

Lesson 8

Taking More Land

Joshua 9-12

Introduction

With Jericho and Ai secured, Israel is now ensconced in central Canaan. But there is a new problem. The sin of Achan and Israel's defeat on its first try demonstrated that their army could be defeated. Instead of the Canaanite nations melting away in fear, they decided to form an alliance and stand together, thinking their overwhelming numbers would give them a chance for victory. The detailed list of those who assembled against Israel is listed for emphasis. What Israel faced would not be easy. The native occupants of the land were not going to go down without a fight.

Here, we must note the terrible impact of sin. Because of one person's sin, Israel's ability to take the land quickly will be prevented, and many people will die in the process. One writer has likened this to the opening chapters of Genesis, where a single transgression brings unimaginable consequences. Chapter 9 demonstrates a transition from a victorious people of God who could have almost walked in defeating people who were demoralized to years of difficult battle, bloodshed, betrayal, and idolatry that would haunt Israel for the remainder of its history.

Joshua 9: The Gibeonite Deception

While most of the Canaanite nations determined to band together and fight as one, the Gibeonites decided to go another way. For them, self-preservation was the top priority, and knowing they could not defeat Israel, they determined to trick them into non-aggression. Their plan was simple.

Verses 4-6 explain how emissaries were sent to Joshua, pretending to be travelers from a faraway land. These men appeared to be dressed in shabby clothes, carrying old bags and patched wineskins. Even their bread had become dry and crumbly. These envoys journeyed nineteen miles from their mountainous homeland to Gilgal, where Israel had returned after the covenant renewal ceremony at Mount Ebal.

The Israelites initially suspected the envoys of deceit, but the envoys were skilled at convincing them that they came from a far-off land. They claimed that they were there because of the renown of Yahweh and shared stories of the Lord's great deeds in Egypt and Transjordan. Despite their suspicions, the Israelites searched the envoys' bags and found everything in order. As a result, the Israelite leaders took some of their provisions. However, this was a grave mistake, as they relied only on their senses and did not seek counsel from God. Joshua made a "peace" and a "covenant" with the Gibeonites, and the leaders of Israel were bound to the covenant through a solemn oath (9.14-15).

The Israelites were planning to attack three neighboring villages under Gibeon's jurisdiction. Now, the ramifications of their carelessness come into full view. The primary consequence will be a group of Canaanites in the middle of their nation, which Deuteronomy 7 expressly forbade. Because of the treaty,

the army refrained from fighting against the Gibeonite villages because their leaders had sworn to spare the Hivites. The Israelites' leaders explained that the oath made in the name of God could not be broken, even if it was negotiated under pretenses. They feared that slaying any of the Hivites would incur God's wrath. However, the covenant did not prohibit other actions against the Hivites. Therefore, the plan was to subject them to strenuous and humiliating servitude instead.

Joshua summoned the Hivite leaders to announce their fate. He reproached them for their deception and declared that they would forever be cursed as slaves to Israel. The Hivites attempted to justify their actions, explaining that they had heard of Yahweh's command to Moses to give the land of Canaan to Israel and destroy its inhabitants. "We feared greatly," they admitted, expressing their gratitude to accept any fate short of death assigned to them by the Israelites. Joshua spared the Hivites from death but condemned them to servitude as lowly laborers. Their dual role involved serving as woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation in secular and religious activities. Since the location of the Lord's sanctuary had not yet been revealed, the text does not specify where the Gibeonites would serve.

Chapter 9 has a theological context that is like Achan's story. Achan's sin took place after the circumcision and the special Passover celebration. In the case of the Gibeonites, the mistake occurred after the covenant renewal ceremony. In both cases, Israel sinned unintentionally. After the error was identified, a battle took place.

The political context also highlights Joshua's leadership. Joshua made an agreement as he did in Joshua 8:30-35. However, this treaty was with neighboring peoples instead of a divine covenant. Joshua is not held personally responsible for the error of making a treaty with the Gibeonites. Instead, he is portrayed as a leader who acted on behalf of the leadership. Joshua pronounced judgment on the Gibeonites when their ruse was uncovered and then delivered them from an angry Israel.

