

Judges 1:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

Analysis

And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

Adoni-bezek's confession is remarkable for its theological awareness. He attributes his fate not to military fortune or the strength of Judah's forces, but to divine retribution: "God hath requited me" (Elohim shillam li, אֱלֹהִים שִׁלַּם לִי). The verb shillam (שִׁלַּם) from root shalam (שָׁלַם, "to be complete, to recompense") indicates perfect, measured justice—receiving exactly what one deserves. Though Adoni-bezek uses the generic Elohim (אֱלֹהִים, "God") rather than the covenant name Yahweh (יְהוָה), his recognition of divine moral governance reflects natural revelation—the law written on human hearts that leaves all without excuse (Romans 1:18-20, 2:14-15).

"Threescore and ten kings" (seventy kings) is a significant number in Scripture, often indicating completeness or totality (compare the seventy elders of Israel, Exodus 24:1; the seventy years of exile, Jeremiah 25:11; Jesus sending out seventy disciples, Luke 10:1). Whether literal or symbolic, the number emphasizes the extent of Adoni-bezek's conquests and the corresponding magnitude of his cruelty. These mutilated kings "gathered their meat under my table" (melakkitim tachat

shulchani, מִלְכָּטִים תִּחַת שְׁלֵחָנִי), depicting the degradation of former rulers reduced to scavenging scraps like dogs—a powerful image of utter humiliation.

The principle of divine retribution pervades Scripture: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Yet Reformed theology recognizes a crucial distinction: Adoni-bezek experienced temporal, retributive justice—the natural consequences of his sins in this life. Believers, however, have already experienced Christ bearing God's retributive justice in their place (2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 2:24). Sanctifying discipline may come (Hebrews 12:5-11), but never condemnation (Romans 8:1). The certainty of divine justice should provoke both humble thanksgiving for Christ's substitutionary atonement and compassionate warning to those facing judgment without a mediator.

Historical Context

The transportation of Adoni-bezek to Jerusalem (still called Jebus, controlled by Jebusites at this time) is historically significant. Jerusalem wasn't conquered until David's reign (2 Samuel 5:6-9), making its mention here either anachronistic (using the later, familiar name) or indicating temporary Israelite control of part of the city (v. 8 describes conquest of Jerusalem, though v. 21 notes Benjamin failed to drive out the Jebusites). Archaeological evidence shows Jerusalem (Tell el-Amarna letters call it Urusalim) was a modest Jebusite city-state during this period, occupying only the southeastern hill (City of David) and controlling important north-south trade routes.

Adoni-bezek's death in Jerusalem may have been intended as a public example—displaying the fate of kings who resist Yahweh's people. Ancient Near Eastern kings frequently paraded captured rulers through capital cities to demonstrate power and discourage rebellion. However, Adoni-bezek's death also fulfilled the principle of herem (הֶרֶם, devoted destruction) commanded for Canaanite peoples (Deuteronomy 7:2), though the mutilation rather than immediate execution shows incomplete adherence to the law's letter.

The reference to Adoni-bezek having subdued seventy kings reflects the political

fragmentation of Late Bronze Age Canaan. The Amarna letters (14th century BCE) document dozens of petty kings ruling small city-states, frequently warring with neighbors. A powerful king could force weaker neighbors into vassalage, exacting tribute and military support. Adoni-bezek's treatment of vassal kings—public humiliation at his table—reinforced psychological domination, deterring rebellion through shame and fear. This context illuminates David's later kindness to Mephibosheth, eating at the king's table (2 Samuel 9:7-13)—reversing the ancient pattern of royal humiliation with covenant faithfulness and grace.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Adoni-bezek's recognition of divine justice demonstrate that suppressing truth about God's moral governance requires active rebellion against conscience?
2. What does this account teach about the certainty of God's justice versus the modern belief that consequences can be indefinitely avoided?
3. How should the reality of Christ bearing God's retributive justice for believers affect our attitudes toward both personal sin and the sins of others?

Interlinear Text

מֶלֶךְ יָם	שָׁבַע יָם	בְּזֶקַח	אָדֹנִי וַיֹּאמֶר
kings	Threescore and ten	And Adonibezek	said
H4428	H7657	H137	H559
הָיָה וַיִּקְצָצֵם	וְכַגְלִיָּהֶם	יָדֵיהֶם	בְּהִנּוֹת
cut off	and their great toes		having their thumbs
H1961	H7272	H3027	H931
כִּי עָשָׂה יָדֵי	כָּאֵשׁ רַ	שֶׁלַחֲנִי י	תָּחַת מְלָקָטִים
as I have done		their meat under my table	gathered
H6213	H834	H7979	H3950
יְרוּשָׁלַם	וַיָּבִיֵא הוּא	אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	שָׁלַם
him to Jerusalem	me And they brought	so God	hath requited
H3389	H935	H430	H7999
וַיָּמָת	שָׁם:		
and there he died			
H4191	H8033		

Additional Cross-References

1 Samuel 15:33 (Parallel theme): And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

Revelation 13:10 (Parallel theme): He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

James 2:13 (Parallel theme): For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

Romans 2:15 (Parallel theme): Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

