

# Joshua 7:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.

## Analysis

The men of Ai killed about thirty-six Israelites and chased them from the gate to Shebarim, striking them in the descent. Though numerically small casualties by ancient warfare standards, the defeat's significance was profound. The Hebrew שְׁבָרִים (sheba rim) means 'breaking places' or 'stone quarries'—likely a descent where fleeing troops were vulnerable. The phrase 'smote them in the going down' indicates pursuit casualties—the most dangerous phase of retreat. But the greater casualty was spiritual: 'the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.' This is the exact language used of Canaanites' fear (2:11, 5:1). Israel now experiences the terror they were meant to inspire. This role reversal reveals sin's devastating effect: they who should inspire fear now experience it. The Hebrew מָסָס (masas—to melt, dissolve) indicates complete demoralization. Courage evaporates when God's presence withdraws. This illustrates that spiritual defeat precedes and produces physical defeat. Their problem wasn't military but covenantal—broken fellowship with God.

## Historical Context

Thirty-six deaths, while tragic, wasn't militarily catastrophic. Ancient battles commonly produced far higher casualties. The significance lay in the fact that Israel lost at all after Jericho's miraculous victory. Their invincible aura shattered.

Canaanite spies observing this defeat would report it throughout the land, reversing the psychological advantage gained by Jericho's fall and the Jordan crossing. The location 'Shebarim' (breaking places) may have been proverbial—a place where formations broke and retreats became routs. Ancient warfare's most dangerous moment came when formation cohesion collapsed and troops fled individually. The phrase 'hearts melted and became as water' uses imagery of wax melting or water dissipating—complete loss of structural integrity. This corporate demoralization threatened Israel's ability to continue the conquest. If faith faltered, the entire campaign could collapse. The crisis was existential, not merely tactical.

## **Related Passages**

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**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

## **Study Questions**

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1. How does sin's consequence extend beyond personal guilt to affect community morale and effectiveness?
2. What does the role reversal (Israel fearing instead of being feared) teach about losing God's favor?
3. When have you experienced the 'melting' of spiritual confidence due to unconfessed sin?

## Interlinear Text

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וַיִּכּוּ וְ	מֵהֶם	אֲנָשִׁי	הָעַי	כְּשִׁלֹּשׁ יָם	וְשֵׁשָׁה	אֲנָשִׁים
and smote	H1992	And the men	of Ai	of them about thirty	and six	men
H5221		H582	H5857	H7970	H8337	H376
וַיִּדְרֹפּוּ וְ	לִפְנֵי	הַשַּׁעַר	עַד	הַשְּׂבָרִים		
for they chased	them from before	the gate	H5704	even unto Shebarim		
H7291	H6440	H8179		H7671		
וַיִּכּוּ	בַּמּוֹךְ דָּ	וַיִּמָּס	לִבָּב	הָעָם		
and smote	them in the going down	melted	wherefore the hearts	of the people		
H5221	H4174	H4549	H3824	H5971		
וַיְהִי	לְמַיִם:					
H1961	and became as water					
	H4325					

## Additional Cross-References

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**Joshua 2:11** (Parallel theme): And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

**Joshua 2:9** (Parallel theme): And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

**Leviticus 26:36** (Parallel theme): And upon them that are left alive of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth.