

# Endurance

## Joshua 11

God calls His people to run the race of faith until it's over. The detailed conquest of Canaan reveals the length of the war that Joshua and the army of Israel endured until they subdued the land. So we too must be faithful to the end, looking to Christ the author and finisher of our faith.

### Summary of the Text

The first fifteen verses of chapter eleven describe the northern conquest of Canaan. King Jabin of Hazor gathers a pile of kings from the Canaanite, Amorite, Hittite, Perizzite, Jebusite, and Hivite peoples with soldiers like the sand on the seashore to come against Israel at the waters of Merom (vv. 1-5). The Lord tells Joshua not to be afraid because He will deliver all of them tomorrow, slain before Israel, and he will hamstring their horses and burn their chariots (v. 6). Joshua attacks them suddenly at Merom, drives them east, and destroys their chariots and horses as God commanded (vv. 7-9). He takes the chief city state of Hazor, razes it, and goes on to other cities leaving "nothing undone of all that Yahweh commanded Moses" (vv. 10-15). Verses 16-23 summarize the conquest noting that it took a long time (v. 18). No one made peace with Joshua except the Hivites in Gibeon (v. 19). The Lord hardens their hearts so that He might destroy them (v. 20). Joshua overcomes the Anakim who are the giants that first caused the Israelite spies to despair (v. 21; Num. 13:28, 33). Joshua takes all the land, gives it to the tribes, and the land rests from war (v. 23).

### Not By Chariots & Horses

These Canaanites have a massive coalition which likely consists of at least a couple dozen kings and their sand-numbered multitude (vv. 1-5). The Lord tells Joshua again not to be afraid, which is encouraging because last time he was told there were only five kings joining forces (v. 6; 10:8). The humble love repetition: "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe" (Phil. 3:1). Joshua intellectually knows not to be afraid and that God will deliver, but the need on the cusp of battle is not more information. The additional instruction this time is to hamstring the horses and burn the chariots (v. 6). In this instance, God did not want him to amass these weapons of war, and Joshua listens and follows through (v. 9). The Lord instructed Israel that when they enter into the land and choose a king to rule over them, the first thing he must not do is multiply horses: "But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses" (Deut. 17:16). It's notable in this passage that the livestock of the cities is given to the children of Israel, but not the chariots and horses (v. 14). It's clear that the chariots and horses would compete with Israel's trust in God to deliver them: "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God" (Ps. 20:7). This doesn't mean that Israel could never use horses, breed them in stables, or build chariots. But the Lord wants them to forego these things now. When thinking about endurance and a plan for the long haul, the first thing that tends to come to mind is power in terms of supplies and equipment. What should come first is singular focus on the Lord and the way to be faithful to Him. With principles and promises identified and believed, then you can move to tactics, know-how, and materials. Joshua is winning battles, but the Lord prepares him to win the war. He learns early to obey and say no to things that would distract him. Cotton Mather said, "Faithfulness begat prosperity, and the daughter devoured her mother." Joshua relies on the goodness and power of God instead of horses and chariots when he really could have used those horses and chariots. So we must plan for faithfulness after success. When you have more money, more success, better whatever, will you be more faithful to God? Are you passing on only material prosperity to the next generation? As a country, we may become much more fiscally sound and eventually if not immediately prosperous. Will we trust the God who is named on our money, or just the money?

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### Our Sovereign Help

The text says the Lord hardens the rebellious kings' hearts in order that they would be destroyed (v. 20). Some Christians want to say that God looks down the corridors of time, as you would if you had a time machine, and sees what people choose and simply refuses to interfere change it. They are trying to get away from the concept of predestination. But if God knows all things—the beginning from the end—then He foreordains all things that come to pass. He knows them immediately and by not changing the outcome He works all things according to the plan of His desires. This what the apostle Paul says, that we were “predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11). When people dive into sin and destruction, Scripture often speaks of God letting them go: “God also gave them up to uncleanness...”; “God gave them up to vile passions”; “God gave them over to a debased mind” (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). And sometimes it speaks as it does in this chapter where He hardens people's hearts (cf. Ex. 7:13). God is not the author of evil, and in order to charge Him with evil, there has to be another god above Him—usually the person accusing Him of evil assumes divine judgment—who stand to judge. But creatures of the true God can't judge Him, try as we might. If He is the true God, then He must be right because is the standard of goodness Himself. Scripture teaches that God made man upright but we sought out many devices, including the device of excusing our sin by blaming Him (Eccl. 7:29). The Canaanite kings want to exterminate Israel and their will to do so is not violated by God hardening their hearts. Hamlet's desire to kill his uncle Claudius is not violated by Shakespeare writing a scene for him to act on it. The point of verse twenty is that the purposes of God are not thwarted by violent, evil men. The evil desires of these kings do not frustrate the God of justice, but work for His glory and the blessing of His people. This comes to into high relief in the crucifixion of Christ: “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done” (Acts 4:27-28). God's sovereignty over everyone and everything, including evil, provides an enduring hope.

### Long War

We flip the pages of our Bibles and it seems like conquest (or apostasy) happens really quickly. In reality we are paging through years if not generations. Caleb was about 40 years old when he left Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land, and then after wandering in the wilderness for a generation and completing the conquest, he is 85 years old (Josh. 14:7, 10). It was about 38 years from Kadesh Barnea to the crossing of the Jordan, so the conquest took about seven years. That's a long campaign. Joshua and Israel faithfully endured to do what God commanded (Ex. 34:11-16; Num. 33:51-54; Deut. 20:16-18). Many promises take a long time, or what feels like a long time, to come to fruition: “little by little I will drive them out” (Deut. 7:22). God loads us up with promises and blessings, and it takes years to receive, walk in, and enjoy them: “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” (v. 15). It's a tragic mistake to miss the important work that God has for His saints in their later years when still bear wonderful fruit: “Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing” (Ps. 92:13-14). The giants didn't fall until late in the campaign. Joshua is a great hero who looked forward to the greater Joshua, Jesus, who was faithful to the end in His victory over Satan, sin, and death. Joshua gave rest to the tribes the land, but he spoke of another day, a greater Sabbath to come that Jesus made for us in His resurrection of the dead (Heb. 4:8-9).