

Joshua's Victories of Faith – Joshua 11:1–23

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Introduction

The first ten chapters of Joshua give the history of Israel's crossing of the Jordan, their campaigns against the cities of Jericho and Ai, and the conquest of the Southern area of Canaan. In all of those important and impressive events, the care, protection, and miraculous blessings of God were very much upon Joshua and Israel as they faithfully obeyed God. Chapter 10 closes with Joshua and the host of Israel back at their base camp at Gilgal, following their victorious campaigns. The stage is thus set for the beginning of the mightiest military challenge Israel had thus far faced—that of the combined forces of all of the kings of Northern Canaan.

The Northern Kings Unite Under Jabin

Verses 1–3:

Hazor was apparently the principal city of Northern Canaan. Its king, Jabin, was powerful enough that he could call the kings of a large surrounding area and they would respond. It appears that Jabin and Hazor were so powerful that all of Northern Canaan was subject to them (cf., v. 10). *Jabin* literally means "wise" or "intelligent." Many generations later the sacred record describes another "Jabin, king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor" (Jud. 4:2).¹ It is thus concluded that "Jabin" is likely the title (rather than a personal name) of the Hazorite kings, after the manner of the Pharaohs of Egypt and the Caesars of Rome.

There were also cities called "Hazor" in Southern Canaan (Jos. 15:23, 25). The name *Hazor* literally means "enclosed" or "fortified" and would thus naturally be used to describe other fortified cities. The Hazor of our text was apparently in the vicinity of the "waters of Merom," where the huge confederate army encamped (cf., v. 5).

Verses 4–5:

The combined forces of the broad area of Northern Canaan were so numerous that Joshua did not even attempt to number them. To count the multitude would have been as futile as counting the sand on the seashore. Josephus, though not present, as Joshua was, brazenly gave the numbers (doubtless fictitious) of 300,000 foot soldiers, 10,000 horse soldiers, and 20,000 chariots.² Joshua's army had neither horses nor chariots. The vast numbers of the challenging army, plus their apparently superior equipment, was such as to strike terror into the heart of the boldest Hebrew.

As earlier indicated, the meeting place of these hordes before beginning their march for their encounter with Joshua's army was at the "waters of Merom." Although some (e.g., Keil and Delitzsch) deny the identity of these waters with Lake Merom, a few miles north of the Sea of Galilee, most commentators make this identity, with which I agree.

It is likely that the numerous kings called together by Jabin had often been at war with each other on various occasions, but when a common enemy threatened them, they united their forces. The same phenomenon is still observable. Members in the same congregation who may hardly speak to one another can sometimes be found uniting to oppose godly elders or bold Gospel preachers in order to overthrow their righteous efforts.

Joshua Routs the Canaanites

Verse 6:

Lest the very appearance of the formidable Canaanite host overwhelm Joshua and his army, the Lord spoke words of encouragement to him. *Be not afraid because of them*, must have been reassuring even to a man who had already proved his faith in God on many occasions. When Joshua approached the Amorites of the hill country, Jehovah said to him, "fear them not" (Jos. 10:8). Even those who are strong in faith sometimes need encouragement. When Christ sent out the apostles, he told them of the terrible opposition and persecution they would face, but he said, "Be not afraid of them" (Mat. 10:28). When Paul was all alone in the wicked city of Corinth, the Lord spoke to him in a vision, saying, "Be not afraid" (Acts 18:9). While God no longer directly speaks to men in such ways, He is still speaking to His faithful people through His words to the likes of Joshua, the Twelve and Paul. We need an increase of those who are fearless in the face of the moral, doctrinal, and philosophical foes which presently abound, even when they appear to be overwhelming.

God promised that he would deliver the enemy slain into Israel's hands within 24 hours. Let us carefully observe that God, not Joshua or the army he led, would deliver the Canaanites. Had there been a battle between two armies of mere men, doubtless the Canaanites would have won a crushing victory over Israel. However, God used the inferior forces of Joshua to rout the mighty army gathered against them. Man in all his power, wealth, and wisdom is but little more than a fragile insect when compared with his Creator; truly, "the foolishness of God is wiser than man; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25).

