

Joshua Fights for God

Devotional Reading: Psalm 108

Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 7; Joshua 6; 8:1–29;
10:28–43; 11:1–23

Today's Scripture: Joshua 11:6–9, 16–23

I. At the River

Joshua 11:6–9

6 And the LORD said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire.

7 So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly; and they fell upon them.

8 And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephothmaim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining.

9 And Joshua did unto them as the LORD bade him: he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire.

6a. In response to the threat of the kings in northern Canaan, *the Lord* speaks to *Joshua*. We don't know the exact place where this communication occurs. But it must be close to the waters of Merom because that is where the enemy is located (Joshua 11:5), and the Israelites will attack them there *tomorrow*. This communication seems to occur after a multi-day march of over sixty

miles northward, from the area of Jericho and Gilgal.

This instance is not the first time Joshua has heard God say *be not afraid*. Joshua heard the same command when he led the people into battle in southern Canaan. As Joshua faces the Canaanite coalition from the north, he is again reminded that God's presence empowers him to rise above fear.

Considering the armies Joshua faces, it is understandable why he might be fearful. The collective size of the enemy force is impressive, numbered "as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many" (Joshua 11:4). Even so, the Lord promises swift military success; in less than twenty-four hours, He will *deliver* the enemies of *Israel* over to them.

6b. Joshua and his army fought during the period when the Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 BC) was giving way to the Early Iron Age. People had already been aware of and used iron for hundreds of years, but its application in weaponry did not predominate until about 1200 BC. The presence of "chariots of iron" among the Canaanites gave them a technological advantage (Joshua 17:16, 18).

The two commands in this half-verse may seem puzzling at first. If the Israelites end up capturing *horses* as well as

chariots, wouldn't it be advantageous to keep them? However, God instructs the Israelites not to capture and keep them. This directive is likely intended to keep the Israelites focused on God as their source of strength, rather than relying on weapons and animals of war.

7. The word *suddenly* indicates an unexpected, surprise attack. The enemy is the Canaanite coalition led by Jabin, king of Hazor.

The exact location of *the waters of Merom* is unknown. Commentators suggest that it points to some local springs of water a few miles west of the Sea of Galilee.

8. The book of Joshua does not provide the specifics of this battle. The lack of details is yet another way the narrative de-emphasizes the Israelites' success in conjunction with their planning or military strength. Instead, their surprise attack against a much stronger military force succeeds because *the Lord* delivers the enemies into their *hand*.

The attack causes the coalition of Canaanites to fragment in several directions. The Phoenician city of *Zidon* along the Mediterranean coastline about fifty miles north-northwest of the battlefield. Others flee to *Misrephothmaim*, about twenty miles due west. Still others escape *eastward to the valley of Mizpeh*.

The text implies that Joshua divides his forces to pursue each element of the now-fractured Canaanite coalition as they retreat. This goes against the typical principles of warfare, since dividing forces introduces the risk that those forces will be more easily defeated. But Joshua's taking of this risk reveals his trust in the Lord. The result is that the enemy alliance is destroyed to the point that *none* remain. This status also applied to the kingdoms of southern Canaan (Joshua 10:28–42).

However, later accounts indicate that the Israelites were unable to entirely

remove the Canaanites from the land (Joshua 15:13–15; Judges 1:19). Therefore, we may interpret this phrase—and others that follow (Joshua 11:20–21, below)—as examples of intentionally hyperbolic language frequently found in ancient Near Eastern war narratives.

The Israelites' conquest removes the Canaanites' collective identity, characterized by violence and immorality, from the land. This removal ensures that the region would be purified from sin, allowing God's holiness to be manifest in and through the Israelites and the land.

9. *Joshua* obeys the Lord's command regarding the *horses* and *chariots*.

II. Through the Land Joshua 11:16–23

16 So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same;

17 Even from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baalgad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them.

18 Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.

19 There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle.

20 For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

21 And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains

of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities.

