

JOSHUA 10-16 JOSHUA'S LONG DAY; SIX YEARS OF CONQUESTS



In this study we will cover the incredible account of the remaining land of Canaan which, with God's help and against all odds, Israel conquered.

Joshua's Long Day

As Joshua had feared, the kings of the surrounding cities soon formed a confederation. "Therefore, Adoni-Zedek, king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish, and Debir king of Eglon, saying, "Come up to me and help me, that we may attack Gibeon, for it has made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel...Therefore the five kings...and all their armies...camped before Gibeon and made war against it" (Joshua 10:3-5).

The Gibeonites, having made an alliance under oath with Israel, naturally called upon them to help defend their city. Joshua and his soldiers did come to help, and God backed them, saying, "Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your hand; not a man of them shall stand before you" (10:8).

Then God gave Joshua the winning strategy of using the element of surprise to defeat them. "Joshua therefore came upon them *suddenly*, having marched all night from Gilgal. So the Lord routed them before Israel, killed them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, chased them along the road that goes to Beth-Horon, and struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah. And it happened, as they fled before Israel and were on the descent of Beth-Horon, that the Lord cast down *large hailstones* from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died from the hailstones than the children of Israel killed with the sword" (10:9-11).

What happens next is one of the greatest miracles in the Bible. But why did Joshua ask God to extend the day an extra 24 hours?

"That day," says the book *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, "the Israelite army covered more than thirty miles over some pretty tough terrain. The enemy fled westward to Beth Horon and then turned south into the Valley of Aijalon. At that point, the men, having made an all-night uphill climb from Gilgal, were exhausted. The heat of the July day was sapping what little energy they had left. But to their great relief, God sent a hailstorm that kept pace with the forward ranks of the fleeing Amorites...The Lord had heard

the prayer of his leader Joshua and answered in a most dramatic way" (p. 187).

If the sun would have gone down as normal, the fleeing Canaanites would have escaped in the darkness. So Joshua had so much faith in God that he asked Him to prolong that day until they could defeat all their enemies and accomplish God's will. The Bible records Joshua's dramatic prayer: "Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and Moon, in the Valley of Aijalon. So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the people had revenge upon their enemies." (10:12-13).

The Bible then mentions a reference work called the Book of Jasher, now lost, where the miracle is also recorded. "Is this not written in the Book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. And there has been no day like this before it or after it, that the Lord heeded the voice of a man, for the Lord fought for Israel. Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal" (10:13-15).

Is there any extra-biblical evidence about this long day? Interestingly enough, there is.

Gleason Archer, professor of Old Testament and Semitic Studies, writes, "Research has brought to light reports from Egyptian, Chinese, and Hindu sources of a long day. Harry Rimmer reports that some astronomers have come to the conclusion that one full day is missing in our astronomical calculations. Rimmer states that Pickering of the Harvard Observatory traced this missing day back to the time of Joshua; likewise has professor Totten of Yale" (*Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, p. 161).

Now, there are at least two ways God could have caused the sun to stand still.

#1. He could have suspended the natural laws that govern the sun's movement for that time. Remember, nothing is difficult or impossible for God (Luke 1:37).

#2. God could have caused a refraction of the sun's rays to continue hitting the earth without altering the sun's or the earth's movement. To Joshua and his men, it would seem as if the sun stood still.

Whichever way it was, it's a great miracle!

While their armies were being defeated, the five kings had fled to a large cave. Joshua captured them and wanted his men to gain courage from the

experience and have total faith in God, “So it was, when they brought out those kings to Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said to the captains, ‘Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings.’ And they drew near and put their feet on their necks. Then Joshua said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; be strong and of good courage, for thus the Lord will do to all your enemies against whom you fight” (10:24-25).

The five Canaanite kings were then hanged and buried in the same cave they had hid. This victory gave the Israelites the courage they needed to conquer the rest of the cities in the central region.

Conquest of the southern regions

Next came the invasion of the southern region. City after city fell against Joshua and his soldiers. “So Joshua conquered all the land: the mountain country and the South and the lowland and the wilderness slopes, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel had commanded. And Joshua conquered them from Kadesh Barnea [in the south] as far as Gaza [the same area they now call the Gaza Strip], and all the country of Goshen, even as far as Gibeon. All these kings and their land Joshua took at one time, because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel. Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal [their headquarters]” (10:36-43).

The conquest of the northern region and Hazor

The next territory to conquer was the north country, and again, it was natural for a league of northern Canaanite kings to band together against the Israelites.

“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, and to the kings which were from the north...to the Canaanites in the east and in the west...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. And when all these kings had met together, they came and camped together at the waters of Merom to fight against Israel” (11:1-5).

This was a huge confederation of Canaanites—as numerous as the sand on the seashore, the Bible says, yet to God they were as nothing. God told 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 [cut their ligaments] and burn their chariots with fire” (11:6-7).

Again, God gave Joshua the winning strategy—another surprise attack! Throughout history, smaller armies have been able to defeat huge battalions through the element of surprise. We saw such a winning strategy in the first Gulf War. It disorients the enemy and many times causes them, in their heightened nervousness and tension, to panic. This is what happened by the waters of Merom, the enemy was caught napping.