Joshua was ordered to hock the horses and burn the chariots of their enemies. This command likely relates to the order of Moses that the kings of Israel should not multiply horses for their use (Deut. 17:16). David may have been thinking of God's order to Joshua when he

wrote Psalms 20:7: "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will make mention of the name of Jehovah our God." Hocking the horses involved cutting the tendon or hamstring in the lower leg. Some say that this rendered the horses completely useless,³ while others say that the horses would still be capable of domestic work, but would no longer be able to run.⁴

Whichever may be the case, the hamstrung horses would certainly no longer be fit for warfare, and this was most likely God's purpose. That the chariots were to be burned indicates that they were constructed mostly of wood, perhaps with some metal overlay to repel javelin and spear.

Verses 7–8:

Joshua fell upon the Canaanites "suddenly." Not only was God with Israel to assure the victory, but the element of ambush was also in their favor. The scene seems to be one in which a huge army is relaxed in overconfidence due to its size and equipment. The sudden sweep of Israel upon them before they ever broke camp completely surprised them and utterly demoralized them.

There was a great slaughter of those who stayed on the battlefield and attempted to fight. The Canaanites who fled, whether to the West toward Sidon on the Mediterranean coast, or to the East toward Mizpeh, were pursued by Joshua's men, and those who fell into their hands were slain. A lesser man than Joshua would have taken the credit and sought the glory for the great victory. However, the humble and faithful Joshua described things as they were: "And Jehovah delivered them into the hand of Israel...."

Verse 9:

Joshua demonstrated his trusting obedience once more in his compliance with God's order to hock the horses and burn the chariots. This servant of God is in sharp contrast with the willful king Saul of several generations later who refused to do all that God had told him to do in the slaughter of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:9–11). Appropriately, Joshua's name has lived in honor through the centuries, and the name of Saul has gone down in infamy.

Joshua Conquers the Cities

Verses 10–11:

Having pursued the Canaanites as they fled from the land, Joshua "turned back" to the cities from which those armies had come. To leave those cities unmolested would have invited their rise to power again. The capitol city of Hazor was given first attention. The city was smitten and burned. Everyone in the city, including King Jabin, was put to the sword, "utterly destroying them; there was none left that breathed." Succeeding verses indicate that not all of the other cities were demolished. Perhaps God intended to make an example of Hazor for all of Israel's

other enemies, since it was the chief city. This treatment of Hazor is reminiscent of the treatment of Jericho, the first city to fall before God's army (6:17–24).

Hazor was in the territory given to Naphtali (19:36). It was apparently abandoned as a city site by Israel and rebuilt and occupied by the Canaanites. About 130 years after Joshua's death, Deborah and Barak rallied God's people against another "Jabin, king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor" (Jud. 4:1–10). It was likely this rebuilt city that was fortified as one of Solomon's "chariot cities" on the northern frontier of his kingdom (1 Kin. 9:15). Generations later, during the evil reign of Pekah of Israel, Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, conquered "all the land of Naphtali," including Hazor, and carried the captives home with him (2 Kin. 15:29). The ruins of this ancient storied city have not been certainly located.

Some would like to find a contradiction involved in Jabin's seemingly being among the kings slaughtered by Joshua at the encampment of the confederacy (v. 5), and yet later being in Hazor when it was destroyed (v. 10). However, it should be remembered that not all of those assembled in the plain of Merom were slain; many panicked and fled in various directions (v. 8). It is possible that Jabin fled to his fortified city, which he thought would be a safe lair. It is also possible that Jabin had already returned to Hazor before Joshua's attack. The latter-day Jabin commanded his army through a captain, named Sisera (Jud. 4:2). It is not unreasonable to assume that the Jabin of our text may have likewise led his army on the field from his throne in Hazor. The text certainly contains no contradiction in any case.

Verses 12–14:

The smaller principalities that allied themselves with Jabin of Hazor, paid a high price for their involvement. All of the other cities were put to the sword, but they were not burned as was Hazor (v. 13). The "utter destruction" in reference to those cities applies to their inhabitants rather than to the walls and buildings, even as, in the description of Hazor's fate, the "utter destruction" relates to people and the burning of the city is mentioned separately (v. 11). These spared cities are said to be "cities that stood still in their strength" (KJV), which would seem to imply that they were too strong to be leveled. However, this would seem contradictory to the fact that the greatest of the cities (Hazor) was burned to the ground and the inhabitants of all of those cities were utterly destroyed. The more accurate reading refers to "the cities that stood on their mounds" (ASV). Thus, it was not because of their invincibility that they were spared, but perhaps because of something to do with their locations.

