

Joshua 10:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That they feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty.

Analysis

Fear grips Jerusalem's king Adoni-zedek because 'Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities...greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty.' The comparison to royal cities indicates Gibeon's significance—comparable to capitals in size and strength. The note that its warriors were 'mighty' emphasizes military capability. Adoni-zedek's fear stems from strategic calculation: if mighty Gibeon made peace with Israel rather than resist, this both strengthened Israel (adding Gibeon's forces) and demoralized other Canaanite cities (showing resistance was futile). The king's name Adoni-zedek (אֲדֹנֵי צֶדֶק—my lord is righteousness or lord of righteousness) ironically contrasts his unrighteous actions. His fear leads to aggression against Gibeon, attempting to punish their treaty and deter other defections. This pattern repeats in history: threatened powers attack perceived collaborators more viciously than original enemies.

Historical Context

Jerusalem (here first mentioned in Joshua) was a significant Canaanite city-state that would remain unconquered until David's time (2 Samuel 5:6-9). Adoni-zedek's name parallels an earlier Jerusalem king, Melchizedek (king of righteousness, Genesis 14:18), suggesting a dynastic title or tradition. The city's elevated position and strong fortifications made it formidable. Gibeon's characterization as 'greater than Ai' and with 'mighty men' indicates it was a major military power. Archaeological evidence suggests Gibeon was indeed a substantial city with

significant population. Its defection to Israel represented a major strategic loss for Canaanite resistance. The fear this provoked among remaining Canaanite kings was rational—Gibeon's assessment that fighting Israel was futile could inspire others to seek peace, collapsing unified resistance. Adoni-zedek's strategy of punishing Gibeon aimed to make an example, deterring other cities from similar defection. This shows ancient understanding of psychological warfare: maintaining allied morale by punishing betrayal.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does defection of a strong ally (like Gibeon) affect enemy morale more than defeating weaker opponents?
2. What does Adoni-zedek's fear-driven aggression teach about how threatened powers respond to perceived betrayal?
3. When has God used unexpected alliances or defections to advance His kingdom purposes?

Interlinear Text

גַּבְעָה וְלִירָא וְ	גְּדוֹלָה	עָרִים מְאַד כִּי עָרִים	כִּי מְאַד עָרִים	גְּדוֹלָה	גְּדוֹלָה
That they feared H3372	greatly H3966	H3588	cities H5892	and because it was greater H1419	because Gibeon H1391
מִן	גְּדוֹלָה	הַיָּא וְכִי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַעֲרִים	הַעֲרִים וְכִי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַעֲרִים	גְּדוֹלָה	מִן
as one H259	cities H5892	H4467	H3588	H1931	and because it was greater H1419
גְּבָרִים: אֲנָשִׁים יְהִי אֶכֶל הַעֲרִים	thereof were mighty	H376	H3605	than Ai H5857	

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 11:25 (Parallel theme): There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the LORD your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you.

Joshua 2:24 (Parallel theme): And they said unto Joshua, Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us.

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