

Joshua 10:39

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he took it, and the king thereof, and all the cities thereof; and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed all the souls that were therein; he left none remaining: as he had done to Hebron, so he did to Debir, and to the king thereof; as he had done also to Libnah, and to her king.

Analysis

And he took it, and the king thereof, and all the cities thereof; and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed all the souls that were therein; he left none remaining—this verse summarizes Debir's complete conquest with familiar formulaic language. The phrase "all the cities thereof" again indicates a city-state complex with dependent villages, similar to Hebron. The comprehensive destruction left no survivors, no remnant, no seed for future resistance. The Hebrew *hecharim* (הֶחָרִים, "utterly destroyed") maintains the *herem* theme running throughout the chapter.

As he had done to Hebron, so he did to Debir, and to the king thereof; as he had done also to Libnah, and to her king—this triple comparison (Hebron, Debir, Libnah) creates a comprehensive *inclusio*, bracketing the entire southern campaign with references to consistent application of God's commands. The repetitive formula emphasizes that divine justice operates by principle, not preference. Each city received identical treatment because each stood under the same condemnation. God's impartiality appears not in ignoring sin but in applying identical standards to all (Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9).

The verse's concluding summary brings closure to the southern campaign narrative (vv. 28-39). From Makkedah through Debir, seven cities fell in rapid succession, each receiving thorough judgment. This pattern of seven cities may be deliberate, as seven frequently symbolizes completeness in biblical numerology—suggesting comprehensive conquest of the southern region. The kingdom of God advanced through systematic, thorough execution of divine commands.

Historical Context

Debir's conquest completed the southern campaign's territorial objectives, securing the entire Judean hill country and Shephelah from Canaanite control. The cities conquered—Makkedah, Libnah, Lachish, Gezer (army only), Eglon, Hebron, and Debir—formed a comprehensive network controlling southern Canaan's strategic cities and routes. Their fall left the region open for Israelite settlement and tribal allotment.

The archaeological record shows a pattern of Late Bronze Age city destructions followed by Iron Age Israelite settlement throughout this region, broadly supporting the biblical narrative. However, as with Hebron, Judges 1:11-15 indicates that Othniel later conquered Debir and received it from Caleb, suggesting initial conquest followed by reoccupation, then final pacification. This pattern reflects the complexity of ancient conquest—military victory did not always mean immediate permanent occupation.

The reference to Libnah at the verse's conclusion creates a literary frame, as Libnah was the second city conquered (vv. 29-30). This *inclusio* technique (beginning and ending with references to the same element) was common in ancient Near Eastern literature, signaling narrative closure. The southern campaign began at Makkedah and ended at Debir, with systematic destruction of everything between, fulfilling God's command to utterly destroy the Canaanites.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the triple comparison (Hebron-Debir-Libnah) illustrate God's unchanging standards of righteousness and the certainty of His judgments?
2. What does the pattern of seven conquered cities teach about the completeness and thoroughness God expects in dealing with sin?
3. How should the combination of Joshua's conquest with later reconquest by Othniel shape your understanding of progressive sanctification requiring both initial victory and ongoing vigilance?

Interlinear Text

וְיָקַח הָ	וְאֵת	וְלַמֶּלֶכָּה׃	וְאֵת	כָּל	עָרֵי יָהּ
And he took		and to her king			thereof and all the cities
H3920	H853	H4428	H853	H3605	H5892
וּמִן	וְיָקַח הָ	וְלַמֶּלֶכָּה׃	וְאֵת	כָּל	עָרֵי יָהּ
thereof and they smote		them with the edge			of the sword and utterly destroyed
H5221		H6310		H2719	H2763
וְיָקַח הָ	וְאֵת	וְלַמֶּלֶכָּה׃	וְאֵת	כָּל	עָרֵי יָהּ
all the souls					that were therein he left none remaining
H5315	H834	H0	H3808	H7604	H8300
וְיָקַח הָ	וְאֵת	וְלַמֶּלֶכָּה׃	וְאֵת	כָּל	עָרֵי יָהּ
as he had done		to Hebron			as he had done to Debir
H6213		H2275		H6213	H1688
וְיָקַח הָ	וְאֵת	וְלַמֶּלֶכָּה׃	וְאֵת	כָּל	עָרֵי יָהּ
and to her king		as he had done			also to Libnah and to her king
H4428	H834	H6213		H3841	H4428

