

Joshua 19:35

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the fenced cities are Ziddim, Zer, and Hammath, Rakkath, and Chinnereth,

Analysis

And the fenced cities are Ziddim, Zer, and Hammath, Rakkath, and Chinnereth. This verse begins listing Naphtali's fortified cities (arei ha-mivtsar, עָרֵי הַמִּצָּדָר), crucial for tribal defense and administration. The term mivtsar (מִצָּדָר) indicates cities with substantial walls, gates, and defensive structures—not merely villages but military strongholds capable of withstanding siege warfare.

The most significant city named is Chinnereth (כִּנֶּרֶת), which gave its name to the Sea of Chinnereth (later called the Sea of Galilee). The name likely derives from kinnor (כִּנּוֹר, harp), possibly describing the harp-shaped lake or the sweet, harp-like sounds of waves on its shore. This body of water became central to Jesus' Galilean ministry—the shore where He called fishermen disciples, the waves He calmed, the waters He walked upon.

Hammath (חֲמַת) means "hot springs," referring to the thermal springs near Tiberias still visible today. The name illustrates how Hebrew place names described geographical features, embedding theology in landscape—God's creation displaying His provision through healing waters. Rakkath (רַקְקַת, "shore" or "coast") likely sat on the Sea of Galilee's western shore, possibly the site of later Tiberias. These fortified cities protected Naphtali's most valuable agricultural and fishing resources.

Historical Context

Fortified cities in the Late Bronze and Iron Age typically featured massive stone walls (10-15 feet thick), defensive towers, and fortified gates with multiple chambers. Archaeological excavations at sites like Hazor (also in Naphtali, mentioned in 19:36) reveal sophisticated defensive systems including glacis (sloped ramparts), moats, and multi-layered walls. These fortifications were necessary given Canaan's constant military threats from surrounding peoples and periodic invasions from regional empires.

The Sea of Chinnereth/Galilee measures approximately 13 miles long and 8 miles wide, providing abundant fish and serving as a vital freshwater source. The lake's location 700 feet below sea level creates a subtropical microclimate suitable for year-round agriculture. Cities along its shores controlled lucrative fishing industries and agricultural lands, making them prime targets for conquest and requiring strong defenses.

The hot springs at Hammath (modern Hamat Tiberias) were used therapeutically in ancient times, as evidenced by Greco-Roman period remains. The springs maintain temperatures around 140°F (60°C) and contain sulfur and other minerals believed medicinal. Ancient peoples recognized such natural phenomena as divine provision, understanding creation's design to serve human welfare.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How do fortified cities represent the spiritual defenses Christians must build through Scripture memory, prayer, and fellowship to withstand spiritual warfare?
2. What does God's gift of both defensive cities and productive lands teach about His provision for both protection and prosperity?
3. How should Chinnereth's later prominence in Jesus' ministry shape our understanding of God's long-term purposes in Old Testament geographical allotments?

Interlinear Text

יְשֻׁרֵי	מִבְצָר	הַצִּדִּים	זֶר	וְחַמַּת	רַקַּת
cities	And the fenced	are Ziddim	Zer	and Hammath	Rakkath
H5892	H4013	H6661	H6863	H2575	H7557
וְכִנְרֵת:					
and Chinnereth					
H3672					

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 11:2 (Parallel theme): And to the kings that were on the north of the mountains, and of the plains south of Chinneroth, and in the valley, and in the borders of Dor on the west,

Genesis 10:18 (Parallel theme): And the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite: and afterward were the families of the Canaanites spread abroad.

1 Kings 8:65 (Parallel theme): And at that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt, before the LORD our God, seven days and seven days, even fourteen days.

