

Joshua 8:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And there was not a man left in Ai or Beth-el, that went not out after Israel: and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel.

Analysis

Total pursuit confirmed: 'there was not a man left in Ai or Bethel, that went not out after Israel: and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel.' The phrase 'not a man left' emphasizes absolute completeness—universal participation. The inclusion of Bethel suggests nearby city joined the pursuit, thinking this an opportunity to destroy Israel. The statement 'they left the city open' highlights the strategic blunder—undefended gates, unmanned walls. The Hebrew אָזַב (azav—to leave, forsake, abandon) indicates complete abandonment. This creates the opportunity God planned: the ambush force can capture defenseless cities while main forces engage the pursuing armies. The passage illustrates how God's strategies often exploit enemies' overreach. Psalm 2:4: 'He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.' Human wisdom apart from God becomes foolishness; schemes against the LORD fail spectacularly.

Historical Context

The participation of Bethel's forces (mentioned for first time in this verse) suggests a coalition or mutual defense pact between the nearby cities. Bethel was less than two miles from Ai—close enough to observe the battle and send reinforcements. Their joining the pursuit swelled the forces chasing Israel while leaving both cities undefended. This coalition participation, intended to strengthen the pursuit, actually created greater vulnerability—two cities now stood empty. Archaeological surveys place Ai and Bethel very close together, confirming the biblical geographic

data. The complete abandonment of both cities shows how battlefield success can produce reckless decisions. Ancient military wisdom counseled maintaining reserves and rear guards precisely to prevent such vulnerabilities. Yet the apparent opportunity to destroy Israel proved irresistible. This demonstrates how God creates circumstances where enemies' apparent advantages become fatal disadvantages. The same pattern appears throughout Scripture—Pharaoh's pursuit into the sea, Sisera's chariots in mud, etc.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does God often turn enemies' apparent advantages (like Bethel reinforcing Ai) into disadvantages?
2. What does the complete abandonment of defensive positions teach about maintaining spiritual vigilance?
3. When have you seen overreach (pursuing too far, committing too fully) produce failure?

Interlinear Text

וְלֹא	נִשָּׂא רַ	אֵשׁ	וְיֵת בְּעֵי	אֵל	אֶשֶׁר
H3808	left	And there was not a man	in Ai	H0	or Bethel
	H7604	H376	H5857		H1008
לֹא	יֵצֵא וְ	אַחֲרַי	יִשְׂרָאֵל:	וַעֲזָבוּ וְ	אֶת
H3808	that went not out	after	Israel	and they left	H853
	H3318	H310	H3478	H5800	H5892
הַ	וַיִּרְדֹּפּ וְ	אַחֲרַי	יִשְׂרָאֵל:		
open	and pursued	after	Israel		
H6605	H7291	H310	H3478		