Joshua 10: The Battle for Southern Canaan

The first eight verses of Joshua 10 provide details on the first serious effort on the part of the Canaanite kings to fight back against the invading Israelites. Verse 1 contains the first mention of Jerusalem in the Old Testament, which King Adoni-Zedek ruled. He was greatly disturbed by the peace treaty the Gibeonites made with Israel, so he rounded up four other kings to go against Gibeon. The five kings marched their armies to Gibeon, fighting against it and holding it under siege. Most likely, part of the peace agreement made with Gibeon required Israel's protection for their safety, so Joshua immediately called up all his troops. They traveled the 19 miles from Gilgal overnight and went to war. God urged Joshua not to be afraid because He was with him. The enemy would be defeated.

10.9-11: Israel's great victory

Verses 9-11 make it clear that God gave Israel the victory. Joshua strategically conducted a night march through challenging terrain, positioning his troops for a surprise attack on the southern coalition. This forced march caught the enemy off guard. A summary of the significant battle events and specific details are provided. The outcome is described through four critical statements:

First, it is mentioned that God *threw them into confusion before Israel*. Whether this resulted from the surprise attack or the subsequent hailstorm is unclear. The word *confusion* is used in other places to describe the disorientation that can occur during severe storms, such as thunder, lightning, and heavy rain.²⁹ God inflicted a "great slaughter" upon them at Gibeon. So, the enemy attempted to flee along the road to Beth-Horon, but God pursued them. The Canaanites fled westward toward the coastal plain, and the slopes above the road allowed the Israelites to continue their assault on the retreating remnants of the enemy army. Finally, God continued to strike down the enemy as they retreated southward, reaching as far as Azekah and Makkedah, 10.10.

Yahweh used a hailstorm to smite the enemy troops as they tried to escape from the Gibeon region. "Great stones" continued to rain down upon them from the "ascent of Beth-horon" to Azekah. Remarkably, more of the enemy perished in the hailstorm than by the sword of the Israelites, 10.11.

10.12-15: The Day the Sun Stood Still

These verses add details to what appears to be a finished story at the end of verse 11. The exact timing of these things that day does not have to be after the hailstorm. In other words, this could have happened in the morning.

Joshua prayed publicly for the sun to stand still at Gibeon and the moon over the Valley of Aijalon. God answered his prayer in the form of a miracle, as mentioned in 10.13. It has been widely believed that a tremendous miracle occurred in which the sun and the moon stopped moving across the sky. In modern scientific terms, this would mean the Earth's rotation stopped. Some religious texts, such as *The Wisdom of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)*, mention that Joshua was responsible for this miracle and that the day became twice as long. It says, "Was it not through [Joshua] that the sun stood still and one day became as long as two?"³⁰ Josephus,³¹ a Jewish historian, also claimed that this day was longer than usual. Many Christian and Jewish scholars, including Augustine, Jerome, Luther, Calvin, and rabbinical commentators, have supported this interpretation.

However, the focus of this section is not just on the miracle that occurred but on the fact that God listened and responded to the plea of a man. This intercession on behalf of Israel was a direct result of Joshua's petition, as stated in 10.12. This remarkable day had never occurred before and would never be repeated. Unlike the previous two miracles that benefited Israel, such as the parting of the Jordan River and the victory at Jericho, which were both initiated by God, this time, it was in direct response to the earnest petition of one man. This aspect again highlights Joshua's significance in the book and underscores God's unwavering faithfulness to His people.

10:16-21: Execution of the Five Defeated Kings

Following the battle of Beth-Horton, the five kings took refuge in a cave located in Makkedah. After some time, Joshua was informed of their location. He ordered his troops to seal and guard the cave to prevent the kings from escaping. Meanwhile, the Israelites continued to attack the remaining forces of the southern coalition, ensuring that they couldn't return to their cities.

The text does not state how long the great campaign in the South lasted. Once the southern coalition was defeated and the few survivors returned to their cities, the Israelites returned to the camp Joshua had established at Makkedah. No one dared to challenge Israel or say anything negative about them because of the success they had achieved.

