**JOSHUA TOOK THE ENTIRE LAND**

Joshua 11:1-12:24 Key Verse 11:23

“So Joshua took the entire land, just as the Lord had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.”

In today’s passage we see the conclusion of the campaign that Joshua led to take over the promised land of Canaan. In spite of significant setbacks and sins, the campaign was completed victoriously. How is your life’s campaign going—your mission, with all its spiritual warfare? Do you ever have doubts that you will finish and win the victory? If all we had to rely on was ourselves, we would definitely fail. But as we can see in today’s passage, because of God’s faithfulness to his own promise, he works to help his people see their mission through to the end. Through meditating on today’s passage, let’s pray to strengthen our faith that with God’s help we will complete our spiritual warfare with a full victory.

I. Israel defeats the army of Hazor (11:1-11)

In Chapter 10 we saw the campaign in which Joshua subdued the whole southern region of Israel. But do you remember how this campaign got started? It started when Israel had to come to the rescue of the Gibeonites, to whom Israel had sworn an oath of protection. This shows that the conquests of the southern cities came as God’s blessing on Israel’s faithfulness when they kept their word. We also saw that Joshua used this campaign as an opportunity to teach his commanders and generals to be strong and courageous in the face of fierce opposition, just as God had taught him. Israel even overcame nature itself in winning this victory, as Joshua commanded the sun itself to stand still and it did.

At the start of today’s passage, we see that the news of Joshua’s conquests had gotten out. Verse 1 says that Jabin king of Hazor heard about all this. Hazor was a city north of the Sea of Galilee, one of the largest cities of Canaan. Archaeologists have excavated the site of Hazor, over 200 acres. When Hazor heard of what Israel was doing and saw it as a threat to himself, he sent word to many other northern kings, and they assembled an army to fight against Israel.

Verse 4 says this army was “a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore.” Furthermore, this army had advanced technology and resources for the time—a large number of horses and horse-drawn chariots. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the great military advantage of chariots was their speed—they could drive circles around an opposing army of foot soldiers and shoot arrows at them without being caught. This army gathered at a place called the Waters of Merom, a lake ten miles north of the Sea of Galilee, to fight against Israel (5).

Apparently Israel did not have any chariots. Though Israel by now has a seasoned army that has won many victories, this looks like the biggest threat they have ever faced. The passage doesn’t tell us how Joshua first found out about the army that the king of Hazor was amassing, but I imagine that when he did find out, he was quite concerned. What the passage does tell us is that the Lord came to Joshua once again to strengthen him with his gracious promise. Look at verse 6. *“The Lord said to Joshua, ‘Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them, slain, over to Israel. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots.’”* God unconditionally promised to give Joshua victory over this huge army, and in a very short time span—within 24 hours they would all be slain. God also gave specific directions for what to do with the horses and chariots—to hamstring the horses, which means to cut tendons in the legs in order to cripple them, and to burn the chariots.

Why did God say this? For one thing, it tells Joshua that the Lord knows about the horses and chariots. God is perfectly aware of the enemy’s capability, and by telling Joshua what to do with the captured horses and chariots, he is practically helping Joshua have assurance that they are not going to be a problem. Those chariots that sounded so frightening? Joshua could now visualize his soldiers joyfully burning them.

Another important meaning of God’s instruction to hamstring the horses and burn the chariots is that it shows God’s intention to bring peace. Once Israel does defeat this huge army of the northern kings, they might think it is a good idea to take these horses and chariots for themselves, as a kind of “insurance” against future conflicts. But this is not what God wanted. In fact, Moses had already told Israel this. In the book of Deuteronomy, when talking about Israel’s future when they would have a king, Moses said, *“The king... must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them.”* (Dt 17:16) Because Israel was to be a people set apart for God, Israel had to rely on God, not on horses and chariots or other advanced technology.

War is horrible. Sometimes in this world, fighting a war is necessary when we are attacked first by an aggressor or when we have to rescue our friends from an aggressor. But by having Israel destroy the weapons of war when the war is over, God shows his ultimate goal is to bring peace.

So, how did the battle against this huge army pan out? Look at verses 7 and 8. *“So Joshua and his whole army came against them suddenly at the Waters of Merom and attacked them, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Israel. They defeated them and pursued them all the way to Greater Sidon, to Misrephoth Maim, and to the Valley of Mizpah on the east, until no survivors were left.”* God’s promise encouraged Joshua to take the initiative, attacking quickly in order to overwhelm the enemy. They defeated the army of the northern kings, then pursued them until there were no survivors. And they hamstrung the horses and burned their chariots (9).

Israel did not stop there. After destroying the army raised by the king of Hazor, the army marched to Hazor itself, captured the king and put him to the sword, and burned the city (10-11). In this way Israel completely removed the threat that had risen up against them, and as before, carried out God’s command of judgment on the Canaanites.

