

# 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

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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 מָסַס (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

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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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וְנִכְתַּבְתִּי	מִן	אֶנְשָׁה	בְּעֵה	כְּשָׁלֵשׁ יָמִים	אֶשְׁנֶה
and smote	H1992	And the men	H582	of Ai	of them about thirty
	H5221		H5857		H7970
וְנִסְתַּרְתִּי	לְפָנֶיךָ	לְפָנֶיךָ	עַד	בְּשָׁבֵר יָמִים	
for they chased	H7291	them from before	H6440	the gate	H5704
					H7671
וְנִכְתַּבְתִּי	בְּמַזְרָבְךָ	וְנִכְתַּבְתִּי	לִבְבָּךְ	בְּעֵה	
and smote	H5221	them in the going down	H4174	melted	wherefore the hearts
				H4549	H3824
					H5971
וְנִכְתַּבְתִּי	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.