

# Receiving Your Inheritance

## Messages from the Book of Joshua

### Message 9

#### *The Super-Enemy*

Joshua 10:1-11:23

Read Joshua 10:1-15; 11:1-9, 16-23

#### **Introduction**

So far Israel had decisively defeated every city she fought – all two of them. Ai was small, so we might not be so impressed by that victory, but Jericho was a massive foe. For those of us who have heard the story of Joshua's battle of Jericho many times, we can forget that this was a major upset – like Lehigh winning the NCAA basketball tournament. Jericho was better armed, more experienced, and better fortified, but Israel won in spite of impossible odds. The lesson there was that God can be trusted. God promises success if we follow Him, and He always delivers on His promises. God's power is sufficient to overcome all odds, and He never lets us down.

But now Israel was facing an enemy of an entirely different magnitude. This time it was not just one well-trained army, but five! Using our sports analogy, it would be as if Lehigh went up against the basketball teams of Maryland, Indiana, Kansas, \_\_\_\_, and Duke simultaneously. It would compare to the American colonial army fighting the forces of Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, and Holland all at once. You have to grasp the situation here. This is a *massive* concentration of force. We might have imagined that with a little luck or help from God Israel could have defeated each king one by one – but this is absolutely out of the question.

Furthermore, the incident which sparked this conflict was Gibeon's treaty with Israel. As we saw last week, this treaty was conceived and executed in deception. Israel was forbidden to enter into such treaties, but the Gibeonites tricked them into it. Israel was understandably angry at this turn of events. They were angry at being deceived, they were frustrated that they disobeyed God – and surely they had no liking for their treaty partners, now their neighbors! But if Israel was angry with Gibeon, the Canaanites were furious. They perceived that Gibeon had turned traitor on them, and they were determined to make them pay for it. So with murder in their hearts the five kings mobilized against Gibeon to destroy the traitor. Israel would hardly have been human if they had not at least momentarily considered allowing Gibeon to be destroyed. That would relieve them of the unfortunate treaty, and the problem of coexisting with the Gibeonites.

But Israel had promised to defend Gibeon. Psalm 15 says, "LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?...He who swears to his own hurt and does not change." (Psa. 15:1, 4b) Just as God always keeps His promises, so He expects – yes, demands – that His people keep theirs – even when it is costly or painful. I am sure it was deeply aggravating to Israel to go to Gibeon's aid. Just think of the potential loss of men and material. Imagine the anxiety of the women of Israel as they watched their sons and husbands go to war to defend lying pagans. The whole situation was all wrong. And then there was the vast army! Everything about this said, STOP! Yet Israel mobilized for battle. There is no indication here of any serious thought to turn back. They gave their word, and they would keep it.

Then God spoke to Joshua. Notice I said, "then". God did not speak until Joshua had begun to obey. How often do you fret and agonize over a difficult task? You struggle and stress. You *wish* God would speak, would give you guidance or comfort. But you refuse to obey! You want God to tell you He will make everything work out, and you are afraid to move ahead until you hear from Him. Don't you see how evil this

is? Hasn't God given you abundant proof of His goodness? Hasn't He shown over and over that He takes care of His people? And what about all the promises in scripture that He will *always* care for you? 1 Peter 5:7 is one example. "Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." Then in Romans Paul writes, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:38-39) No matter what God asks of you, you can be sure He will go with you and take care of you in it. Your part is to believe, and if you believe, you will obey – even if it is an impossible task.

God spoke to Joshua. He didn't have to. He didn't say anything new. All God did was repeat what He has been saying since the beginning of this book. "Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your hand; not a man of them shall stand before you." But God understands the frailty of man, how weak and forgetful he is – so God reminded Joshua of His promise of success.

