

Judges 8:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?

Analysis

And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?

Succoth's response reveals pragmatic faithlessness masquerading as prudence. The sarcastic rhetorical question **Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand** (hakaf Zevach ve-Tsalmunna atah be-yadekha, הֲכַף זֶבַח וְצַלְמוֹנָע אַתָּה בְּיָדְךָ) mocked Gideon's unfinished mission. The reference to **hands** (kaf, כַּף) was idiomatic—ancient Near Eastern victors sometimes cut off defeated kings' hands as trophies (compare 1 Samuel 5:4). Succoth demanded proof of complete victory before offering support, refusing to aid based on faith in God's promise.

This response exposes cowardly calculation. Succoth feared that if Gideon failed, the Midianite kings would return and punish any city that had assisted Israel. Their concern was self-preservation, not covenant faithfulness. They ignored that Gideon had already routed the entire Midianite army (Judges 7:22) and that Ephraim had captured the princes Oreb and Zeeb (Judges 7:25). Despite overwhelming evidence of divine intervention, Succoth demanded ironclad proof before risking support.

The phrase **that we should give bread unto thine army** reveals misplaced loyalty—they called it "thine army," not "Israel's army" or "the LORD's army." They viewed this as Gideon's personal campaign rather than God's deliverance of

covenant people. This mirrors the seed sown among thorns in Jesus's parable—"the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22). Fear of worldly consequences stifles faith and fruitfulness.

Historical Context

Succoth's fear was not entirely irrational. Cities that supported losing sides in ancient warfare faced severe reprisals—destruction, enslavement, or tribute. The Midianite confederation had oppressed Israel for seven years, suggesting military superiority and ruthlessness. Gideon's small force of 300, despite their miraculous victory, may have seemed unlikely to capture the fleeing kings who had extensive desert knowledge and support networks.

The reference to the kings' hands suggests this was recognized proof of victory. Ancient Near Eastern victory stelae and reliefs often depicted conquered enemies' hands piled before victorious kings. The Egyptians counted enemy dead by severed hands; the Assyrians similarly displayed hands of conquered foes. Succoth's demand for such tangible proof before offering minimal bread assistance reveals their spiritual bankruptcy.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How do believers sometimes demand absolute certainty before supporting God's work, refusing to act on faith in His promises?
2. What does Succoth's fear of Midianite reprisal teach about the paralysis that comes from fearing human opposition more than grieving God?
3. In what situations might 'prudence' actually be a mask for faithlessness and refusal to sacrifice for kingdom advance?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	שָׁרֵי י	סֹכּוֹת	הַ כַּף	זֶבַח	וְזַלְמוֹנָא
said	And the princes	of Succoth	Are the hands	of Zebah	and Zalmunna
H559	H8269	H5523	H3709	H2078	H6759

עַתָּה	בְּיָדְךָ	כִּי	נָתַן	לְצִבְאָךָ	לֶחֶם:
H6258	now in thine hand	H3588	that we should give	unto thine army	bread
	H3027		H5414	H6635	H3899

Additional Cross-References

1 Kings 20:11 (Parallel theme): And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.