

Joshua 8:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And all the people that were in Ai were called together to pursue after them: and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city.

Analysis

Ai's complete commitment: 'all the people that were in Ai were called together to pursue after them: and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city.' The phrase 'all the people' emphasizes comprehensive participation—total mobilization. The verb 'called together' (za'aq, ַזעַק) suggests urgency, rallying all available forces. The pursuit 'after Joshua' shows focus on Israel's leader—defeating him would break Israel's army. The crucial phrase 'drawn away' (nataq, נָתַק) means pulled, drawn, torn away—they left the city completely exposed. This is the trap's culmination: full pursuit creating total vulnerability. The passage illustrates how pride and presumption make enemies of God's people vulnerable. Proverbs 16:18: 'Pride goeth before destruction.' The Canaanites' unified opposition (chapters 9-11) similarly concentrated forces for defeat. God often uses enemies' strategies against them—their strength becomes weakness when deployed outside His will.

Historical Context

The complete mobilization of Ai's forces meant every fighting man participated in the pursuit, leaving only women, children, and elderly in the city—completely defenseless. This tactical error resulted from false confidence based on previous victory and perceived vulnerability of fleeing Israelites. Ancient warfare psychology meant pursuing apparently broken enemies was irresistible—an opportunity to inflict maximum casualties and capture fleeing troops. Ai's forces

pursued aggressively, likely in dispersed formation to maximize capture/killing of individuals. This dispersion, while effective for pursuing routed enemies, made them vulnerable to counter-attack. Meanwhile, the undefended city stood open to the ambush force. The complete abandonment of defensive positions violated basic military wisdom—never leave fortifications unguarded. Yet overconfidence produced this error. The historical lesson repeats: overconfidence breeds carelessness; past success doesn't guarantee future victory; and God's strategies often exploit enemy presumption.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does overconfidence based on past success produce tactical errors in spiritual warfare?
2. What does Ai's complete pursuit (leaving nothing in reserve) teach about wisdom of measured responses?
3. When has God used your opponents' overconfidence or overcommitment to produce their defeat?

Interlinear Text

וַיַּעֲשֵׂה כָל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְכָל
were called H3605 And all the people H5971
H2199 H834 H5892 H7291

וַיַּעֲשֵׂה יְהוָשָׁעַ וְאֶחָרָיו
after them and they pursued H7291
H310 H310 H3091 H5423 H4480

מִן

from the city

H5892

Additional Cross-References

Judges 20:31 (Parallel theme): And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city; and they began to smite of the people, and kill, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to the house of God, and the other to Gibeah in the field, about thirty men of Israel.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org