

God of Battles

Joshua 10

Joshua and the leaders of Israel have foolishly covenanted with the Gibeonites, and rather than abandon them, they go to battle to protect them in what becomes the longest day in Israel.

It's better to be with the Lord in hard times than without Him in easy ones. He fights for His people and with them, empowering Israel to take the southern land: "All these kings and their land Joshua took at one time, because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel" (v. 42). So He fights for us.

Summary of the Text

Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem hears about Joshua's conquest of Ai and Jericho and the peace Gibeon made with Israel despite its regal strength and mighty men (vv. 1-2). So he gathers four other Amorite kings to besiege Gibeon, and Gibeon sends men to Joshua at Gilgal to come quickly and save them (vv. 3-6). Joshua goes with all the mighty men of valor and the Lord tells him not to fear because He is with them and not a man will stand before them (vv. 7-8). They march through the night, attack suddenly, and route them to Beth Horon where the Amorites encounter a hailstorm from the Lord that kills more than died in battle (vv. 9-11). Joshua prays that day for the sun to stand still and prolong the day until his enemies perish, and it did unlike any other day (vv. 12-15). Unlike Joshua who is in the battle, the five kings hide and are shut up in a cave while Israel defeats pursues, though some escape to fortified cities (vv. 16-20). Joshua brings the kings out of the cave and has his captains put their feet on the kings' necks, telling them not to be afraid or dismayed but strong and courageous knowing that God will do the same to all their enemies (vv. 21-25). They execute the kings and put them in the cave (vv. 26-27). The conquest heads south to Makkedah, Libnah, Lachish, Horman, Eglon, Hebron, Debir, the mountain country, Negev, lowland, and wilderness, destroying them as God commanded (vv. 28-41). Joshua pursued until this land was conquered because the Lord fought for Israel (vv. 42-43).

God Our Help

Fear falls again on the inhabitants of Canaan because they hear about what God has done (v. 2, 2:10-11, 5:1, 9:1-2, 24). Rahab fears wisely and puts herself at the mercy of the Lord and His people. Achan pretends to fear the Lord but instead deceives and steals. Adoni-Zedek fears and tries to extinguish Lord's people. Fear is inescapable, the only question being what or whom you will fear: "The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread" (Is. 8:13). Jesus says something similar: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Remember the foolish covenant Israel made with the deceitful Gibeonites without seeking counsel from the Lord (9:14). They now keep that covenant by going to defend the Gibeonites from these kings because they swore to God (9:18). This is a you break it, you buy it, keep your word situation. It would be more convenient to let the five Amorite kings take out the Gibeonites. Perhaps they'd destroy most of each other, two birds with one stone. Where it's tempting to be faithless, Joshua hears the cry of his servants and sees the opportunity to be faithful (v. 6). He gathers all the men of war to do it. Breaking your word, taking the easy way, telling "small" lies, and ignoring foundational problems seems to make sense at least for short term gain, but these sins lead to huge problems later. If Joshua breaks his oath to the Gibeonites before God, how would that affect the loyalty of his own people? This would not excuse anyone else's sin, but he would be modeling it. He is with the Lord—and the Gibeonites, of all people! No wonder they will become such valuable servants of God in Israel (Neh. 3:26; Ezra 8:20). These acts of Joshua's faithfulness result from his faith in God, trust that He would fight for him and through him (vv. 8, 11).

Prayer & Pursuit

The longest and one of the most famous days in Israel happens because Joshua prays (vv. 12-14). The first thing he hears from the Lord is nothing he hasn't heard before: God is with you and you will be victorious (v. 8;

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cf. 1:5, 9). Sometimes we need clear direction and wisdom in prayer to make the right decision (9:14), but other times we simply need to hear the truth about God, ourselves, His promises, what Jesus accomplished and will do, again and again. Is He really good? Am I really able to do this thing faithfully? The fans at the basketball game don't provide any insightful information, but the home team has a solid advantage by having them there. To believe, hope, and endure faithfully you need to hear from the Lord in Scripture, in the preached word, in the words of encouragement and correction from His people, in the beauty of His other book, creation (Ps. 19:1ff.). Joshua's prayer is costly and puts him and his people into the heat of battle for many extra hours. He asks for divine intervention so that he can finish the job. This whole passage demonstrates the principle and virtue of pursuit. There's a counterfeit version of prayer where instead of asking God to not only fight and provide for, to protect and keep us but also to use us and strengthen us to obey and follow, we just ask Him to do it: "Lord, make it so that I need not lift a finger." These aren't the words we use, but general prayers for peace and prosperity are different than asking God make you a peacemaker with Schwartz whom you are butting heads with, to honor your mom, and to be more diligent at work. God doesn't steer parked cars. Joshua knows his oath and has already ascended from Gilgal when the Lord speaks to him (vv. 7-8). The Lord's word to Him spurs him to more action; he marches through the night for a surprise attack (v. 9). Prayer provides assurance, confidence, creativity, and courage. How could communication with the source of all good things not? James says the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (Jms. 5:16-18). There's nothing different in Joshua's or Elijah's than yours, and their prayers worked. Pursue all night and pray for strength to finish the work God has given you (v. 21; cf. Ex. 11:7).

Sign of Victory

The five kings brought out of the cave are an encouragement to Israel that the Lord will conquer all of their enemies (v. 25). Remember that these kings just tried to wipe out the Gibeonites and Israelites so they could continue their culture of death. Israel is commanded not to have pity on the Canaanites because their gods would be a snare (Deut. 7:16). The fact that some are tempted to pity them is a twisted result of the Bible's influence on our culture. In his book *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind*, historian Tom Holland traces how the exaltation of power in the Greco-Roman world transformed into the exaltation of liberation and redemption in the western world. Though an atheist, Holland says Christianity started "a revolution that has, at its molten heart, the image of a god dead on the cross." The old order insisted that those in power ought to exploit their inferiors, but Paul's instruction that every person in Christ is a part of the body and to be honored reversed the plight of the weak. Christianity recognized that the accused and even executed—those who lose—are not necessarily losers. We sympathize with innocent victims, and we love our enemies and pray for those who spitefully use us. This goes to seed when all members of a group of people are considered victims. Joshua was faithful to God in defeating and executing the enemy. He was picture of the greater Joshua to come. Jesus disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public spectacle of them by His triumph on the cross (Col. 2:15). He bound the strong man and has been plundering his house for over 2000 years, turning the kingdoms of this world into the kingdoms of our Lord (Matt. 12:29; Rev. 11:15). In the new covenant our weapons are not carnal but mighty, and kings willingly bring their glory into the new Jerusalem (2 Cor. 10:4; Rev. 21:24). They hear the gospel and believe.