

Joshua 10:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it came to pass, when Joshua and the children of Israel had made an end of slaying them with a very great slaughter, till they were consumed, that the rest which remained of them entered into fenced cities.

Analysis

And it came to pass, when Joshua and the children of Israel had made an end of slaying them with a very great slaughter, till they were consumed, that the rest which remained of them entered into fenced cities.

The phrase "made an end of slaying them" (כָּכְלֹת וְהַשְׁעָרָה... לְהַכּוֹת) indicates thorough, complete victory. The description "very great slaughter" (מְתַתְּלָה גְּדוֹלָה, makkah gedolah me'od) emphasizes the crushing magnitude of defeat. The phrase "till they were consumed" (עַד-תְּמִימָה, ad-tummam) uses language of total destruction, the same term used in Deuteronomy 7:22-23 for gradual but complete conquest.

Yet realism tempers the triumph: "the rest which remained of them entered into fenced cities" acknowledges incomplete annihilation. Some Amorites escaped to fortified cities (ערי המבצר, arei hamivtsar), requiring subsequent siege operations (vv. 28-39). This pattern—dramatic victory yet incomplete execution—appears throughout Judges, where failure to complete conquest led to covenant compromise (Judges 1:27-36). Total victory requires sustained effort, not just initial success.

From a theological perspective, this mirrors the already/not yet tension of redemption. Christ's victory over sin and Satan is complete (Colossians 2:15), yet

believers still battle indwelling sin (Romans 7:14-25). Spiritual warfare involves both celebrating decisive victory (justification) and pursuing ongoing conquest (sanctification). The fortified cities that remain represent remaining sin requiring continued warfare through the Spirit's power (Galatians 5:16-17).

Historical Context

The scale of casualties in ancient battles varied enormously depending on circumstances. When armies broke and fled, casualties could reach 50-80% of the defeated force. The Battle of Cannae (216 BCE) saw Hannibal inflict approximately 70,000 casualties on Rome in a single day. The phrase "very great slaughter" (makkah gedolah) appears elsewhere for decisive victories (Judges 11:33; 15:8; 1 Samuel 6:19), indicating casualties in the thousands or tens of thousands.

Fortified cities in Canaan during the Late Bronze Age featured sophisticated defenses: massive stone walls, glacis (sloped ramparts preventing siege ladders), towers, and reinforced gates. Archaeological excavations at Gezer, Megiddo, Hazor, and Lachish reveal impressive fortification systems requiring specialized siege equipment and tactics to overcome. The Israelites at this stage lacked siege technology (battering rams, siege towers, etc.), making walled cities extremely difficult to capture.

The survivors' retreat to fortified cities wasn't cowardice but sound military doctrine. Cities provided defensive advantages offsetting battlefield defeat, and time to regroup, resupply, and negotiate. However, Joshua's rapid follow-up sieges (vv. 28-39)—conquering seven major cities in quick succession—prevented the southern coalition from recovering. Speed and momentum proved decisive.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What 'fortified cities' of remaining sin in your life have you allowed to stand unconquered, and what would it look like to pursue them to completion?
2. How does the pattern of great victory yet incomplete execution challenge you to persevere in sanctification rather than resting on past spiritual progress?
3. What does this verse teach about the tension between celebrating God's decisive victories and continuing to fight remaining battles?

Interlinear Text

וְבָא יְהוָה עַל כָּל וְתִּרְאֵי
H1961 had made an end And it came to pass when Joshua and the children
H3615 H3091 H1121

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till they were consumed that the rest which remained H8300 H8277

בְּמִבְּאֹרֶת עַל אֶל
H413 cities into fenced H5892 H4013

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 8:24 (Creation): And it came to pass, when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness wherein they chased them, and when they were all fallen on the edge of the sword, until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned unto Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword.

