

Judges 8:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.

Analysis

And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.

Gideon's threat to Penuel was specific and strategic: destroy their defensive tower. The phrase **When I come again in peace** (beshuvi be-shalom, בְּשׁוּבִי בְּשָׁלוֹם) expresses the same prophetic certainty seen in verse 7—not "if" but "when" he returns victorious. The word shalom (שָׁלוֹם) typically means "peace" but here carries the sense of "safely, successfully"—returning from complete victory over the Midianite kings. Gideon's confidence rests entirely on God's promise, contrasting starkly with Penuel's fearful pragmatism.

The threatened demolition—**I will break down this tower** (etots et-migdal hazzeh, אֶתְצָצֵא אֶת-מִגְדָּל הַזֶּה)—targeted Penuel's false security. The verb natsats (נִצְתַּס, "break down, demolish") appears frequently in prophetic judgments against fortifications that represent human pride and self-reliance (Isaiah 22:10, Jeremiah 1:10, Ezekiel 26:4). Penuel trusted its tower for protection rather than trusting God. Jesus similarly warned: "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (Psalm 127:1).

Theologically, this verse addresses misplaced security. Penuel's tower gave them false confidence to refuse supporting God's work—they thought defensive walls protected them from consequences. However, no human structure can protect

covenant people who rebel against God's purposes. This foreshadows Jesus's warning about the Jerusalem temple: "Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Mark 13:2). True security comes from covenant faithfulness, not military fortifications.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cities invested heavily in defensive fortifications—walls, gates, and towers. A tower (migdal, מִגְדָּל) served multiple purposes: watchtower for spotting approaching enemies, defensive position during siege, and refuge for citizens. Penuel's tower was substantial enough that Gideon specifically targeted it rather than the city walls, suggesting it was the fortification's key element. Archaeological excavations at various Iron Age sites reveal towers 20-30 feet high with thick stone walls.

The tower represented Penuel's investment in self-defense rather than covenant reliance. Cities that trusted God (like Jerusalem under Hezekiah, 2 Kings 19:35-36) received miraculous protection; those trusting fortifications often fell despite impressive defenses (like Jericho, Joshua 6:20). Gideon's threat to demolish the tower thus aimed at destroying both physical security and the false theology it represented—teaching Penuel that covenant faithfulness provides surer protection than military engineering.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What 'towers' (false securities) do modern believers construct rather than trusting God's provision and protection?
2. How does Penuel's reliance on defensive fortifications mirror contemporary trust in wealth, insurance, or human strategies over dependence on God?

3. What is the relationship between wise stewardship (including reasonable precautions) and the kind of self-reliance that excludes faith in God's sovereignty?

Interlinear Text

בְּשׁוּבׁ וְ לִאמְרָם לְאַנְשָׁם גָּם לִאמְרָם
And he spake of Penuel And he spake When I come again
H559 H6439 H559 H7725

בָּשָׁל וְ אֶת־זֶה לְמִגְדָּל וְ
in peace I will break down this tower
H7965 H5422 H4026 H2088

Additional Cross-References

Judges 8:17 (Parallel theme): And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.

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