

# Great is God's Faithfulness

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Date: 14 March 2021

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[0:00] So we're going to look at Joshua 10 to 12 as we come towards the sort of conclusion and summary of the first stage of the conquest.

So we'll read a few different sections. First of all, Joshua chapter 10 and the first 15 verses. Now, Adonai Zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard that Joshua had taken Ai and totally destroyed it. Doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king. And that the people of Gibeon had made a treaty of peace with Israel and had become their allies. He and his people were very much alarmed at this because Gibeon was an important city, like one of the royal cities. It was larger than Ai and all its men were good fighters. So Adonai Zedek, king of Jerusalem, appealed to Hotham, king of Hebron, Piram, king of Jarmath, Japhia, king of Lachish and Debiar, king of Eglon.

Come up and help me attack Gibeon, he said. Because it has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites. Then the five kings of the Amorites, the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmath, Lachish and Eglon joined forces.

[1:10] They moved up with all their troops and took up positions against Gibeon and attacked it. The Gibeonites then sent word to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal, do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us, help us, because all the Amorite kings from the hill country have joined forces against us.

So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men. The Lord said to Joshua, do not be afraid of them. I have given them into your hand.

Not one of them will be able to withstand you. After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise. The Lord threw them into confusion before Israel, so Joshua and the Israelites defeated them completely at Gibeon.

Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makedah. As they fled before Israel, on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the Lord hurled large hailstones down on them.

And more of them died from the hail than were killed by the swords of the Israelites. On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel, Son, stand still over Gibeon, and you, moon, over the valley of Eglon.

[2:20] So the sun stood still and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day.

There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a human being. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel. Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal. And then if you look with me to chapter 11, and we'll read the first six verses, a similar theme emerges. When Jabin, king of Hazor, heard of this, he sent word to Jobab, king of Madon, to the kings of Shimron and Akshaph, and to the northern kings who were in the mountains, in the Arabah, south of Kinneret, in the western foothills, and in Naphoth Dor on the west, to the Canaanites in the east and west, to the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, and Jebusites in the hill country, and to the Hivites below Hermon in the region of Mizpah.

They came out with all their troops and a large number of horses and chariots, a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. All these kings joined forces and made camp together at the waters of Merom to fight against Israel.

The Lord said to Joshua, do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them slain over to Israel. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots.

[ 3 : 44 ] And then in chapter 12, we have an extended list after a few verses of kings who were defeated. So chapter 12 and in verse 7.

Here is a list of the kings of the land that Joshua and the Israelites conquered on the west side of the Jordan, from Balgad in the valley of Lebanon to Mount Halak, which rises towards Seir. Joshua gave their lands as an inheritance to the tribes of Israel according to their tribal divisions. The lands included the hill country, the western foothills, the Arabah, the mountain slopes, the wilderness and the Negev.

These were the lands of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. These were their kings. The king of Jericho, one. The king of Ai, near Bethel, one. The king of Jerusalem, one.

The king of Hebron, one. And so it goes on until we discover 31 kings in all who were defeated by Joshua. So let's turn together to these chapters and discover what it says to us about God's great faithfulness.

[ 4 : 52 ] I was lamenting recently with a friend about high school English texts. Maybe you have one of those groans.

In particular, thinking about being forced as a 13, 14 year old boy to read *Sunset Song* by Lewis Grassett Gibbon. Now I'm sure it's a classic, maybe you enjoy it, but it was just so hard to relate to at that stage.

Now, think about what we've just read. Perhaps a really helpful question for us to ask when we come to a passage of the Bible is, why is it here? Why does God want us to be reading this? But honestly, Joshua chapter 10 to 12 and other chapters like it, it could be hard to answer that question. That record of battles and cities and kings defeated and sometimes it reads really brutally. We come to that list in Joshua 12, 31 kings, one after the other after the other. And when we are removed from the battlefield, we're not fighting those wars.

[ 6 : 05 ] When we're separated by long history, it's easy, isn't it, to shrug our shoulders, to flick the pages over. But let me suggest that it's important that we stick with it and that we don't miss the wood for the trees.

Don't miss the big picture in among these details. How would Israel hear this text? How would they hear this list?

Dale Ralph Davis says, this is the Old Testament version for them of great is thy faithfulness. How come? How would they hear it and read it with such joy?