Various speculations have been offered as to why these cities were spared, some of which I deem worthy of notice. Matthew Henry supposes that they were left as part of the

fulfillment of Moses' promise that Israel would "...dwell in great and goodly cities which they builded not..."⁵ Blaikie postulates the following:

The reason [the cities were not leveled, DM] probably was, that it would have cost too much time. But it was in such places that the old inhabitants rallied and entrenched themselves, and from them they were able in after years to inflict much loss and give great trouble to Israel. Joshua, however, had not received instructions to destroy them; they were left to serve a purpose in God's plan of discipline (Jud. 2:3), and while Israel was often humbled under them, their attacks proved occasions of rallying, bringing them back to God, whose worship they were so ready to neglect.⁶

"To the victor belongs the spoils" is the rule of war, and it prevailed in the conquest of Northern Canaan, even as it had done so in the Southern conquest after the exception of Jericho (8:2, 27). The spoils of numerous cities must have been great indeed, including the cattle of the lands surrounding same. It is a cause for amazement to consider how much Israel was enriched by her enemies at God's bidding, not only in the conquest of Canaan, but on other occasions as well (e.g., Exo. 12:35–36).

Verse 15:

I have often referred to Joshua as "faithful"; this verse expresses why he can be called by this honorable term. Joshua was a man of blind obedience to God through God's spokesman, Moses. A clear "chain of command" is described: (1) "Jehovah commanded Moses," (2) "Moses commanded Joshua," and (3) Joshua commanded Israel (implied in this passage and illustrated throughout the book of Joshua). It has always been God's right to command and man's responsibility to obey.

The great heroes of the Bible have always been the men and women who understood this. Moses was such a man, who carefully obeyed God's instructions and faithfully delivered God's message that was given to guide Israel for 1,500 years. More emphatically in the verse before us, Joshua was such a man, who faithfully executed the commands of God, whether given directly or through Moses. Verses 14 and 15 in conjunction imply that under loyal Joshua's watchful eye, all of the icons, idols, images, and such like of the pagan Canaanites (along with their attached gold and silver) were incinerated, rather than being kept for spoils, according to God's command through Moses (Deu. 7:25).

A principle of exceeding and abiding significance is couched in the words of this verse: To obey God's designated spokesman is to obey God; to reject God's designated spokesman is to reject God himself. God no longer speaks through Moses and the prophets, but through his Son (Mat. 17:3–5; Heb. 1:1–2). The Son of God spoke himself while upon the earth and his words were faithfully recorded in the first four books of the New Testament. He further spoke

through the Spirit of Truth whom he sent upon the apostles, guiding them into all the Truth (John 16:13), whose words we have in Acts through Revelation. The words of these latter New Testament books are just as much the words of Christ as are the direct quotations from his lips while he was upon the earth (see 1 Cor. 2:13; 14:37; 1 The. 2:13, et al.). When one rejects the teaching of the New Testament, whether upon the page as he reads it or from the lips of the messenger who proclaims it, he has rejected Christ (John 12:48) and the Almighty God who sent him (John 13:20).

Note well the nature of real obedience: Joshua "left nothing undone of all that Jehovah commanded Moses." The ASV margin reads, "he removed nothing." Keil and Delitzsch give the literal rendering of the phrase as "he put not away a word."⁷ The obedient heart neither ignores nor seeks to set aside even a single word of God's revelation. Those moderns who presume to pontificate that it is beneath them to be "commandment-keepers" because, after all, "we are under grace, not law," are greatly deceived. They are deceived in thinking that they are under grace when they are not, if they are ignoring the commands of Christ. Salvation is only for the obedient (Heb. 5:9), and since salvation is by grace (Eph. 2:8), it must follow that grace is extended only to the obedient (cf., Tit. 2:11–12). Furthermore, they are deceived in thinking that it is somehow "unspiritual" to be under law or restricted by the commandments of Christ. However, Paul was not bashful to say that he was "under law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21), and the Lord said that by keeping His commandments we express our love for Him (John 14:15).