“So Joshua and all the people of war with him came against them *suddenly* by the waters of Merom, and they attacked them. And the Lord delivered them into the hand of Israel, who defeated them and chased them to Greater Sidon...they attacked them until they left none standing. So Joshua did to them as the Lord had told him: he hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots with fire. 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. And they struck all the people who were in it with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them...*Then he burned Hazor with fire*...So all the cities of those kings, Joshua took and struck with the edge of the sword. He utterly destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded. But as for the cities that stood on their mounds, Israel *burned none of them, except Hazor only*, which Joshua burned” (11:7-13).

Recently, incredible evidence of the burning of Hazor has been found. Archaeologist Amnon Ben-Tor, who has been digging up Hazor for several years, says the evidence indicates it was most likely the Israelites who burned down Hazor.

So now, Joshua had conquered the north, south, east and part of the western land of Canaan. Why had all these kings risked fighting Israel instead of remaining safely behind their powerful walls? The Bible gives the answer: “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 commanded Moses” (11:20-21).

Defeat of the giant Anakim

Joshua was even victorious against the race of giants that lived throughout Canaan. “And at that time Joshua came and cut off the Anakim [giants] from the mountains of Hebron....None of the Anakim were left in the land of the children of Israel; they remained only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod [the Philistine cities, where Goliath is from]” (11:21-22).

About these giants, there is historical evidence they did exist. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote of these giants, “”The bones of these men are still shown to this very day, unlike to any creditable relations of other men” (*Antiquities* Bk.5,2:26). Cimon recognized the bones of Theseus on the isle of Scyros by their enormous size (Plutarch, *Theseus* 38), and Pausanias in his *Guide to Greece* mentions two separate cluster of giants' bones that one may visit in Arkadia (8.29.4, 8.32.5). Herodotus in book 1, chapter 68, describes how the Spartans uncovered in Tegea the body of Orestes which was seven cubits long (3,2 meters, or over 9 ft. high).

Then, in chapter 12 of Joshua, it lists the 31 kings Joshua and his men defeated. This shows how historically precise is the Bible.

The conquest took about six years, and the Bible says, “Then the land rested from war” (11:23). Yet, there were still many pockets of Canaanites left.

God told Joshua, “You are old, advanced in years, and *there remains very much land yet to be possessed*. This is the land that yet remains: all the territory of the Philistines...from Sihor, which is east of Egypt, as far as the border of Ekron northward (which is counted as Canaanite)...all the inhabitants of the mountains from Lebanon as far as the Brook Misrephoth, and all the Sidonians—they I will drive out from before the children of Israel; only divide it by lot to Israel as an inheritance, as I have commanded you. Now therefore, *divide this land* as an inheritance to the nine tribes and half the tribe of Manasseh” (13:1-7).

The Tell-Amarna letters and the conquest

We have fascinating historical evidence of what was going on in Canaan from Egyptian records. In 1887, the Tell-Amarna letters, some 400 cuneiform tablets, were found in Pharaoh Akhenaton's archives and give an account of the Canaanite kings seeking the help from their Egyptian protectors.

“For the period covered by Joshua's latest years and those of the Elders who succeeded him,” writes

Oxford professor Stephen Caiger, “we have plenty of evidence in the Tell el Amarna letters. These show quite clearly that the end of Amenhotep's reign (around 1400 BC) witnessed a great decline of Egyptian prestige in Canaan. It had become difficult to interest the Pharaoh, now engrossed in artificial lakes, lion-hunts, and bullfights, in the sterner business of empire. The vassal kings of Canaan, already weakened by the rapacious policy of the Egyptian pharaoh. Their appeals for help were not even answered.

“While as for Amenhotep's successor Akhenaton, his over-absorption in religious innovations and his consequent unpopularity left the empire more than ever a prey to any enterprising invader. 'One stands amazed at the reckless idealism, the beautiful folly of this Pharaoh', writes Weigall [A. E. P. Weigall, *Akhmaton, Pharaoh of Egypt* (1910).], 'who in an age of turbulence preached a religion of peace to seething Syria.'...”

“The Habiru', [writes a Canaanite king,] 'are now capturing the fortresses of the Pharaoh. Not a single governor remains among them to my lord the King: all have perished. Zimrida of Lachish has been killed. May the King send help. Lo, if no reinforcements come this year, all the countries of my lord the King will be utterly destroyed...The land of the King is lost to the Habiru [a term linked to the Hebrews].

“And now indeed a city of the territory of Jerusalem, Bet-Ninib, has been captured...After taking the city of Rubuda, they are now attempting to take Jerusalem...What have I done against my lord the King, that you love the Habiru, and hate the governors?...The Habiru have wasted all the territory of the King” (Stephen Caiger, *The Hebrew Conquest*, 1936).

Next, in chapters 14-16, the land is divided among the tribes of Israel, with the northern 10 tribes being led by Ephraim, and the three southern tribes (Judah, Simeon and Benjamin, led by Judah). Caleb, the other faithful spy besides Joshua, received the territory around Hebron, and defeated the giants that dwelt there (14:6-15). So ends the first and main stage of the conquest of Canaan.