

Judges 8:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host.

Analysis

And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host.

The capture of Zebah and Zalmunna completes Gideon's divinely appointed mission. The kings' names carry symbolic weight: **Zebah** (Zevach, זֶבַח) means "sacrifice" while **Zalmunna** (Tsalmunna, צַלְמָנָה) means "shade/protection denied" or "shadow withdrawn." Whether these were birth names or throne names, they ironically foreshadow their fate—they became sacrifices to divine justice, their protection stripped away. Their flight—**when Zebah and Zalmunna fled** (vayyanusu Zevach u-Tsalmunna, וַיָּנָסְעוּ זֶבַח וְצַלְמָנָה)—demonstrates that even kings cannot escape God's judgment.

Gideon's relentless pursuit—**he pursued after them** (vayyirdof achareihem, וַיַּרְדֵּף אַחֲרֵיכֶם)—models complete obedience. God had commanded Israel to destroy the Midianites; Gideon refused to settle for routing the army while leaving leadership intact. The phrase **and took the two kings** (vayyilkod et-shenei malkhei Midyan, וַיַּלְקֹד אֶת-שְׁנֵי מֶלֶכִי מִדְיָן) emphasizes capture of both kings—complete fulfillment of the mission. The verb lakad (לְקַד, "capture, seize") indicates decisive control.

The final phrase—**and discomfited all the host** (ve'et kol-hamachaneh hechrid, וְאֵת כָּל-הַמַּחֲנֶה הָחָרֵיד)—uses charad (חָרָד, "to tremble, be terrified, scatter"). This is the same terror God sent in the initial battle (Judges 7:22). The complete victory—

from 135,000 warriors reduced to scattered remnants, their kings captured—vindicated Gideon's confidence in God's promise. This foreshadows Christ's complete victory: "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15). Partial victory leaves enemies to regroup; complete victory ensures lasting peace.

Historical Context

The capture of enemy kings was militarily and psychologically decisive in ancient warfare. Leaderless armies typically disintegrated, with soldiers fleeing to their homes. The kings' capture prevented future Midianite coalitions—without royal leadership to organize and motivate troops, the nomadic groups would return to fragmented clan-based existence rather than unified raiding.

Zebah and Zalmunna's capture is referenced in later Scripture as paradigmatic of God's judgment on Israel's enemies. Psalm 83:11 invokes their defeat: "Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna." This memorialization demonstrates how Gideon's victory became proverbial—a reminder of God's faithfulness to deliver His people and judge those who oppress them. The kings' eventual execution (Judges 8:18-21) completed the judgment, ending the Midianite threat for generations.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does Gideon's pursuit to complete victory challenge modern Christian tendency toward partial obedience or incomplete sanctification?

2. What 'kings' (besetting sins, spiritual strongholds) in your life require complete capture and removal rather than mere suppression?
3. How does the complete discomfiture of the Midianite host illustrate Christ's total victory over spiritual enemies that believers appropriate by faith?

Interlinear Text

וַיַּלְכֵל fled H5127	וְזָבָה And when Zebah H2078	וְצַלְמֹנָנָה and Zalmunna H6759	וַיַּעֲשֶׂה he pursued H7291	וְאַתָּה after H310	וְאָכַרְתָּם them and took H3920
וְאֶת the two H853	מֶלֶךְ kings H4428	מִדְיָן of Midian H4080	וְאֶת And when Zebah H2078	וְאֶת and Zalmunna H6759	
וְאֶת all the host H3605	וְפָמַתְתָּם and discomfited H4264	וְפָרַיְתָּם and discomfited H2729			

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 83:11 (Parallel theme): Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna:

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