Joshua's Conquests Summarized

Verses 16–17:

After detailing the major battles by which the Canaanites were routed and subdued, both in the Southern area (prior to chapter 11), and the Northern area (11:1–15), Joshua gives, in the verses before us, a summary of all the territory conquered. The broad expanse of land described stretched from the area south of the Dead Sea (Mount Halak) at its southern extremity to the area of Mount Hermon northward. It is specifically stated that Joshua put to death all of the kings of the cities of this vast territory.

We are not to suppose that absolutely all of the Canaanites were either killed or driven from the land—the book of Judges indicates that there were various Canaanite nations which were able to rally, regroup, and place God's people under tribute periodically in subsequent times. J.J. Lias correctly observed, "It [the statement of vv. 16–17, DM] must not be pressed to mean the utter destruction of all the Canaanites, and the undisturbed possession of the

country."⁸ However, it is clear that due to the successful campaigns of Joshua, the Canaanite was subdued so that the land could be divided and settled by Israel, tribe by tribe.

Verses 18–20:

Although the chronicles of the battles required to conquer the kings of Canaan are brief, I remind the reader that the campaign was lengthy. Moses had told Israel that the Canaanites would not be driven out "in one year," but "little by little" (Exo. 23:29–30). Authorities give various estimates of the length of the warfare. T.E. Espin has a good summary statement:

At least five years; according to others, seven years.... It is evident from this verse [i.e., v. 18, DM] that this and the preceding chapter contain a very condensed account of the wars of Joshua, giving particulars about leading events only.⁹

To emphasize the difficulty of subduing the Canaanites, Joshua reminds the reader that only the Hivites of Gibeon made peace with Israel (9:3–15); all other cities determined to oppose the unrestrainable advance of the people of God. Israel attacked and took all of them through God's mighty hand.

Their defiance of Israel, regardless of her remarkable successes, is explained by the fact that God hardened their hearts to their own destruction. This same explanation is given by Moses to explain why Pharaoh resisted Jehovah in spite of the grievous plagues and their demonstration of God's omnipotence (Exo. 4:21; 7:3; 14:4,17, et al.). It is manifest from Exodus 7:3 that the means by which God hardened Pharaoh's heart was by the multiplication of signs and wonders in the plagues.

It is likewise clear from the words of the Hivites when they sued for peace with Israel that God's mighty works (including the plagues in Egypt) were well known in Canaan (9:3, 9–10). These very same deeds which softened the hearts of the Hivites apparently hardened the hearts of their neighbors. By whatever means God hardened their hearts, He did not interfere with their own wills and choices. Adam Clarke well observed:

They had sinned against all the light they had received, and God left them justly to the hardness, obstinacy, and pride of their own hearts; for as they chose to retain their idolatry, God was determined that they should be cut off.¹⁰

God still works in the same way upon the hearts of men who refuse to hear His inspired Truth: "And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 The. 2:11–12). Like the sun in the sky which hardens clay, but melts wax, the wondrous works and words of God will soften the hearts of some men, while hardening the hearts of others. In

both cases, the respective hardening or softening depends upon the material acted upon, not upon the acting agent.

Verses 21–22:

This brief reference gives special attention to the disposition of the Anakim, although the general description of the conquest of this area was previously recorded (10:37–39). It should not be surprising that Joshua, who, as a younger man, was one of the twelve spies sent into Canaan from Kadesh-Barnea (Num. 13:1–8), would write this special note about the giants of Canaan. When the spies returned with their reports of the land, the ten faithless spies discouraged Israel by saying that the land was inhabited by this race of giants, before whom they appeared as mere grasshoppers (Num. 13:31–33).

Surely, it was appropriate for Joshua to show that by God's power the Anakim could be (and were) conquered, just as he and faithful Caleb had declared more than 40 years earlier (Num. 13:30; 14:6–9). Indeed, this was proof that they could have entered the land then rather than having to endure all of the agonies of the Wilderness Wanderings due to their unbelief. In these verses Joshua is saying to the sons of that faithless previous generation, "I told them so!"

All of the Anakim who fell into their hands were destroyed. The ones remaining alive fled from the conquered territory of Israel, to the Philistine cities of Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod. This ancient race of giants apparently lost their tribal identity after moving to Philistia.

