

Joshua 10:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Beth-horon, that the LORD cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword.

Analysis

And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Bethhoron, that the LORD cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword.

This dramatic divine intervention demonstrates that Yahweh, not Israel's military prowess, secures victory. The "great stones from heaven" (avanim gedolot min-hashamayim, אַבְנֵימִן הַשָּׁמַיִם) describes extraordinary hailstones of lethal size, directed with supernatural precision. The text explicitly states more enemies died from heaven's assault than from Israel's swords, emphasizing that the battle belongs to the Lord (1 Samuel 17:47). This principle undergirds Reformed theology's doctrine of providence: God uses natural means (weather phenomena) to accomplish His sovereign purposes.

The hailstones' selective targeting—killing fleeing Canaanites while sparing pursuing Israelites—reveals divine discrimination beyond natural explanation. Ancient Near Eastern readers would recognize this as divine judgment, comparing it to the seventh Egyptian plague (Exodus 9:18-26) where hail struck Egypt but not Goshen. Both events employ natural phenomena (hailstorms) for supernatural

purposes, showing that the Creator controls creation to execute His decrees.

Theologically, this account refutes deistic conceptions of an uninvolved deity. The God of Scripture actively intervenes in history, wielding creation as instrument of judgment and redemption. The hailstones typologically anticipate the final judgment when God will rain fire and brimstone on the wicked (Ezekiel 38:22; Revelation 16:21). Yet for believers, this same sovereign power provides assurance: the One who controls weather to defeat our enemies can order all circumstances for our good (Romans 8:28).

Historical Context

The descent from Beth-horon to Azekah covers approximately 25 miles through the Shephelah (lowland hills) toward the coastal plain. This region is prone to sudden, severe thunderstorms when Mediterranean moisture meets the highlands, creating conditions for large hail. Archaeological surveys confirm this route was a major ancient highway, making it the logical escape path for the fleeing coalition.

Ancient writers understood that divine action often employed natural means. The text's matter-of-fact reporting—without explaining mechanisms or defending miracles—reflects the Hebrew worldview where natural and supernatural seamlessly integrate under divine sovereignty. Weather phenomena frequently appear in ancient Near Eastern texts as signs of divine activity; what distinguishes the biblical account is attribution to Yahweh's direct action rather than capricious nature deities.

The battle's geography proved tactically significant. The Beth-horon ascent (actually two towns: Upper and Lower Beth-horon) was a narrow pass easily defended or, in this case, creating a bottleneck for fleeing troops. The descent to Azekah exposed the coalition to extended pursuit with nowhere to hide. The hailstorm prevented the coalition from regrouping or taking defensive positions in the fortified cities of the Shephelah, enabling Joshua to press his advantage (verses 16-27) and capture their leaders.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does the fact that more died from God's hailstones than from Israel's swords challenge our tendency to credit human effort rather than divine provision for success?
2. What does God's use of natural means (hailstorm) for supernatural purposes teach about His ongoing providence in our lives?
3. How should recognizing God's sovereign control over creation affect our prayer life and expectations of His involvement in our circumstances?

Interlinear Text

וַיָּהִי י' H1961	בָּנָסָם H5127	מִפְנֵי י' H6440	יִשְׂרָאֵל ל' H3478	ה' מ' H1992
And it came to pass as they fled	from before	Israel		
בְּמוֹךְ ד' H4174	בֵּית H0	חוֹרֹן H1032	וַיְהִי ה' H3068	הִשָּׁל יוֹ H7993
and were in the going down	to Bethhoron	that the LORD	cast down	
עֲלֵיהֶם H5921	בָּאֲבָנֵי י' H68	גָּדֹל וְ H1419	מִן H4480	הַשָּׁמַיִם ים H8064
stones	great	from heaven	upon them unto Azekah	
וּמֵתוּ H4191	רַב ים H7227	מֵאֲשֶׁר ר' H834	וּמֵתוּ H4191	בָּאֲבָנֵי י' H68
and they died	they were more	than they whom	and they died	stones
הַבָּרָד ד' H1259	מֵאֲשֶׁר ר' H834	הָרַג ו' H2026	בְּנֵי י' H1121	יִשְׂרָאֵל ל' H3478
with hailstones	than they whom	slew	the children	Israel
				בְּחֶרֶב: H2719
				with the sword

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 28:2 (References Lord): Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand.

Judges 5:20 (Parallel theme): They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

Revelation 16:21 (Parallel theme): And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.

Revelation 11:19 (Parallel theme): And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

Isaiah 30:30 (References Lord): And the LORD shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones.

Psalms 11:6 (Parallel theme): Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.

Genesis 19:24 (References Lord): Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;

Ezekiel 13:11 (Parallel theme): Say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it.