

Judges 8:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king.

Analysis

Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor?—This verse transitions from Gideon's punishment of Israelite cities to personal revenge against the Midianite kings. The question reveals that Gideon's pursuit of Zebah and Zalmunna was motivated not solely by military necessity but by blood vengeance for murdered relatives. The phrase "what manner of men" (eiphoh ha'anashim, אֵiphָה כָּאָנָשִׁים, literally "where/what are the men") asks about their appearance or characteristics.

The kings' response—"As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king" (kamokha khemohem echad kethoar benei hamelekh)—indicates Gideon's brothers possessed royal bearing and nobility despite being Israelites without formal kingship. This description is striking given Israel's rejection of monarchy at this stage (8:23). The comparison suggests that Gideon's family held prominent social standing, explaining the Midianite kings' memory of these particular victims among countless others killed during their seven-year oppression (Judges 6:1-6).

Critically, verse 19 reveals these slain men were Gideon's actual brothers, "the sons of my mother." The mention of Mount Tabor as the location connects to earlier Midianite raids into the Jezreel Valley. This personal tragedy likely fueled Gideon's initial reluctance when called to deliver Israel (6:11-17)—his family had

already suffered devastating loss. However, the shift from divinely-commissioned deliverance (chapters 6-7) to personal vendetta (verses 18-21) reveals the danger of mixing God's purposes with private revenge. Romans 12:19 commands, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord," forbidding believers from taking personal revenge even for grievous wrongs. Civil magistrates may execute justice (Romans 13:1-4), but private citizens must forgive personal offenses and trust God's ultimate judgment.

Historical Context

Mount Tabor is a prominent landmark in the Jezreel Valley, rising 1,886 feet and visible throughout the region. Deborah and Barak later mustered forces there before defeating Sisera (Judges 4:6-14). The mountain's strategic position made it a gathering point but also a vulnerable location during Midianite raids. The Midianite oppression involved annual invasions at harvest time, destroying crops and livestock (Judges 6:3-5), during which numerous Israelites were killed. The fact that Zebah and Zalmunna personally remembered killing Gideon's brothers suggests these were notable victims, possibly captured during a specific raid rather than random casualties. Ancient Near Eastern warfare frequently involved execution of captured nobles while enslaving common people, explaining why the kings particularly recalled men of royal appearance.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How do personal tragedies and injustices color your response to God's calling, and when does legitimate grief become an excuse for disobedience or vengeance?

2. What is the biblical distinction between proper civil justice (through magistrates) and prohibited personal revenge, and how do you navigate that boundary?
3. How does knowing that Christ bore ultimate injustice without revenge (1 Peter 2:23) transform your response to personal wrongs and family tragedies?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמְרוּ	אָל	זֶה	זֶה	אָל	צְלָמָן	עִירָה
And they answered	H413	he unto Zebah	H413	and Zalmunna	What	
H559		H2078		H6759	H375	
וַיֹּאמְרוּ	אָשֶׁר	בְּרִכְתָּם	בְּתַבְעָרָה	וְרֹאשׁ	וַיֹּאמְרוּ	
H376	H834	were they whom ye slew	at Tabor	And they answered		
		H2026	H8396	H559		
כְּמֹוֹה	מִ	אֲפָד	כְּתָאָר	בְּבִין	פָּלָרָה	
As thou	As thou	art so were they each one	resembled	the children	of a king	
H3644	H3644	H259	H8389	H1121	H4428	

Additional Cross-References

Judges 4:6 (Parallel theme): And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

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