹ	כְּלִבְבוֹ:				
lest his brethren's	as well as his heart				
H251	H3824				

Additional Cross-References

Judges 7:3 (Parallel theme): Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.

Revelation 21:8 (Parallel theme): But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Deuteronomy 1:28 (Parallel theme): Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there.

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org