Joshua 10:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

> And Joshua said, Roll great stones upon the mouth of the cave, and set men by it for to keep them:

Analysis

And Joshua said, Roll great stones upon the mouth of the cave, and set men by it for to keep them:

Joshua's command demonstrates tactical wisdom and strategic priorities. The verb "roll" (גֹּלּוּ, gollu) indicates moving massive stones requiring multiple men—ensuring the kings couldn't escape even if they attempted to fight their way out. The phrase "great stones" (אֲבָנִים גְּדֹלוֹת, avanim gedolot) emphasizes size sufficient to seal the cave mouth completely. This created a natural prison without requiring significant troop deployment to guard it.

The additional command "set men by it for to keep them" (הַפְקִידוּ עָלֶיהָ אֲנָשִׁים, hafqidu aleha anashim) assigned a small guard force to ensure security while minimizing forces diverted from the main battle. The Hebrew verb פָּקַד (paqad) means to appoint, muster, or assign responsibility, indicating formal guard duty. This balanced security with operational necessity—the kings were neutralized, but the battle continued.

From a Reformed perspective, this illustrates the principle of using sufficient means without excess. Joshua didn't leave the cave unguarded (presumption) nor deploy his entire army to guard it (overreaction). He used proportionate means for the task. Christian wisdom similarly avoids both presumptuous passivity and anxious overreaction, trusting God while employing appropriate human effort (Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Peter 5:7-9).

Historical Context

Rolling large stones to seal cave entrances appears throughout biblical and archaeological contexts. Burial caves were sealed with rolling stones (Genesis 29:2-3; Matthew 27:60; Mark 16:3-4), as were storage caves. Archaeological excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa and other sites have uncovered examples of such stones, typically disc-shaped and weighing hundreds of pounds, requiring several people to move them.

The tactic of sealing enemies in caves occurs in other ancient accounts. The rebel Maccabees used caves for guerrilla warfare refuges, prompting enemies to seal them (1 Maccabees 2:29-38). Roman forces under Vespasian sealed rebels in caves during the Jewish Revolt (66-73 CE). The tactic worked because caves typically had single entrances, making them easy to block but deadly traps if sealed.

Joshua's decision to seal the cave rather than entering to fight the kings showed tactical wisdom. Cave fighting favored defenders—narrow passages neutralized numerical superiority and allowed trapped enemies to inflict heavy casualties. The confined space, darkness, and unknown cave layout made direct assault extremely costly. By sealing the cave, Joshua achieved the same objective (neutralizing the kings) without casualties, freeing his troops for the continuing pursuit.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does Joshua's balanced approach—securing the kings without overcommitting resources—illustrate biblical wisdom in managing competing priorities?
2. What situations in your life require proportionate response rather than either neglect or excessive attention?

3. How can you discern when God is calling you to trust Him through bold action versus prudent caution?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּ֫אמֶר יְהוֹשֻׁ֫עַ גֹּ֫לּוּ אֲבָנִים גְּדֹלוֹת אֶל פִּי
| said | And Joshua | Roll | stones | great | H413 | upon the mouth |
| H559 | H3091 | H1556 | H68 | H1419 | | H6310 |

הַמְּעָרָה הַפְקִידוּ עָלֶיהָ אֲנָשִׁים לְשָׁמְרָם׃
| of the cave | and set | H5921 | men | by it for to keep |
| H4631 | H6485 | | H582 | H8104 |

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 27:66 (Parallel theme): So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.