

Joshua 10:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And stay ye not, but pursue after your enemies, and smite the hindmost of them; suffer them not to enter into their cities: for the LORD your God hath delivered them into your hand.

Analysis

And stay ye not, but pursue after your enemies, and smite the hindmost of them; suffer them not to enter into their cities: for the LORD your God hath delivered them into your hand.

The emphatic negative "stay ye not" (אַל-תַּעֲמֹד, al-ta'amodu) commands immediate action without pause. Joshua refused to let his troops rest after securing the kings, recognizing that momentum in battle must be exploited. The verb "pursue" (רָדַף, ridfu) indicates aggressive chase rather than passive waiting. Military history confirms that most casualties occur during pursuit when defeated armies flee in disorder—exactly what Israel experienced (v. 10).

The command to "smite the hindmost of them" (זַנְבָּו אַתָּה עֲמֹד, zannevu otam, literally "tail them" or "strike their rear") targets the stragglers and rearguard. Ancient armies fleeing in panic stretched out over miles, with slower troops falling behind. These isolated groups were vulnerable to attack and couldn't support one another. The tactical objective was preventing reorganization: "suffer them not to enter into their cities" would eliminate fortified refuges where defeated forces could regroup.

The theological foundation comes in the final clause: "for the LORD your God hath delivered them into your hand" (כִּי-נְתַנְתָּם וְהִנֵּה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּיַדְכֶם), ki-netanam YHWH Eloheichem beyedchem). The verb נָתַן (natan, "delivered/given") uses the perfect tense, indicating completed action—divine victory was already accomplished,

requiring human appropriation through pursuit. Faith isn't passive; it vigorously seizes what God has promised.

Historical Context

Ancient military doctrine emphasized pursuit as the decisive phase of battle. Alexander the Great's victories often came through relentless pursuit that prevented enemy forces from regrouping. Roman military manuals stressed converting tactical victory (winning the battle) into strategic victory (destroying the enemy's ability to continue war) through aggressive pursuit. Joshua understood these principles, as did later biblical commanders (Judges 8:4; 1 Samuel 14:31; 2 Samuel 18:16).

The emphasis on preventing enemies from reaching their cities reflected the realities of siege warfare. Fortified Canaanite cities with walls 20-30 feet high and 10-15 feet thick could withstand months of siege, requiring enormous resources to capture. The Beth Shean stele and archaeological evidence from sites like Lachish demonstrate the strength of Late Bronze Age fortifications. Catching enemy forces in the open field, where Israel's numerical superiority and divine assistance proved decisive, was far preferable to costly sieges.

The tactical situation required split-second decision-making. Joshua had to balance securing the five kings, pursuing the routed armies, and maintaining his own force's cohesion. His decision to seal the cave with minimal guards while deploying maximum force in pursuit showed brilliant battlefield judgment. This single day's pursuit (continued through verse 20) broke the back of southern Canaanite resistance.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What spiritual battles has God given you victory in that you're failing to consolidate by not 'pursuing to the end'—allowing old sins or patterns to regroup rather than pressing for complete transformation?
2. How does the command to 'stay ye not' challenge the tendency toward spiritual complacency after initial victories?
3. What does Joshua's balance between divine promise ('the LORD hath delivered them') and human effort ('pursue... smite... suffer them not') teach about cooperation between grace and works?

Interlinear Text

אִבֶּיךָ מִתְּעַמֵּד תְּעַמֵּד אַל־יַאֲפִים
And stay ye not but pursue after your enemies

H859 H408 H5975 H7291 H310 H341

לְבָוא אַל־נָתַן מִזְבְּחַת מִזְבְּחַת
and smite the hindmost not to enter them

H2179 H853 H408 H5414 H935 H413

אֶלְهֵיכָם יְהִי הַנְּתָן מִתְּבָנָה
into their cities for the LORD your God

H5892 H3588 H5414 H3068 H430

בְּיָדְכֶם:
them into your hand

H3027