

Joshua 11:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But as for the cities that stood still in their strength, Israel burned none of them, save Hazor only; that did Joshua burn.

Analysis

But as for the cities that stood still in their strength, Israel burned none of them, save Hazor only—The phrase **stood still in their strength** (הַעֲמִדוֹת עַל־הַלְּלָא, ha'omedot al-tillam) literally means 'standing on their mounds,' referring to fortified cities built on tells (artificial hills from successive occupation layers). Israel's selective destruction policy preserved infrastructure for future habitation while eliminating the symbolic power center.

The Hebrew tel (לְלָא, mound) appears throughout Near Eastern archaeology—centuries of rebuilding on the same site created elevated settlements. **Save Hazor only** emphasizes Hazor's unique status as the coalition's head (verse 10). Burning only the capital sent a clear message: resistance headquarters destroyed, but productive cities preserved for Israel's use. This strategic pragmatism combined divine judgment with wise stewardship, showing God's commands serve both justice and His people's welfare. The contrast between comprehensive human destruction (herem) and selective urban destruction demonstrates nuanced obedience—Joshua destroyed what God commanded (people) while preserving what would serve covenant community (cities).

Historical Context

Archaeological surveys in northern Canaan confirm this pattern. Hazor shows massive Late Bronze Age destruction by fire (13th century BC), with ash layers several feet thick. Other northern sites from this period show conquest damage

but not the total conflagration that characterizes Hazor. Cities built on tells were extremely valuable—their elevated positions provided defense, drainage, and visibility. Rebuilding from scratch would require enormous labor; preserving existing infrastructure allowed rapid Israelite settlement. Ancient Near Eastern conquest typically either destroyed cities completely or preserved them intact as vassals. Israel's selective approach—eliminating populations while preserving select cities—was unusual, reflecting specific divine direction rather than conventional warfare practice. The tel phenomenon dominates Palestinian archaeology; modern excavations of biblical sites typically involve tells with occupation layers spanning millennia.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does selective judgment (destroying some while preserving others) demonstrate both God's justice and practical wisdom?
2. What 'infrastructure' in your spiritual life should be preserved and repurposed rather than completely destroyed during renewal?
3. How does this verse challenge all-or-nothing thinking about God's commands, showing nuanced obedience to different aspects of divine will?

Interlinear Text

כָּל בֵּרֶק הָעָרִים הַעֲמֻדוֹת עַל תֵּלֵם לֹא
H7535 H3605 **But as for the cities** **that stood** H5921 **still in their strength** H3808
H5892 H5975 H8510

שָׂרַף לְיִשְׂרָאֵל זָלָתָם אֶת חָצֹר לְבֵדָה שָׂרַף
burn **Israel** **none of them save** H853 **Hazor** H905 **burn**
H8313 H3478 H2108 H2674 H8313

יְהוֹשֻׁעַ:
only that did Joshua
H3091

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 30:18 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwellingplaces; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof.