

Joshua 16:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And goeth down westward to the coast of Japhleti, unto the coast of Beth-horon the nether, and to Gezer: and the goings out thereof are at the sea.

Analysis

And goeth down westward to the coast of Japhleti, unto the coast of Beth-horon the nether, and to Gezer: and the goings out thereof are at the sea— the boundary now turns westward, descending from the central mountain ridge toward the Mediterranean coastal plain. The phrase **goeth down westward** accurately describes the topography, as the terrain descends from the highlands (2,000+ feet) to the coastal plain (sea level).

Beth-horon the nether ("house of the hollow," בֵּית־חֹרֶן הַתַּתְּמוֹן) was the lower of twin cities guarding a strategic pass connecting the coast to Jerusalem. This pass witnessed Joshua's great victory when the sun stood still (Joshua 10:10-14) and later battles throughout Israelite history. The distinction between "upper" and "lower" Beth-horon reflects their positions on the ascending ridge—military control of this pass was essential for defending the highlands.

Gezer (גֶּזֶר) was one of Canaan's most important cities, controlling the main road from Egypt to Mesopotamia. Verse 10 reveals that Ephraim failed to conquer Gezer, allowing Canaanites to remain—a compromise with long-term consequences. The boundary reaching **the sea** (the Mediterranean) gave Joseph's tribes access to maritime trade, though they never developed significant naval power like their Phoenician neighbors.

Historical Context

Archaeological excavations at Gezer have revealed massive fortifications and a gate complex from the Canaanite period, explaining why Ephraim found it difficult to conquer. The city remained Canaanite until the Egyptian pharaoh conquered it and gave it to Solomon as his daughter's dowry (1 Kings 9:16), over 400 years after Joshua. Beth-horon's strategic importance is evident from its mention in multiple biblical battles and in extrabiblical sources like the Amarna letters. The pass remained a crucial military objective through Roman times. The Mediterranean coast offered economic opportunities through trade, but Israel's lack of naval expertise meant Phoenician cities like Tyre and Sidon dominated maritime commerce while Israel focused on agriculture and land-based trade routes.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What strategic spiritual positions (like Beth-horon) has God given you to guard, and are you maintaining vigilance or allowing compromise?
2. How does Ephraim's failure to fully conquer Gezer warn against tolerating persistent sins because they seem too difficult or costly to remove?
3. What boundaries in your life mark the extent of your calling and inheritance —are you content with God's allotment or coveting others' territories?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּרֶד	יָמָּה:	אֶל	גֹּב וּל	הַפְּלִטָּה	עַד
And goeth down	thereof are at the sea	H413	to the coast	of Japhleti	H5704
H3381	H3220		H1366	H3311	
וּל	בֵּית	חֹרֶן	תַּחַת וֹן	וְעַד	גֵּזֶר
to the coast	H0	of Bethhoron	the nether	H5704	and to Gezer
H1366		H1032	H8481		H1507
וְהָיָה	יָמָּה:				
and the goings out	thereof are at the sea				
H8444	H3220				

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 18:13 (Parallel theme): And the border went over from thence toward Luz, to the side of Luz, which is Beth-el, southward; and the border descended to Ataroth-adar, near the hill that lieth on the south side of the nether Beth-horon.

Joshua 10:33 (Parallel theme): Then Horam king of Gezer came up to help Lachish; and Joshua smote him and his people, until he had left him none remaining.

2 Chronicles 8:5 (Parallel theme): Also he built Beth-horon the upper, and Beth-horon the nether, fenced cities, with walls, gates, and bars;