Joshua then ordered the cave of Makkedah to be opened and the five kings to be brought out. He instructed the military officers with him on this campaign to come near and put their feet on the necks of the captive kings. This act symbolized what God would do to all of Israel's enemies. Joshua encouraged his subordinates to "be strong and courageous," 10.22-25, the exact words that had previously been spoken to him by Moses, the Lord, and the people. See 1.6, 18. The kings were then executed and impaled on five "trees" until evening. According to the law of Moses, Deuteronomy 21.23, and Galatians 3.13, someone who hung on a tree was considered cursed by God. Before sunset, Joshua ordered the corpses to be taken down in compliance with the law of Moses, Deuteronomy 21.23. The bodies were thrown into the cave where earlier they had taken refuge, and huge stones were placed over the entrance of the cave to serve as another stone monument, the sixth in the book.

10.28-39: Southern Cities Captured

In this passage, the author lists six cities in southern Canaan that Joshua and his army captured. The future territory of Judah was established in this region. The passage emphasizes the role of God in giving these cities into the hands of Israel. The ban was applied in each case, and all the inhabitants were executed, including the king. The six southern cities captured are Makkedah, Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron, and Debir. The capture of each city is described, but there are certain individual variations in the reports. For example, in four of the six reports, the king's execution is mentioned, but no mention is made of the fate of the kings of Lachish and Eglon. The language used to describe the movements of Joshua's army differs depending on each city's geographical circumstances.

The city of Lachish received aid from the king of Gezer, delaying the capture of that city by one day. The army from Gezer was crushed. Both Debir and Hebron had to be recaptured at a later period. The mention of the execution of the king of Hebron in 10.37 is interesting in the light of 10.23, in which he was executed on the day of the smashing victory. The conquests reported in 10.28–39 must have stretched over considerable time. The citizens of Hebron must have replaced their fallen king.

10:40-43: Summary of the Southern Campaign

Four regions of Canaan had now become the possession of Israel. The hill country, the Negev, the lowland, and the slopes. All the inhabitants were killed. This region encompasses around 4500 square miles. The area was captured simultaneously, i.e., in the same campaign. This would have lasted over several months. All of this was made possible because of the work of God. After the campaign, Joshua and his troops returned to Gilgal.

Joshua 11: The Northern Campaign

How much time passed between the northern and southern campaigns is unknown. The entire time for the conquest is estimated to be around seven years. The account in Chapter 11 is more abbreviated than in Chapter 10.

11.1-5: The Northern Coalition

Just as seen at the beginning of chapters 5 and 10, the opening in chapter 11 is ominous. The northern coalition was a vast army. These verses vividly portray the formidable threat the assembled Canaanite forces posed to Israel, comprising a massive army that seemed as numerous as the sand on the seashore. This description describes the seemingly impossible challenge from which the Lord would soon deliver His people.

Another significant factor is the Canaanite forces' extensive use of horses and chariots. Beginning around 1500 BC, chariots had become a crucial, and at times, the primary component of military forces in the Near East. Each Canaanite city-state had its complement of chariots and charioteers. These charioteers were troops who fought from chariots, distinct from mounted cavalry, which became prominent in warfare during a later period. The enemies' use of chariots and horses presented significant challenges to Israel (see 17.16-18; Judges 1.19; 4.13).

The writer goes out of his way to describe the deliberate and coordinated nature of the Canaanite resistance efforts. The kings convened at a predetermined location, indicating careful pre-planning for this coalition. Naturally, there was a common point where their camp was established, called the waters of Merom.

11.6-9: Israel Goes to Battle

God gave the Canaanites into the power of Israel. He instructed Joshua not to be afraid. After being defeated, they retreated in different directions, some towards Great Sidon and Misrephoth-maim. Sidon is located on the Phoenician coast. Misrephoth-maim is probably south of the so-called Ladder of Tyre. The pursuit of the Canaanite forces also extended eastward as far as the valley of Mizpah.