### ***God's Deliverance***

No doubt these words encouraged Israel, for they threw themselves into the battle, beginning with a forced march. This reminds me a bit of the Battle of the Bulge in World War II. It was the last serious German offense, and it nearly turned the war in their favor. The Germans massed their troops and armor at the weakest point in the allied line. Their plan was to penetrate the front and race to the coast and cut off the allies supplies. When the battle began, a call was sent to General Patton to send troops from his Third Army far to the south. Patton ordered a forced march, and his troops arrived far sooner than anyone dreamed possible. They played a large role in turning back the German advance.

So the Israelites marched through the night and rushed the Canaanites without warning. That was a good start. Surprise is always instrumental in military victory. But lest we think that the final outcome was the result of human effort alone, the text tells us that it was God who routed the Canaanites. Then it happened. The huge Canaanite army was on the run, but they certainly would have regrouped were it not for God's atmospheric artillery: hailstones. Now these were not the little pebbles we sometimes see during a summer storm. These were lethal hailstones. The scripture tells us that most of the five armies were killed by the hail – God's cluster bombs!

The hail storm was miracle enough, but then God did something even more amazing. He made the sun stop so the Israelites could finish the job. This is the kind of thing that *really* irritates some people. It seems *so* fantastic. We expect this sort of story in fairy tales or in Saturday morning cartoons – but not in real life. Not only is it too wild for reasonable people to believe, it violates the laws of physics and astronomy. Any high school physics student knows, for one thing, that it is the earth which revolves, not the sun. Furthermore, the revolution of the earth around the sun keeps it in its place in the solar system. It is absolutely impossible for the sun (i.e. the earth) to stop moving for a few hours and then resume. Therefore, most moderns assume this is a piece of fiction. If any of the Bible is true, certainly this part is not. So many people, including some theologians, have declared that this story is fictitious. Other people realize that if one part of scripture is false, none of it can be trusted. These people know that our salvation depends upon a reliable word from God. So they look for scientific evidence to prove that, about 1000 B.C., the earth ceased revolving for a few hours.

The problem with both of these perspectives is that neither take into account the nature of the scripture. If the Bible is the word of God, it must be the ultimate authority. Scripture, not science, will determine what is reasonable. If the Bible seems unreasonable in places, we are the ones who need to adjust, not it. And science cannot prove the truthfulness of scripture – but scripture will validate good science. If

the Bible is God's word, it is the last word on all topics it addresses. Now of course there are many topics the Bible does not address, and science is useful to expand our knowledge of these fields. Furthermore, people frequently forget that God, if He exists at all, can certainly do miracles. If miracles are not possible, then there must be no God at all. We can see that most of the time the universe operates according to predictable patterns. Otherwise science would be impossible. But just because God ordinarily causes the earth to revolve around the sun is no reason to suppose that He cannot make it stop for a while. It is really rather foolish even to dispute that an infinite, divine power would find this difficult.

But what we want to focus on here is God's faithfulness and provision for His people. The whole point of the sun standing still was to enable Israel to win the battle. God made it possible for them to succeed.

When we move over to chapter 11 we see God continuing to deliver His people. This time the foe was even larger and more menacing than the five kings. All the armies of the north massed to stop and destroy Israel. The text says they were as numerous as the sand on the seashore. In other words, there were so many men it was impossible to get a reasonable count. Furthermore, they had horses and chariots. Lots of horses and chariots. In those days chariots were the most advanced military technology. Foot soldiers didn't stand a chance against them. The chariot would trample anyone who got in his way, and the charioteer could pick off the defenseless foot soldiers from the relative safety of the chariot. Chariots were the laser-guided missiles of the ancient world. You saw what our missiles did to the Taliban in Afghanistan. Chariots caused similar panic and devastation in the ancient world.

This time we find no details. Perhaps God sent hail again. Maybe He used a plague to weaken and destroy the enemy. Perhaps the Israelites used an ambush again. No doubt God gave the Israelites strength to attack the enemy with vigor. But it doesn't matter. We don't need to know *how* God defeated that vast host, do we? By now we are convinced that, with God on our side, we are invincible!

