

Joshua 15:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Dilean, and Mizpeh, and Joktheel,

Analysis

And Dilean, and Mizpeh, and Joktheel,

Dilean (דִּילָאן, dil'an) is of uncertain etymology, possibly related to a root meaning "cucumber" or "gourd," perhaps indicating agricultural character. This city appears only here in Scripture, exemplifying how most ancient settlements remain known only through administrative lists, their stories lost to history except for this biblical witness to their existence.

Mizpeh (מִצְפֶּה, mitspeh) means "watchtower" or "lookout point," from the root tsaphah (צָפָה, "to watch, keep watch"). Multiple cities bore this name throughout Israel, each occupying elevated positions for surveillance and defense. The name itself testifies to ancient military architecture and strategic thinking—heights that provided visual command of surrounding territory were fortified and settled. Theologically, the concept of "watching" carries spiritual significance: God's people must maintain spiritual vigilance against enemies (1 Peter 5:8).

Joktheel (יֹקֶתֶל, yoqte'el) means "God subdues" or "obedience of God," combining a verbal form of qahal (to gather, assemble) with El (God). This Yahwistic name (containing the divine element) may indicate Israelite renaming of a captured Canaanite city, or preservation of an earlier Semitic name acknowledging divine authority. Either way, it declares theological truth: ultimate power belongs to God who subdues nations and establishes His people.

Historical Context

The proliferation of cities named Mizpeh reflects the strategic importance of elevated observation posts in ancient warfare. Without modern communications, visual signaling from hilltops was crucial for warning of approaching armies. Archaeological excavations at various Mizpeh sites have revealed fortification walls, towers, and strategic positioning commanding valleys and routes. The Shephelah's rolling terrain made such watchtowers particularly valuable. The preservation of both Canaanite and Yahwistic city names in these lists reflects historical complexity—some cities Israel renamed after conquest, others retained original designations, and some may have had dual names used by different populations. This textual detail authenticates the historical character of these records.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does the name Mizpeh (watchtower) challenge you to maintain spiritual vigilance in your walk with God, watching for both threats and opportunities?
2. What does it mean that God 'subdues' (Joktheel) both enemies and His own people for His purposes—and how do we submit to His subduing work in our lives?
3. Why do you think Scripture preserves these seemingly minor city names—what does this teach about God's attention to historical detail and ordinary places?

Interlinear Text

וְדִלְעַן	וּמִצְפֶּה	וְיֹקְתֵּל:
And Dilean	and Mizpeh	and Joktheel
H1810	H4708	H3371

Additional Cross-References

2 Kings 14:7 (Parallel theme): He slew of Edom in the valley of salt ten thousand, and took Selah by war, and called the name of it Joktheel unto this day.

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