The Canaanite retreat is similar to that found in 10.28-43. The emphasis is on the completeness of the victory. Joshua carried out the divine command concerning the horses and chariots. He was to hamstring the horses and burn the chariots. Joshua's faithfulness in executing the Lord's command is also emphasized elsewhere in the account of the Conquest (see 10.40 and 11.15).

11.10-15: Capture of the Cities

The Israelites captured all the cities of the northern coalition, and their kings and populations were executed, just as Moses had commanded. However, Hazor was the only city that was burned. The Israelites took possession of these cities and fulfilled the promise of Deuteronomy 6.10. The plunder of the cities belonged to Israel, but the inhabitants were executed, as per the standing order that had originated with the Lord and passed down to Moses and then to Joshua. The author emphasizes that Joshua did precisely what he had been instructed.

11.16-12.24 – Overview of the Entire Campaign

In this section, the author provides an overview of the entire campaign of conquest undertaken by the Israelites under Joshua's leadership. The summary can be divided into several key points:

11.16-18: Geography of the Conquest

The author begins by emphasizing the extent of Israel's success in the conquest. Joshua conquered a vast territory, including the hill country, the Negev, Goshen, the lowland, the Arabah, the hill country of Israel, and the lowland of Israel. This conquest extended from Mount Halak in the south to Mount Hermon in the north, with Baal-gad at the foot of Mount Hermon being the northernmost point. The author notes that all the kings in this region were executed during this phase of the conquest, which lasted slightly over seven years.

11.19-20: Theology

The author reflects that none of the city-states sought peace with Israel, except for the Gibeonites, who used deception to secure a treaty. The hardening of the hearts of the Canaanite inhabitants, leading to their resistance and eventual destruction, is attributed to Yahweh's divine will. God had decreed the destruction of the Canaanites as a judicial act, and this will was first revealed to Moses, who entrusted the execution of this plan to Joshua. Despite God's mighty acts on behalf of His people, only a single Canaanite, Rahab, had embraced the worship of the Living God, illustrating the hardened state of the Canaanites.

11.21-23: Climax and Conclusion

The author introduces the existence of the Anakim, a giant race of people who had previously terrified the Israelites during the initial survey of the land. Joshua successfully defeated and eradicated the Anakim in various locations within the hill country of Judah and Israel, except for three locations in the Philistine Plain where some Anakim remained. This victory over the giants is a pivotal moment in the conquest.

The author summarizes the united conquest of the land, affirming that Joshua fulfilled God's promises regarding the Promised Land and that the conquered territory would be distributed among the tribes of Israel. The phrase "the land had rest from war" should be understood as indicating that the primary resistance from the enemy had been broken. However, subsequent chapters will reveal ongoing conflicts as individual tribes deal with remaining Canaanite pockets in their inheritance.

Joshua 12: An Appendix:

As an appendix to the narrative, the author provides a systematic list of thirty-three kings defeated by the Israelites during Moses' and Joshua's leadership. This list serves as a song of praise for the triumph of the King of Kings over earthly rulers. The kings conquered east of the Jordan, under Moses' leadership, included Sihon and Og. Their territories were allotted to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. Under Joshua's leadership, the kings conquered west of the Jordan numbered thirty-one, collectively ruling a vast region from Baal-gad to Mount Halak. This list may have reminded the Israelites of their victorious history when united under Joshua's leadership.

Overall, this section provides a comprehensive overview of the conquest of Canaan, emphasizing its geographical scope, the theological implications of resistance, the climactic defeat of the Anakim, and the subsequent distribution of the conquered land among the tribes of Israel.

What's In This for Us?

The Impact of Sin: The story of Achan's sin and its consequences highlights the impact of sin on individuals and communities. It serves as a reminder of the importance of obeying God's commands to avoid such devastating consequences.

The Importance of Seeking God's Guidance: The Israelites' failure to seek God's guidance and counsel before making a covenant with the Gibeonites led to unintended consequences. It underscores the importance of seeking God's wisdom and advice in decision-making and not relying solely on our understanding.

