

The Northern Campaign and a Summary of the Seven Year Conquest

Joshua 11

Joshua 11 - *“And it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor heard these things, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon, to the king of Shimron, to the king of Achshaph,² and to the kings who were from the north, in the mountains, in the plain south of Chinneroth, in the lowland, and in the heights of Dor on the west,³ to the Canaanites in the east and in the west, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite in the mountains, and the Hivite below Hermon in the land of Mizpah.⁴ So they went out, they and all their armies with them, as many people as the sand that is on the seashore in multitude, with very many horses and chariots.⁵ And when all these kings had met together, they came and camped together at the waters of Merom to fight against Israel.⁶ But the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow about this time I will deliver all of them slain before Israel. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire.”⁷ So Joshua and all the people of war with him came against them suddenly by the waters of Merom, and they attacked them.*

⁸ And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who defeated them and chased them to Greater Sidon, to the Brook Misrephoth,^[a] and to the Valley of Mizpah eastward; they attacked them until they left none of them remaining.⁹ So Joshua did to them as the LORD had told him: he hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots with fire.¹⁰ Joshua turned back at that time and took Hazor, and struck its king with the sword; for Hazor was formerly the head of all those kingdoms.¹¹ And they struck all the people who were in it with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them. There was none left breathing. Then he burned Hazor with fire.¹² So all the cities of those kings, and all their kings, Joshua took and struck with the edge of the sword. He utterly destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded.¹³ But as for the cities that stood on their mounds,^[b] Israel burned none of them, except Hazor only, which Joshua burned.¹⁴ And all the spoil of these cities and the livestock, the children of Israel took as booty for themselves; but they struck every man with the edge of the sword until they had destroyed them, and they left none breathing.

¹⁵ As the LORD had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses.¹⁶ Thus Joshua took all this land: the mountain country, all the South, all the land of Goshen, the lowland, and the Jordan plain^[c]—the mountains of Israel and its lowlands,¹⁷ from Mount Halak and the ascent to Seir, even as far as Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings, and struck them down and killed 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, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. All the others 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 utterly destroy them, and that they might receive no mercy, but that He might destroy them, as the LORD had commanded

Moses. ²¹ *And at that time Joshua came and cut off the Anakim from the mountains: from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel; Joshua utterly destroyed them with their cities. ²² None of the Anakim was left in the land of the children of Israel; they remained only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod. ²³ So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Then the land rested from war.*"

Background Notes

By the end of Joshua 10, Israel controlled the central highlands and the whole southern half of Canaan. Only the northern part of the country was not conquered.

In Joshua 11 a coalition of kings from the northern half of the land joined forces and prepared to fight against Israel. They gathered together by the waters of Merom, northwest of the Sea of Galilee. However, the "intelligence branch" of the Israeli army was right on top of their movements, and Joshua decided to attack them in a pre-emptive strike. After all, why wait until the coalition was organized with their chariots in battle-array at a place where the enemy would be most effective? So Joshua attacked them in the hill country and completely demobilized them, crippling their horses and burning their chariots.

Next Joshua attacked Hazor and burned it with fire (v10-11). Hazor was "the Jericho of the north." It was probably the largest city in Israel at that time. The stronghold of Hazor controlled the whole northern half of the land of Canaan, but God gave Hazor into Joshua's hands, as well as the rest of the cities of the north.

Notice verse 13: "*But as for the cities that stood on their mounds, Israel burned none of them, except Hazor only, which Joshua burned.*" That verse is significant because it indicates that Israel didn't burn all of the cities. Throughout the whole conquest, only three cities were burned: Jericho, Ai, and Hazor. The rest of the cities were taken over and inhabited by the Israelites. Archaeologists have excavated the tel of Hazor, and there is a burn layer that dates to the time of the conquest. This archaeological finding clearly supports the biblical record in Joshua.

In the summary of the conquest, verse 18 says, "*Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.*" From the chronological data given to us in the book of Joshua, it appears that the conquest took about seven years. When we read these chapters at one sitting, it's easy to get the idea that the conquest was only a few weeks long. Not so! It took a long time to conquer the entire land.