### ***The Result***

Looking over these two chapters, what was the result of these battles? Israel won every encounter with the enemy. No matter how powerful, no matter what weapons or technology they possessed, no army survived a battle with Israel. Chapter 10 describes the defeat of the southern kings and chapter 11 the defeat of the northern kings. So in the end, the whole land was defeated.

The total conquest of Canaan was emphasized by two accounts. The second half of chapter 10 describes the capture and execution of the five southern kings. When they saw they were losing the battle, they fled and hid in a cave in a place called Makkedah. Makkedah means "place of the shepherds", which is fitting considering that a king is the shepherd of his people. After the army was wiped out, Joshua brought these evil shepherds out and made them lie on the ground. Then he ordered his captains to put their feet on the necks of these kings. Why do you think he did that? It was to demonstrate the absolute power of Israel over her enemies. Now, I don't know how much damage Heather might do, but a heavy, muscular soldier could break someone's neck if he stomped on it. The neck is a vulnerable part of your body, and this action showed that Israel had the power to do with her enemies as she pleased. In Genesis 49 Jacob blessed his fourth son by saying, "Judah, you *are he* whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand *shall be* on the neck of your enemies." This was his way of saying that Judah would defeat those who oppose him. The hand on the neck showed the power to kill. And in the case of the Canaanites God had told Israel to execute them – so she did.

The other sign of the total defeat of the Canaanites is toward the end of chapter 11. In verses 21 and 22 we read that Joshua killed all the Anakim except those in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod. Do you remember

who the Anakim were? No, not Luke Skywalker's father! This is Anakim, with an "m". They were the giants who scared the Israelites in the first place. Because of them, the Israelites lost their nerve and refused to enter Canaan the first time. They were convinced they could not defeat the huge giants. Since they refused to trust Him, God condemned Israel to wander in the desert for 40 years. Now the defeat of the giants takes only two verses. So much for the difficulty of defeating them! With God all things are possible. But note that three cities still had giants. These will torment Israel in the future.

The kings of the south and the kings of the north were defeated. But that did not mean all the Canaanites were exterminated. There were small towns and villages all throughout the land. These campaigns took a total of about 10 years. In that time Joshua broke the power of the Canaanites, but he did not kill every last one of them. Moses had prophesied in Deuteronomy 7 that the extermination of the Canaanites would happen over a period of time to allow the Israelites to get established there. "The LORD your God will drive out those nations before you little by little; you will be unable to destroy them at once, lest the beasts of the field become *too* numerous for you. But the LORD your God will deliver them over to you, and will inflict defeat upon them until they are destroyed." (vv. 22-23) The rest of Joshua and the book of Judges describes this long-term occupation. But it was possible because Joshua broke the stranglehold of the Canaanite kings.

Finally, there was rest. Israel had not seen rest for over a century. The nation was enslaved in Egypt for decades, and wandered in the desert for 40 years. They had fought the Canaanites for 10 years. Now, at last, they can settle down. Finally God's promise to Abraham is come to pass. Everyone has his own house. Everyone can live in peace and happiness. Finally, Israel had come home!

In an odd twist, the New Testament picks up this verse, joins it to psalm 95, and concludes that Joshua did *not* give the people rest. Psalm 95 concludes, "For forty years I was grieved with *that* generation, And said, 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts, And they do not know My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" The book of Hebrews points out that this indicates a rest still remaining for God's people. Joshua did provide rest – as the text says, rest from war. But it took the greater Joshua, Jesus, to give us full and complete rest. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Mt. 11:28) What Joshua gave in part, Jesus gives in full. If you do not know rest, it is because you do not know Jesus. If you come to Him, He will give you perfect rest in a frantic, restless age.

### ***Today's Battles***

world: Islam

U.S.: anthropology

Lehigh: pleasure and career

Remedy: seek first God's kingdom

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