22 There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained.

23 So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.

16. This verse and the next offer a parallel to what is stated in Joshua 10:40–41: what Joshua did to the kingdoms of the northern cities, he has also done to the kingdoms of the southern cities.

The land spans from *the hills* near Galilee in the north to *the south country* of the Negev, including the valley, the plain, and the foothills of *the mountain of Israel* in *Goshen*. The Israelites now control the northern and central parts of Canaan.

17a. More specifics are noted. *Mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir*, marks the southernmost border of Israel. Seir is another name for Edom, the neighboring country located south and east of the Dead Sea. To the north, the conquered land extends to *Baalgad*, near the foothills of *mount Hermon* in *Lebanon*. The described region is extensive.

17b–18. The summary continues. The conquest of Canaan began with an advance into the central region of the land, starting with the destruction of the cities of Jericho and Ai. From there, the Israelites shifted their focus to the southern area of Canaan, where they defeated the kings of that region. Subsequently, Joshua and the Israelites focused on removing the coalition of northern kings and their cities. Joshua 12 features a complete list of the kings and cities defeated.

The last verse of that chapter says that there were thirty-one such kings.

19. The people and events in this verse refer to the events mentioned in Joshua 9. Hivite messengers deceived the Israelites. Through this deception, *the Hivites* negotiated a *peace* treaty with Joshua. After discovering the Hivites' deceit, the leaders of the Israelites agreed to uphold the treaty and vowed to protect *the inhabitants of Gibeon*. This decision was in direct disobedience to earlier commands.

20. We may wonder about the phrase *for it was of the Lord to harden their hearts*. Does it mean that it was not of the Canaanites' own free will that they resisted? Not at all. The Canaanites had rejected the true God; their sins had become "full" (Genesis 15:16). With hardened hearts, they fought in allegiance to their fictitious gods.

21–22. *The Anakims*, descendants of Anak, reside near *Hebron*. That city lies about twenty miles south of the town later known as Jerusalem. When the twelve Israelite spies investigated the land, the presence of the Anakims instilled great fear.

Although none of the Anakims remain in *the land of the children of Israel*, the victory is not total since some manage to escape to *Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod*.

23a. This verse serves as the halfway point for the book of Joshua; it repeats the main themes and events of the book thus far. The promises made by *Moses* regarding the land have come to fruition. The Lord keeps His promises, and Joshua takes *the whole land* of Canaan by relying on God. The phrase "the whole land" is meant to be understood as "the whole land as described thus far." Joshua 13:1–7 makes clear that there's more work to do. The second half of the book will recount how Joshua divided the land and its cities among various *divisions* and *tribes*.

Involvement Learning

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Into the Lesson

For each sentence, write down whether you agree or disagree with it and why.

1. *I could never worship a god who directed someone to kill without mercy.*

2. *God wants peace, not violence.*

3. *Since God is good, I don't believe He has ever wanted someone to suffer.*

4. *I understand most of the Bible and don't worry about the difficult parts.*

5. Joshua defeated the enemy armies and imprisoned their kings.

6. Most Canaanite cities established covenants of peace with the Israelites.

7. The Lord softened the hearts of the Canaanites, leading them to worship Him.

8. Joshua eliminated the tribal divisions among the Israelites so that everyone could share in the land.

Key Text

For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

—Joshua 11:20

Into the Word

Read Joshua 11:6–23 and determine whether each statement is true or false and write a few words that would make the false statements become true statements.

1. The Lord promised to deliver the enemies of the Israelites within a month.

2. The Lord encouraged Joshua to seize the enemy's chariots and horses for future battles.

3. After Joshua and the Israelites launched an attack at the waters of Merom, the Israelites retreated.

4. Following the battle, Joshua rode the enemy's horses and took command of their chariots.

Into Life

Today's text includes some of the most challenging passages we might encounter. When we read texts that include violence, we might want to ignore the violence or accept the violence without a critical perspective. Write down one way that you might respond to reading challenging passages of Scripture.

Thought to Remember

Scripture reveals
God's work in history.