

Jeremiah 41:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then they took all the men, and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and found him by the great waters that are in Gibeon.

Analysis

The military pursuit—'Then they took all the men, and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah'—demonstrates Johanan's commitment to justice and rescue. The phrase 'found him by the great waters that are in Gibeon' provides geographical specificity: Gibeon, about 6 miles north of Jerusalem and some 2-3 miles south of Mizpah, had significant water sources including a famous pool (2 Samuel 2:13). That Johanan overtook Ishmael there indicates Ishmael's party was moving slowly, burdened by captives and possibly plunder. Gibeon's location also shows Ishmael was taking a route toward the Jordan Valley and Ammonite territory. The interception at 'great waters' (likely a pool, cistern complex, or spring) suggests Ishmael stopped to water his party, providing opportunity for Johanan to overtake him. This detail demonstrates how tactical necessities (needing water) can create vulnerabilities for those fleeing. The passage sets up the confrontation (v.13-15) where captives would be liberated but Ishmael would escape. This partial success characterized much of the post-destruction period: efforts to preserve and restore were only partially successful, with damage never fully undone.

Historical Context

Gibeon (modern el-Jib) was a significant city in Benjamin territory, famous from Joshua's time when Gibeonites made peace with Israel through deception (Joshua 9). The 'great waters' likely refers to Gibeon's remarkable water system,

discovered in archaeological excavations: a massive spiral staircase descending 80 feet to reach a water table, plus a tunnel extending through bedrock to an external spring. This sophisticated hydraulic engineering from the 11th-10th centuries BC ensured water supply during siege. In David's time, a battle occurred 'by the pool in Gibeon' between Joab's men and Abner's (2 Samuel 2:12-17), showing this location's strategic importance. That Ishmael stopped here indicates either he felt confident in his lead over pursuers or his party desperately needed water. Either way, the tactical pause allowed Johanan to close the distance. Gibeon's location on the route to the Jordan Valley and Ammon made it a natural waypoint. The site's water sources made it attractive for rest, but this attractiveness also made it predictable to pursuers.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does Johanan's pursuit of Ishmael illustrate the biblical principle of seeking justice even when recovery can only be partial?
2. What does this episode teach about how God's providence works through natural circumstances (like the need for water) to accomplish His purposes?
3. In what ways should believers pursue justice and rescue while recognizing that complete restoration of what evil destroyed may not be possible in this age?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּקְחוּ	אֶת	כָּל	הָאֲנָשִׁים	וַיֵּלְכוּ	לְהִלָּחֵם	עִם
Then they took	H853	H3605	H376	H1980	to fight	H5973
H3947					H3898	
לְיִשְׁמָעֵאל	בֶּן	נִתְנָה	וַיִּמְצְאוּ	אֶת	אֵל	מַיִם
with Ishmael	the son	of Nathaniah	and found	H853	H413	waters
H3458	H1121	H5418	H4672			H4325
רַב־יָם	אֲשֶׁר	בְּגִבְעוֹן:				
him by the great	H834	that are in Gibeon				
H7227		H1391				

Additional Cross-References

2 Samuel 2:13 (Parallel theme): And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out, and met together by the pool of Gibeon: and they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool.