

Joshua 8:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw it, that they hasted and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain; but he wist not that there were liers in ambush against him behind the city.

Analysis

Ai's response: 'when the king of Ai saw it, they hasted and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain; but he wist not that there were liers in wait against him behind the city.' The phrase 'they hasted' indicates eager response—confidence from previous victory breeding overconfidence. Rising 'early' shows Ai's alertness and military discipline. The king personally leading ('he and all his people') demonstrates full commitment—leaving city undefended. The phrase 'at a time appointed' (moed, מָעֵד) suggests prearranged meeting place or optimal timing—but unknown to Ai, it's Israel's timing, not theirs. The crucial statement 'he wist not' (didn't know) of the ambush shows the trap sprung. Ai's comprehensive sortie—all fighting men leaving the city—creates the vulnerability Israel exploited. Pride and presumption, rooted in past success, produce strategic blindness.

Historical Context

The king of Ai's personal participation was standard for ancient Near Eastern rulers—kings led their armies into battle. The decision to lead all fighting men out left only non-combatants in the city, making it vulnerable. This tactical error

stemmed from false assumptions: Israel would fight like before (direct assault), their previous victory would repeat, no deception was involved. Ancient warfare's psychological dimension meant past victories created confidence that could become overconfidence. The phrase 'before the plain' indicates the battle location—open terrain where Ai's forces could maneuver and Israel could 'flee.' The plain's openness was precisely why Joshua chose it—space for convincing retreat. The king's ignorance of the ambush shows successful intelligence concealment. Israel's overnight positioning had gone undetected. This demonstrates that spiritual warfare requires both strategic wisdom and divine concealment—God hides His servants' preparations from enemy observation until His timing for revelation.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does past success breed overconfidence that produces strategic blindness?
2. What does fighting 'at a time appointed' teach about distinguishing God's timing from our assumptions?
3. When has God's concealment of your preparations protected you until His appointed time for action?

Interlinear Text

רָא	וְתִּיהְיָה	מֶלֶךְ	בְּעֵד	יְמִינָה	בְּעֵד
H1961	saw	And it came to pass when the king	H4428	of Ai	it that they hasted
H7200				H5857	H4116
וְיֹאכַל	לְקַבָּאת	בָּעִירָה	אֶנְשָׁי	וְשָׁכַן	יִמְלָכֶת
and rose up early	went out	and the men	of the city	against	Israel
H7925	H3318	H582	H5892	H7125	H3478
לְפָנָי	לְמִזְעֵד	עַמּוֹד	וְיָכֹל	הַיָּה	לְמִלְחָמָה
to battle	H1931	H3605	he and all his people	at a time appointed	before
H4421			H5971	H4150	H6440
בְּהַעֲרָבָה	לְאַתְּ	וְהַיּוֹא	לְעַד	בְּ	אֵיךְ
the plain	H1931	H3808	but he wist	H3588	not that there were liars in ambush
H6160			H3045		H693
לְ	מִאֵתָרָה	בָּעִירָה			
H0	against him behind	of the city			
	H310	H5892			

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 24:39 (Parallel theme): And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.