In verse 20 we read, "*For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might utterly destroy them, and that they might receive no mercy, but that He might destroy them, as the LORD had commanded Moses.*" This verse reminds us of the plagues in Egypt, when God hardened Pharaoh's heart -- after Pharaoh had hardened his own heart! God had given the Canaanites plenty of time to repent and change their ways, but

they wouldn't. They had hardened their hearts against God, and so now God hardened their hearts as He brought Israel into Canaan as His rod of judgment.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Faithful warriors don't fear numbers

Verse 4 says that the armies of the north were *"as many people as the sand that is on the seashore in multitude, with very many horses and chariots."* This is a place where hyperbole is used in the Bible! It was used to drive home the point that the armies of the north far outnumbered Joshua and the army of Israel. They were outclassed in technological strength as well. The enemy had many horses and chariots and Israel had none. But Israel had **God** and His promises!

Faithful warriors don't fear numbers. Verse 6: *"the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow about this time I will deliver all of them slain before Israel. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire."* "Hamstringing" a horse means to cut the tendons and cripple the horses. Why didn't God tell Joshua to capture the horses and chariots and start a branch of cavalry in the Israeli army? One reason is that if the Israelites had no horses and chariots, they would have to keep trusting the Lord for victory -- and not start to trust in their own military strength. Psalm 20:7 - *"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God."*

Remember that Joshua is a handbook of spiritual warfare for the Christian, and all the enemy opposition represents and illustrates spiritual opposition for the believer today. Just as the northern coalition of pagan enemy forces totally outnumbered and outclassed the army of Israel, so the spiritual opposition we face in the world today appears to be far superior to the small Christian community. But faithful warriors do not fear numbers, because God is on our side. One plus God is always a majority! As we go out each day to face the world and other forms of spiritual opposition, we may have a tendency to be afraid and discouraged because we're so outnumbered. Listen, there's no need to fear because God is on our side! Remember 2 Timothy 1:7 - *"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."* God has ways to "hamstring the horses" and "burn the chariots" of the opposition. Faithful warriors don't fear numbers.

2. Faithful warriors do not fear giants.

In the summary of the conquest, we read that Joshua cut off the Anakim (v21-22). The Anakim were the giants that Israel had feared when they spied out the land years before. They showed a lack of trust and belief in God at that time. Numbers 13:32-33 - *"The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature.³³ There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."*

What a difference forty years had made! They were scared then, but now the Israelites had become faithful warriors and giants were no problem! Only a few giants were left in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod. (This is the area, by the way, from which Goliath came years later.) But Israel no longer feared the giants. Now they didn't see themselves as grasshoppers.

What made the difference? Their eyes were now on the Lord and not on the giants. When your eyes are on the Lord, giants look like grasshoppers. It's all a matter of perspective. Faithful warriors don't fear giants.

Do you fear the giants that you face in spiritual warfare? What about the fear of losing your job when you let it be known on the job that you're a Christian? That can be a giant. What about the fear of dying? That can be a giant that Satan uses to make you doubt your salvation. What about the fear of loneliness or lack of security in your old age? That certainly can be a giant that keeps you from enjoying your blessings in Christ. There are no giants that can't be brought down by faith. Trust God, and watch God work! Faithful warriors don't fear giants.

Practical Application

Do you know what "rest" is all about?

Verse 23: *"So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Then the land rested from war."* What does that mean? It certainly doesn't mean that all the land was possessed by Israel. In Joshua 13:1 the Lord said to Joshua: *"You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed."* We know that enemy forces continued to exist in the land – just read the book of Judges. But still in Joshua 11 it could be said that the land rested from war. The conquest was over; the backbone of the enemy was broken. All that was left to do was to clean out the pockets of enemy resistance.

Do you see the application to our lives? We believers can come to place in our Christian life where the control of sin and spiritual opposition is no longer overwhelming. That doesn't mean that we no longer sin, and it doesn't mean that we are no longer involved in spiritual warfare, but we are resting in Christ in the land of spiritual blessing. The major battles with the world of flesh and the devil have been fought and been won. We're no longer struggling with certain sins. As Romans 6:14 says, *"...sin no longer has dominion over you..."* Have you experienced this rest in the land of spiritual blessings, or does the enemy still have lots of control over your life? Do you know what "rest" is all about?