

Judges 8:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thy men that are weary?

Analysis

And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me—Gideon's confrontation with Succoth recalls their earlier mockery when he requested bread for his exhausted troops (8:5-6). The verb charaph (חרף, "upbraid/reproach") indicates scornful contempt—the elders of Succoth had demanded tangible proof of victory before offering support, asking sarcastically, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand?" (8:6). Their refusal to aid fellow Israelites fighting God's battles constituted covenant faithlessness.

Now Gideon displays the captured kings as vindication—"Behold" (hineh, הנה) dramatically presents the evidence they demanded. The phrase "with whom ye did upbraid me" emphasizes personal affront rather than covenant violation. While the men of Succoth sinned against Israel and Yahweh by refusing aid (Deuteronomy 23:3-4 commands Israel to help brethren in need), Gideon's response centers on wounded pride rather than covenant justice. This subtle shift from righteous indignation to personal vendetta marks the deterioration visible throughout Judges—leaders begin well but finish poorly, mixing godly zeal with carnal motives.

The theological tension here involves legitimate versus illegitimate justice. Succoth's sin was real—they prioritized self-preservation over covenant loyalty, fearing Midianite retaliation if they aided Gideon's seemingly doomed campaign.

Yet Gideon's subsequent punishment (verse 16) appears disproportionate and personally motivated rather than judicially administered according to Mosaic law. This contrasts with Christ's teaching that disciples must forgive personal offenses (Matthew 18:21-35) while leaving judgment to God and proper authorities (Romans 12:19, 13:1-4).

Historical Context

Succoth was an Israelite city in the territory of Gad, east of the Jordan River in the lush valley region. Its name means 'booths' or 'temporary shelters,' possibly related to Jacob's earlier encampment there (Genesis 33:17). The city's strategic location along trade routes made it vulnerable to raids from desert peoples like the Midianites. Their refusal to aid Gideon likely stemmed from fear—if Gideon failed, Midianite reprisal would be swift and brutal. Ancient Near Eastern warfare frequently involved collective punishment of cities supporting failed rebellions, making Succoth's caution understandable though inexcusable given their covenant obligations to fellow Israelites.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. When have you demanded that others prove themselves before offering support, and how does this reflect a lack of faith in God's ability to work through unlikely circumstances?
2. How do you distinguish between righteous confrontation of sin and personal vindictiveness when addressing wrongs done to you?

3. What does Succoth's fear of Midian despite God's clear calling on Gideon teach about choosing pragmatic security over covenant faithfulness?

Interlinear Text

וַיָּבֹא	וְ	אֶל	לְאַמְרָה	סִפְוָת	אֲנָשִׁים	וְ	בְּ	בְּ	בְּ
And he came		H413	H376	of Succoth	and said	H2009	Behold Zebah		
		H935		H5523	H559		H2078		
וְ	אֲשֶׁר	מִצְלָמָה	עָלָיו	עָרְפָת	מִ	לְאַמְרָה	אַזְתָּחָת	וְ	בְּ
and Zalmunna	H834			with whom ye did upbraid	H853	and said		H559	
	H6759			H2778					
בְּ	בְּ	בְּ	בְּ	בְּ	בְּ	בְּ	בְּ	בְּ	כִּי
Are the hands	Behold Zebah	and Zalmunna		וְ	אֲשֶׁר	מִצְלָמָה	עָלָיו	עַתָּה	בַּיִדְךָ
H3709	H2078	H6759			H6258		H3027		H3588
נָתַת	לְאַנְשֵׁים	לְעַפְתִּים	לְקַמְּמִים						
that we should give	H376	H3287	H3899						
H5414									

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