God Listens to Prayer: The miraculous event of the sun and moon standing still in response to Joshua's prayer illustrates that God listens to the prayers of His people. It reminds us of the power of prayer and the faithfulness of God to answer when we seek Him earnestly.

God's Faithfulness in Victory: Throughout the conquest of Canaan, God remained faithful to His promise to give the land to Israel. This is a testament to God's faithfulness in delivering His people and fulfilling His promises even in the face of formidable challenges.

Obedience to God's Commands: The conquest of Canaan highlights the importance of obeying God's commands, even when they may seem complex or challenging. It reminds us that faithfully following God's commands are for our well-being and success.

Conclusion

What have we learned in this lesson?

The importance of seeking God's guidance before making decisions must be emphasized. The experience of the Israelites with the Gibeonites highlights the value of seeking divine wisdom and not relying solely on our understanding. We are encouraged to trust God's direction and acknowledge His sovereignty.

The miraculous event of the sun and moon standing still in response to Joshua's prayer underlines the power of prayer and God's faithfulness in answering the prayers of His people. It reminds us of the importance of persistent and heartfelt prayer in our relationship with God.

Leadership and responsibility have been prominent themes throughout our study. Joshua's role as a leader who followed God's commands and led the Israelites with courage and faith is an example. It highlights the significance of leadership grounded in faith and obedience to God's Word.

The conquest of Canaan also showcases the importance of unity and covenant-keeping. The unity of the Israelite tribes and their commitment to honoring their covenants, even when entered into under

deceptive circumstances, demonstrate the value of unity within the body of believers and the importance of keeping our promises and commitments.

Moreover, we have seen God's power manifested in battles and victories. The conquest of Canaan demonstrates that when we trust in God's strength and follow His guidance, we can overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges and adversaries.

Lastly, gratitude for God's provision has been a recurring theme. As the Israelites possessed the land, they were reminded to acknowledge God's role in their success and be grateful for His blessings. We must recognize God's provision in our lives and offer gratitude for His faithfulness.

In conclusion, these chapters are a testament to God's faithfulness, guidance, and the power of faith and obedience. It challenges us to live by God's commands, seek His wisdom, pray fervently, lead with courage, maintain unity, and express gratitude daily. Never forget that God will help you navigate the challenges of life victoriously.

For Class Interaction and Discussion

Lesson Outline:

1. Introduction to Israel's situation in Canaan
2. The sin of Achan and its consequences
3. The Gibeonite deception and Israel's response
 - The importance of seeking God's guidance
4. The battle for Southern Canaan and the role of God in Israel's victories
5. The Northern Campaign and its challenges

Thought Questions for Discussion

1. How did Achan's sin affect the entire nation of Israel?
2. Why do you think the Gibeonites chose deception over confrontation?
3. What can we learn from the Israelites' failure to seek divine guidance before making the covenant with the Gibeonites?
4. Discuss how the concept of divine justice is portrayed in the battles described in Joshua 10 and 11.
5. How does the story of the sun standing still inspire your understanding of prayer?
6. In what ways did Joshua demonstrate effective leadership during the conquest of Canaan?
7. What is the significance of the defeat of the Anakim in the narrative?
8. How does the systematic list of defeated kings serve as a testament to God's faithfulness?
9. Reflect on the importance of unity and covenant-keeping as shown by the Israelite tribes.

10. What does the conquest of Canaan teach us about gratitude for God's provision?

Group Activities

Debate: Should the Israelites have sought retribution against the Gibeonites for their deception?

Create a map depicting the Southern and Northern Campaigns of the Israelites.

Final Encouraging Word:

Remember, as we face our battles and challenges, let us learn from the stories of Joshua and the Israelites. Seek guidance from above, trust in the power of prayer, and lead with courage and integrity. United in our commitments and grateful for our blessings, we can navigate life's difficulties. Stand firm in faith and be assured that God is with you every step of the way, guiding you to victory.

²⁹ Exodus 14.24; Psalm 77.16-18; Judges 4.15; 5.20-21.

³⁰ Sir 46.4.

³¹ Antiquities, 5.1.17.