Are you facing any obstacles that look like a huge army, like sand on the seashore, with horses and chariots? If we are not looking for selfish gain but are fighting the Lord’s battles for his kingdom of peace, we can take God’s promise for ourselves: “Do not be afraid. I will hand all of them over to Israel.” I can’t count how many times I was facing an obstacle that looked so big and scary and made me so stressed, but when the time came for me to actually face that obstacle head-on, it just fell away. Whatever kind of opposition or unknowns we are facing, God’s will is for us to not be afraid, but to have courageous faith, and even take the initiative to win the victory that will give glory to God and advance his kingdom.

II. Joshua finishes carrying out the Lord’s command (11:12-12:24)

In the remainder of Chapter 11 we see the completion of the campaign against the Northern cities. Verses 12 through 14 show how carefully Joshua kept the directions he had received. He totally destroyed every city he defeated. The cities on mounds were the ones Israel was allowed to carry off the plunder from to provide for themselves. The rest he burned completely.

There are no defeats or setbacks mentioned here. It shows that after the failure at Ai and the mistaken treaty with the Gibeonites, Joshua learned to co-work with God and he won one victory after another. Verses 16 and 17 describe the extent of the territory that Joshua took, the south and the north part of Israel. The last group Joshua attacked was the Anakites in the hill country of Israel, described in verses 21-22. As we have said, Joshua was an instrument of God’s judgment. Thankfully, we are not called to that, but to be instruments of salvation through the gospel, and to leave the judging up to God.

In verses 12, 15, 20, and 23, we see a certain phrase repeated four times. What is that phrase? *“...as the LORD had commanded Moses”*. Joshua committed significant sins, as we have seen, sins of presumption and failure to pray, and he may have been slow to learn courageous faith. But in the end, the summary of Joshua’s life was that he obeyed God’s word that he received through Moses, and as a result, he was a true victor. Many people are hoping for a point in their life where they will “find their groove” and begin to see successes after a long period of struggle. The book of Joshua shows us that the way to get to that point is to receive God’s training, and then do the work God gave us to do.

Look at verse 18, which is short but tells us a lot. *“Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time.”* We have studied the passages of Joshua over the period of just a few weeks, but of course in reality these campaigns stretched over many years, basically all of Joshua’s productive adult life. It is not easy to keep up such warfare for many years. We can see this as an analogy of our own lives of faith. We all like to hear stories and watch movies of someone who gives everything in one great battle and wins eternal fame from that and lives happily ever after. But for most of us, as it was for Joshua, we have to keep up the fight for a long period of time. For most of us, our lives of faith are not like a 100-meter dash but like a marathon, in which we have to renew our strength many times to make it to the finish line.

The good news is that God helps us with this also. Look at verse 20. *“For it was the Lord himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the Lord had commanded Moses.”* Think about what this says. It says God actually provoked Israel’s enemies to attack them, so Israel couldn’t quit fighting prematurely but had to keep defending themselves. In our lives, when we have to keep dealing with new problems and challenges, we might not see it this way at the time, but it is actually God’s grace to send us those problems. It shows that God still has work for us to do and hope for us to grow.

There was an ending point for Joshua, however. Look at Chapter 11 verse 23, which is our key verse. *“So Joshua took the entire land, just as the Lord had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.”* As we will read in next week’s passage, Joshua didn’t conquer 100% of the cities and all the territory that God intended for Israel to finally possess. This was God’s plan, as he had already told Israel that the remainder would be driven out little by little so the land would not become desolate (Ex 23:29-30). The point is that Joshua finished his mission, and then there was rest. Others would carry it forward now that he was done. It’s interesting that it says the land had rest. All these battles were not just good times, they were hard and took a toll on the people and the land. But God’s goal in everything was to arrive at a time of rest, of peace. It reminds us of Genesis, when God created the heavens and the earth in six days, and on the seventh day, the Sabbath, he rested and just admired all that he had made, which was very good.

We also have a rest that we are aiming for. In the book of Hebrews, the kingdom of God is referred to as a “Sabbath rest” for God’s people, which we enter into by faith in Jesus (Heb 4:10-11). In fact, Joshua’s conquest is a kind of partial and earthly preview of what Jesus did. Did you know that Jesus’ name is actually the same name as Joshua? “Jesus” is just the Greek form of it. As Joshua conquered the promised land of Canaan, Jesus conquered our sin on the cross and purchased the kingdom of God for us, the true promised land, so we can have rest there.

Chapter 12 is a summary of all the kings Israel defeated in the entire campaign, everything we have read in the book of Joshua and even before that, starting with the two kings on the East side of the Jordan River who were conquered under Moses, Sihon and Og. You can read about that in the book of Numbers, Chapter 21. Then there is a list of all the kings in Canaan, West of the Jordan, who were defeated by Joshua and Israel, starting from the king of Jericho. There were thirty-one of them in all. This long list is an illustration of God’s might and also his judgment on sin. Kings of the earth are powerful people, and often seem to be above the law, but God is able to judge their wickedness. It also shows how much God helped his people overcome. Any one of those kings was a powerful enemy. But with God’s help, Israel overcame thirty-three of them in all.

Thank God that he wants to give us many victories in our lives of faith. When we learn to overcome our fear and our earthly thinking and do things God’s way, he can use us a lot to bless many people and increase the territory of the kingdom of God. May God bless you to win many victories in your life of mission and experience true rest in Jesus.