

Judges 8:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that.

Analysis

God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that.

Gideon's argument climaxes by attributing glory to God and to Ephraim while minimizing his own role. The phrase **God hath delivered into your hands** (bayedkhem natan Elohim, בָּיַדְכֶם נָתַן אֱלֹהִים) uses the perfect tense, emphasizing completed divine action—God gave the victory, not human prowess. By crediting Ephraim with capturing the princes Oreb (meaning "raven") and Zeeb (meaning "wolf"), Gideon acknowledged their significant contribution. These leaders' deaths demoralized the remaining Midianite forces and prevented regrouping.

Gideon's rhetorical question **what was I able to do in comparison of you?** (umah yakholti asot kakhkhem, וּמָה יָכֹלְתִּי עָשׂוֹת כְּכֶם) expresses extreme self-deprecation. In reality, Gideon's 300 had routed 135,000 Midianites (Judges 8:10), while Ephraim pursued stragglers. Yet Gideon's humility defused the crisis: **their anger was abated** (rafetah rucham, רַפְּתָה רוּחָם)—literally "their spirit relaxed." The verb rafah (רָפָה, "to sink, relax, let go") indicates complete de-escalation.

This passage illustrates biblical peacemaking that prioritizes reconciliation over being right. Jesus taught: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called

the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Gideon could have cited his divine calling (Judges 6:14), his miraculous signs (Judges 6:36-40), or the Spirit's empowerment (Judges 6:34). Instead, he chose humility and generosity, preventing bloodshed within Israel. Paul similarly urged: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18).

Historical Context

The capture of Oreb and Zeeb (Judges 7:25) was strategically crucial—leaderless armies often disintegrated in ancient warfare. With their princes dead, the remaining Midianite forces lost command structure and morale. The places where they fell were memorialized: "the rock of Oreb" and "the winepress of Zeeb," becoming proverbial references to God's judgment (Psalm 83:11, Isaiah 10:26).

Ephraim's acceptance of Gideon's explanation prevented civil war that plagued later periods. When Jephthah faced similar Ephraimite anger, his harsh response led to slaughter of 42,000 Ephraimites at the Jordan fords (Judges 12:1-6). Gideon's diplomatic wisdom preserved unity, allowing continued pursuit of the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna. This contrast illustrates how leadership responses to unjust criticism significantly impact outcomes—gentleness can preserve peace while defensiveness escalates conflict.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does Gideon's credit to God for victory model proper response to success in ministry or life?
2. What does the contrast between Gideon's diplomacy and Jephthah's harshness teach about responding to criticism?

3. In what situations should believers prioritize peace and unity over being vindicated or proven right?

Interlinear Text

בְּיָדְכֶם	נָתַן	אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָם	שָׂרֵי	מִדְיָן	אֶת
into your hands	hath delivered	God	H853 the princes	of Midian	H853
H3027	H5414	H430	H8269	H4080	
וְאֵת עֹרֵי ב	זֵאֵב	וַיְמָה	יָכֹל לַתִּי	עָשׂוֹת	כָּכָם
Oreb	H853 and Zeeb	H4100	and what was I able	to do	H0
H6159	H2062		H3201	H6213	H227
רָפְתָה ה	רוּחָם	בְּדִבְרֵי	מַעַל יוֹ		
was abated	in comparison of you	Then their anger	H5921	that	
H7503	H7307			H1696	
הַדִּבְּרֵי	הַזֵּה:				
toward him when he had said	H2088				
H1697					

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 15:1 (Parallel theme): A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.