Verse 23:

One statement summarizes the record of all the battles and conquests: "So Joshua took the whole land." *The whole land* is more fully explained in subsequent passages. "So Jehovah gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein" (21:43). Chapter 23:14 further states: "...not one thing hath failed of all the good things which Jehovah your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, not one thing hath failed thereof." In spite of these unequivocal statements, millions still insist that God yet owes fleshly Israel the land of Palestine and that the modern nation of Israel possesses that land by Divine right. All such are either abjectly ignorant or they prefer not to accept what the Bible teaches, or both. God does not owe all of the Jews in the world a square inch of Palestine! All of the land promise (Gen. 12:7; 26:3; 28:13; Deu. 34:4) was fulfilled in the lifetime of Joshua.

The message of verse 15 is re-emphasized, namely, that Joshua acted "according to all that Jehovah spake unto Moses." Joshua was careful to take the land as God had directed through Moses, but he was also careful to divide the land among the Israelites as he had been

charged (Deu. 1:38). In all things this man remained the humble servant of God, never once showing a sign of rebellion or presumptuousness. In Joshua we find a noble example. Little wonder that he is made a type of our Lord (Heb. 4:8). While the fact of the allotment of the land is here mentioned, the actual description of the division of the land appears later (chapters 13–21).

"And the land had rest from war." The great battles had now been won and God's people could now concentrate on peacefully settling the land. Not until their battles were over could they rest. Only those who are deranged welcome war, strife, and violence. The servant of God will "seek peace, and pursue it" (1 Pet. 3:11). However, we will never find complete peace upon this earth, even when we do our best to maintain it (Rom. 12:18). Our Lord is the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6), and he pronounced a blessing upon peacemakers (Mat. 5:9), yet He was constantly embroiled in strife and controversy. Paul preached the "gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15), but he knew little peace as a child of God. We should be surprised that the saints of God are called "soldiers of Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3) and are commanded to "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Tim. 6:12).

The church of God is presently permeated with an inordinate desire for peace at any price. Many saints have the idea that they should not have to fight any battles or be embroiled in any controversy. Not a few seem to believe it is downright sinful to oppose and expose error. The body of Christ is afflicted with thousands (including hundreds of elders and preachers) who believe it is unspiritual to be concerned with brotherhood problems, issues, and controversies, and they boastfully ignore them. Such seem to think that those who do remain abreast of such things because of a zeal for Truth, delight in and thrive on controversy. I know of none who enjoy differing with (and exposing where necessary) false teachers, whether or not they are brethren.

What if none did this "dirty work" as these pacifist brethren conceive of it? The church would surely have digressed much further than it already has in recent years. We are spiritual traitors if we ignore or run from elements that oppose the Truth. Thus it is evident that many are prematurely seeking perfect peace, having forgotten that we are soldiers on duty in the midst of a gigantic spiritual war, charged to "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3). Only when all of the battles are over or we have fallen while fighting (whichever may come first for us) may we have rest in that eternal land of perfect and eternal peace! My brethren, let us not seek peace and rest too soon!

Conclusion

Major lessons we should remember from Joshua 11 are the following:

1. God is not impressed with numbers, for He is more powerful than all men combined.
2. Those who serve God faithfully need fear no man or alliance of men who are opposed to God, for He will be with His own.
3. There is no substitute for absolute obedience to God.
4. When we obey the faithful messenger of God we obey God; when we reject the faithful messenger of God we reject God.
5. There is "a time for war, and a time for peace" (Ecc. 3:8); while on earth we will always be in a time of spiritual war—the time for peace will come in Heaven if we have faithfully striven for our God during wartime here below.

Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus, Antiquities*, v., 1., 18.
3. J.J. Lias, *The Pulpit Commentary*, ed., H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (New York, NY: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1950), v. 3, part 2, p. 189.
4. Willard W. Winter, *Studies in Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1969) pp. 163–64.
5. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Wilmington, DE: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1972 reprint), v. 1, p. 556.
6. William Garden Braikie, *The Expositor's Bible*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982 reprint), v. 1, pp. 693–94.
7. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982 reprint), v. 2, p. 122.
8. Lias, p. 190.
9. T.E. Espin, *The Bible Commentary*, ed. F.C. Cook (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981 reprint), v. 2, p. 62.
10. Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1824 [3 volume reprint, n.d.], v. 1, part 2, p. 55.

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