

Judges 8:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and enquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even threescore and seventeen men.

Analysis

Literacy in Ancient Israel: This verse provides remarkable evidence of widespread literacy in ancient Israel. The Hebrew word וַיִּכְתֹּב (vayikhtov, "and he wrote/described") indicates the young man could write down the names of seventy-seven leaders. **Cultural Significance:** This casual mention of a randomly captured youth being literate suggests education was more common in ancient Israel than often assumed.

The precision of the number—"threescore and seventeen" (77)—demonstrates specific, verifiable information rather than approximation. **Gideon's Strategy:** By obtaining written documentation of Succoth's leadership, Gideon was preparing for systematic justice. The verb וַיִּשְׁאַל (vayishal, "enquired") suggests interrogation or questioning, indicating this was not voluntary cooperation.

Literary Function: This brief verse sets up the coming judgment on Succoth (verse 16), showing Gideon's methodical approach to dealing with those who refused to help God's army. The written list would prevent any leaders from escaping accountability.

Historical Context

Period of the Judges: This event occurred around 1191-1151 BC during Gideon's pursuit of the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna. Succoth was a city east of the

Jordan River in Israelite territory that refused to provide food to Gideon's exhausted troops.

Ancient Near Eastern Literacy: Archaeological discoveries, including the Tel Zayit abecedary and Gezer calendar, confirm that alphabetic writing was known in ancient Israel. The simplicity of the Hebrew alphabet (22 consonants) made literacy more accessible than in civilizations using complex cuneiform or hieroglyphics. This verse provides biblical evidence supporting archaeological findings about literacy rates in Iron Age Israel.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What does this verse reveal about the level of education and literacy in ancient Israel during the period of the Judges?
2. Why was it important for Gideon to obtain written documentation of Succoth's leadership rather than relying on memory?
3. How does the casual mention of a young man's ability to write challenge modern assumptions about ancient societies?
4. What does Gideon's methodical approach to justice reveal about biblical concepts of accountability and leadership?
5. How might the widespread literacy evidenced here have contributed to the preservation and transmission of biblical texts?

Interlinear Text

וַלְכָד	נַ עֵר	מֵאֲנָשִׁי י	סֻכּוֹת	וַשְּׁאֵל הוּא	
And caught	a young man	of the men	of Succoth	and enquired	
H3920	H5288	H582	H5523	H7592	
	וַיְכַתְּבֵהוּ ב	אֶת אֵל יוֹ	שָׁרֵי י	סֻכּוֹת	וְאֵת
	of him and he described	H413 H853	unto him the princes	of Succoth	H853
	H3789		H8269	H5523	
זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	שְׁבַע יָמִים	וְשִׁבְעָה	אִישׁ:		
and the elders	thereof even threescore and seventeen	H7651	men		
H2205	H7657		H376		

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