

A Message from Joshua 11

God's Word and the Way of Victory

Joshua 11, verse 23 — the last line of the verse: "And the land rested from war."

I understand that some of us have been reading in the book of Joshua already and have recently come this far, or about this far. So you may hear something from me that you have already heard recently. Peter wrote that it was not a bother to him to go over the same material another time, so I will take courage from that and say just a few words.

The Book Does Not End at Chapter 11

The book of Joshua does not end with chapter 11. When it says "the land rested from war" — the last line of the chapter — it seems as though it should be the last chapter, the last verse, the last line. It is all over. But it is not.

I suggest to you that up until Joshua 11, all twelve tribes of Israel together had been fighting the wars of Canaan. From chapter 12 to the end of the book, you will not find all twelve tribes together again. You will find Caleb — just Caleb — fighting for his inheritance at Hebron. That is a lovely story, and his faithfulness is a great example. But that is not twelve tribes together. You will also find individual tribes, or perhaps two tribes going out together, but not twelve.

The first part of the book of Joshua records a number of events that happened to the children of Israel after they crossed the river Jordan and entered the land of Canaan. If you have read this recently, you may be able to count — I love to count — the number of battles that Israel fought before it says the land rested from war.

The Four Battles

The first battle was at Jericho. Turn quickly to Joshua chapter six, verse 20:

"So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets, and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city."

That is how the battle of Jericho was won. The wall fell down — not because of anything Joshua did, not because of anything the children of Israel did. Give credit where credit is due: it was God who caused the wall of Jericho to fall down.

The second battle was against the city of Ai. Chapter eight, verse one:

"And the Lord said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed. Take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land... lay thee an ambush for the city behind it."

Whose idea was it to set an ambush? It was not Joshua's idea. It was not an Israelite's idea. Joshua did not consult his captains of thousands and say, well, what do you think we should do? No. It was God. It was Jehovah who said to set an ambush. So the credit for the defeat of Ai goes to God just as surely as the fall of Jericho.

The third battle was against the five kings of the Canaanites, recorded in chapter 10. There was only one king of Jericho, only one king of Ai, but now there were five kings together. That is a daunting prospect — especially since Israel had only one Joshua. The odds, by sheer count of kings, were five to one in favor of Canaan. I will come back to that point.

Chapter 10, verse 12:

"Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou Moon, in the valley of Ajalon."

The sun stopped, the moon stopped, and Israel gained a tremendous victory against the five kings. Just like the wall of Jericho, it was not anything Joshua did. Just like the ambush at Ai, it was God's idea. And did you notice to whom Joshua spoke when he said, "Sun, stand thou still"? Verse 12 tells us: "Then spake Joshua to the Lord." He did not talk to the sun. The land of Canaan was full of sun worshipers, but Joshua did not speak to the sun — he spoke to the Lord. The credit for all these victories goes to Jehovah, the God of Israel.

In my Bible there are four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In the book of Joshua, before the land had rest from war, there are four battles: Jericho, Ai, the five kings, and chapter 11. Just four, and they are given in that order.

Joshua 11: What to Look For

Now I would like to turn your attention to Joshua 11. As you read it, be alert and look for the verse in which the wall falls down. Or you could look for the verse in which somebody sets an ambush. You could look for the verse in which the sun stands still — or, if you are impressed by hailstones falling from heaven, look for that. Just something to look for.

If you do not find any of those things, then you must find what is in chapter 11 instead. Because there is something else in chapter 11 — something to learn just as in the three previous battles.

Chapter 11 opens with a coalition forming against Israel. King Jabin of Hazor sends word to king after king — to the north, in the mountains, in the plains, on the coasts, to the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, and more. How many kings? More than five — indeed, it reads like an unlimited number, on and on and on.

Here I want to say something about fear, dear brethren. Jonathan, Saul's son, had it right when he told his armor-bearer: it is no trouble for God to save Israel by few or by many. It does not matter how few we are. We may feel our weakness and our small number. Israel in chapter 11 felt that too. Verse four says:

"And they went out, they and all their armies with them, a people numerous as the sand that is on the seashore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many."

