

Who were Zebah and Zalmunna in the Bible?

Zebah and Zalmunna were Midianite kings who lived during one of the darkest periods recorded in Scripture, the time of the Israelite judges. The defeat of these two kings is detailed in Judges 8:1-21 when Gideon vanquished them and brought an end to their oppression.

God allowed the Israelites to fall under the oppression of the Midianites as a form of judgment for Israel's sin of idolatry. When Gideon was called by God to judge Israel, Zebah and Zalmunna had been oppressing Israel for seven years (Judges 6:1). "Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts" (Judges 6:3-5). Some Israelites had even taken to living in caves for shelter (verse 2).

Gideon's triumph over the forces of Zebah and Zalmunna serves as an example of God prevailing over impossible circumstances for His glory. The Midianite kings had teamed up with other groups and had a huge army, "thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore" (Judges 7:12). Gideon gathered an army, but God pared it down to only 300 men (Judges 7:1-8). God intentionally set the odds against Gideon to display His power. As He told Gideon, "If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength" (Judges 7:2, NLT).

God gave the Midianites into the hands of Israel, who pursued their enemies as they fled toward the Jordan River. Two Midianite commanders, Oreb and Zeeb, were captured and

beheaded (Judges 7:25). Capturing Zebah and Zalmunna took more time. Gideon and his men crossed the Jordan and pursued the kings through two towns that refused to give aid to Gideon. Finally, Gideon and his men caught up with them at Karkor. Only about 15,000 soldiers were left to fight for Zebah and Zalmunna; 120,000 Midianite swordsmen had been killed (Judges 8:10). Gideon came upon the enemy unawares; Zebah and Zalmunna fled again, but they didn't get far before being captured (verse 12).

Gideon brought Zebah and Zalmunna back to the cities that had refused to help him, to show the city leaders that God had indeed granted Israel the victory. Gideon then interrogated the captured kings, and they confessed to killing Gideon's brothers at Tabor (Judges 8:13-19). For that crime, Gideon ordered his son Jether to execute the kings, but Jether, being young, was afraid (verse 20). "Zebah and Zalmunna said, 'Come, do it yourself. As is the man, so is his strength.'" So Gideon stepped forward and killed them, and took the ornaments off their camels' necks" (verse 21).

Apart from their defeat, little is known of Zebah and Zalmunna. They are mentioned in one of the imprecatory psalms: "Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna" (Psalm 83:11). Their defeat is also referenced in 1 Samuel 12:11 and Isaiah 10:26, though no names are mentioned. No other historical or archaeological evidence of these kings exists. The fate of these wicked kings serves as a demonstration of God's judgment and His glory.