And it does not matter. It just does not matter. When the Lord Jesus was thinking about His own in this world after He returned to heaven, He said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

As a parenthetical note: the last line of chapter 12, verse 24, says "all the kings, thirty and one." If you take those 31 kings that Joshua defeated, and add Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan, you come to 33. Divide 33 by 12 tribes and you get 2.75 — two and three-quarter kings per tribe. How do you say two and three-quarters in Bible language? "Two or three." It is one of the connections between the words of the Lord Jesus and the accounts of the Old Testament. Israel had Jehovah with them, and that vast multitude did not matter.

Seven Times God Spoke

Reading through chapter 11, from verse five to verse 23, I find no walls falling down. No ambushes. No clever tactics of any kind. No hailstones. The sun did not stand still and the moon did not stand still anywhere in the chapter.

Instead, I want to set before you seven things that are in the chapter. This is the way of victory in a day of small things — when those who oppose the truth are as numerous as the sand by the seashore, and we are so few that we are down to two or three.

Here are the seven occurrences of God's word in Joshua 11:

1.Verse 6: "And Jehovah said to Joshua..." — Jehovah spoke to Joshua. Be not afraid, for tomorrow about this time I will give them all up slain before Israel. It was God's word.

2.Verse 9: "And Joshua did unto them as the Lord bade him." The bidding — the instruction — came from Jehovah. It was not for Joshua to wonder what to do. The way it worked was that Jehovah told Joshua what to do.

3.Verse 12 (last two lines): "He utterly destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the Lord commanded." A commandment is just a little stronger than a bidding, but it comes from the same source — the word of God, this time through Moses.

4.Verse 15 (first half): "As the Lord commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua..." You see how it worked: God commanded Moses, Moses commanded Joshua. It was God's word all the way through.

5.Verse 15 (last part): "He left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses." God's word, and the full obedience that answered it.

6.Verse 20 (last lines): "...that he might destroy them, as the Lord commanded Moses." Six times now. Every time you count things in a passage and reach six, go back and check your arithmetic — because it is very likely there will be a seventh.

7.Verse 23: "So Joshua took the whole land according to all that the Lord said unto Moses." There it is. Seven times God's word. That is what I wanted to direct your attention to.

That is the way of victory over the enemy — to pay attention to God's word.

Psalm 119: The Lamed Section

Of late I have been enjoying the 119th Psalm, and I would like to say a few words about one of its sections. The 119th Psalm is 176 verses long. Some people think it is the longest Psalm in the Bible — but in a sense it is one of the shortest. Imagine being charged to write it, with the Spirit of God saying in your ear: you get eight verses beginning with the letter A, then eight beginning with B, and no more than eight for each letter. You are constrained. That is the 119th Psalm: 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, in order, with eight verses for each.

Verse 89 begins the Lamed section — the letter L — and this is what it says:

"Forever, O Jehovah, thy word is settled in the heavens."

This verse is about God's word — and forever it is settled in the heavens. It is immovable, unchanging. Something you can rely upon because God has placed it in the heavens and settled it there. I could not

help thinking of Joshua 11 as I read this.

This quality of being settled — of enduring, of lasting — is not emphasized elsewhere in the 119th Psalm the way it is here in the Lamed section. Something special is being stressed.

Verse 90: "Thy faithfulness is from generation to generation. Thou hast established the earth and it standeth."

That means it lasts, it continues. Just like God's word. Verse 90 is not a duplicate of verse 89, but it carries a similar emphasis — a similar consideration. God's word is settled in heaven, and His faithfulness endures from generation to generation.

Verse 91: "By thine ordinances they stand this day, for all things are thy servants."

Like the sun and the moon in the third battle in Canaan — all things are His servants. They do not change, they do not retire, they do not get put out to pasture. All things are thy servants.

Verse 92: "Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my afflictions."

I think of Joshua and the children of Israel against that vast multitude. You cannot trust Joshua, you cannot trust the children of Israel — because the victory over that vast multitude did not depend upon them. It depended upon the Lord. There is something unchangeable to rest upon.

Verse 93: "I will never forget thy precepts, for by them thou hast quickened me."

To quicken means to give life. Here is the verse about eternal security — eternal life that continues on and on, without end.

Verse 94: "I am thine; save me, for I have sought thy precepts."

"I am thine" — and that does not change. That is eternity, because belonging to Him is the unchanging ground of prayer to God. Lord, I have these circumstances, this issue, this problem, and I do not know what to do — but I am Thine. Save me.

Verse 95: "The wicked have waited for me to destroy me, but I attend unto thy testimonies."

Attending — that is a good word. The precepts are mentioned some 25 times in the 119th Psalm; the testimonies perhaps another 25 times. The Psalm is filled with the word of God all the way through. But this matter of attending — of truly listening — comes up only rarely. That is what Joshua did in Joshua 11: not only was God's word addressed to him, but he listened, he gave heed to what God said.

Verse 96: "I have seen an end of all perfection; thy commandment is exceeding broad."

Some have the idea that God's commandment is so broad that it tolerates all sorts of things — that the breadth of God's word gives room for the flesh to do its will. That is not what this verse means. The breadth means this: "God so loved the world that he gave his Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God's word is so broad it goes out to whosoever — as wide as the ocean, as high as the heavens above. The gospel goes out to whosoever will.

And read it this way: I have seen the end — the cross, where the Lord Jesus died in all His perfection for me — and now the gospel goes out to whosoever will.

There are 21 other sections of the 119th Psalm, and there is much more that could be said about God's word and its enduring quality. But the Psalm allows only eight verses per letter. You could add a marginal note beside the Lamed section: "See Joshua 11."

Seven Times Obedience

Returning to Joshua 11, there are seven more things to bring to your attention — this time, obedience answering the word.

1.Verse 8 (last lines): "And they smote them until they left none remaining." If the Lord said smite them, they smote them. That is obedience.

2.Verse 9 (middle): "He houghed their horses." The word houghed — spelled H-O-U-G-H-E-D — means they cut the muscles in the legs of the horses so the animals could no longer gallop or pull a chariot. Back in verse 6 God had said, "Thou shalt hough their horses." So they did. That was obedience.

3.Verse 9 (end): "And burned their chariots with fire." God said in verse 6, "Thou shalt burn their chariots with fire." They burned their chariots with fire. Obedience — plain and simple. People say, I do not know what I should do. The answer is: open your Bible and look for a verse you can obey. The commandments of the Lord Jesus are not grievous — but they are there if you search diligently.

4.Verse 12 (middle): "And all the cities of those kings, and all the kings of them, did Joshua take, and smote them with the edge of the sword." The word of God is like a two-edged sword. Obedience.

5.Verse 13 (end): "But as for the cities that stood on their mounds, Israel burned none of them, save Hazor only, that did Joshua burn." A thorough obedience — knowing what to do and what not to do.

6.Verse 15 (end): "He left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses." Joshua's obedience matched precisely what God had said through Moses. Nothing undone.

7.Verse 21: "And at that time came Joshua and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel; Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities." In Deuteronomy 9:1-2, Moses had warned Israel about the sons of Anak — the giants whom Israel feared, of whom men said, who can stand before them? Joshua was there when those words were spoken. To tackle the Anakim was obedience. Obedience — seven times.

Closing Word

Seven times God spoke His word in Joshua 11. Seven times there was obedience from Joshua.

There is nothing profound in what I have said this afternoon, beloved. It is really quite simple. I wanted to say a few words about God's word and the response of heart it calls for. When we hear God's word, the response should be obedience — that we would obey what the Lord says.

If we take away one thought from these special meetings, let it be this: God's word and obedience to it.

The next time you face trouble, a problem, a difficulty of any kind — collectively or privately — and you do not know what to do: you could wait until the wall falls down, or you could think up a clever strategy like setting an ambush, or you could wait for the day when the sun stands still. But do not hold your breath for any of those.

We all have the privilege of listening to God's word. That is how Joshua and Israel won the fourth battle: Jehovah spoke to Joshua, and Joshua — with all Israel — obeyed what Jehovah said to do.

May God bless His word.