Because here is the reality of God judging their enemies and God saving his people. Here is God keeping his promise that that first phase of entry into the promised land has now been completed. Here is God's glory on full display. Here is God's faithfulness to his covenant promise being revealed. So for us, it's helpful to get into the mindset of those first readers.

[ 7 : 10 ] And it's also helpful for us to put passages like these into the big picture of the Bible. What's the big story that goes from Genesis to Revelation?

God is saving people so that they might live with him and enjoy him. And we see that then in Joshua. As I was getting ready for this, I came across a quote from Jonathan Edwards in regards to the saints in glory, but relevant for us, I think.

He said of them, So my prayer is that that would be true for us today, that we'd learn to see God's saving acts, that we would see more of how excellent he is so that we would love him and find our joy and delight and happiness in him.

And also when we come to this scene of battles and war, to think about our own spiritual battles. And to think what truths and promises does our text have for us today?

I have three themes that run through these chapters. The first big theme is that of hard hearts. We saw in chapter 10 and chapter 11, a repeating theme, the enemies of God know God's plans.

[ 8 : 45 ] They oppose God's will and God's people and they fight against God. Chapter 10, we met Adonai Zedek, the king of Jerusalem.

Now, how does he respond to what he knows of God? He knows about the defeat at Jericho and Ai at God's hand. And he's heard of Gibeon making a treaty of peace. Now, what does he do? He gathers, doesn't he, first five verses, an army of five kings to fight against Gibeon and the cause is clear.

Verse four, come up and help me attack Gibeon because it has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites. And then what you have in the rest of the chapter from verse six to verse 27 is a record of

the defeat of those kings.

Those cities are destroyed as God is fighting for his people. And there's some significant imagery towards the end of our section, verse 24.

So there's these five kings have been defeated. When they brought these kings to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders, come here and put your feet on the necks of these kings.

[ 9 : 59 ] That image promising certain victory over God's enemies. Joshua said to them, do not be afraid. This is what the Lord will do to all the enemies you're going to fight.

And then in verse 26, more imagery. Joshua put the kings to death and exposed their bodies on five poles. A theme that we've seen already, a reminder that these kings stand under the judgment of God.

They are under the curse of God because they have hardened their heart towards God. So that's what's going on in the south. But the news spreads to the north.

And that's what we read in the first five verses of chapter 11. So this diverse grouping of northern kings that we see they have one aim. Again, they want to destroy God.

They want to destroy God's plans. They want to destroy God's leaders. It made me think of the four gospels where we discover various diverse groups who come together because they want to get rid of Jesus.

[ 11 : 05 ] And again, the rest of chapter 11 shows defeat, destruction and cities taken. Verse 8 stands as a good summary. The Lord gave them into the hand of Israel.

They defeated them and pursued them until no survivors were left. And then into chapter 12, we had that lengthy list of defeated kings. And those kings either directly attacked God's people in order to destroy, or they stand under the judgment of God because of their sin within Canaan. And only, we're told, only Gibeon ever seeks peace. In the face of the power of God, the clear evidence of his plan and purpose, the reality that he has for his people, everybody hardens their hearts except for Gibeon.

Now, before we leave this idea of hard hearts, it's important to recognize words in chapter 11 and verses 19 and 20.

So we're told only Gibeon sought peace. And then verse 20, For it was the Lord himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel.

[ 12 : 23 ] So that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the Lord had commanded Moses. So just like Pharaoh in the story of the Exodus, there was fear with regards to the people of God.

There was opposition to God himself. And that becomes a hardened resolve. I'm going to stand against God and against God's will. They refused to learn from Gibeon's lesson.

And judgment comes from God. God gives them over to the desire of their heart. And the desire of their heart is to be hostile to God, to continue in rebellion against their creator, to refuse his peace. And because of that, it is God's design that they be judged and destroyed. Now, what does this big theme about hard hearts teach us about God's salvation and about our spiritual battles?

Well, what we've seen in these chapters is stubborn determination to fight against one who is more powerful, where defeat is the only outcome.

[ 13 : 35 ] Boys and girls, maybe you can think of movies where baddies come and fight against a superhero. And it's clear those superpowers are far too strong.

And victory is certain. Or think about those stormtroopers who are always piling in to fight the Jedi. But they can never have a chance of victory. There's a stark warning in Joshua 10 to 12 to nations, to kings, to secular societies about a deliberate rejection of God, about a standing against God and fighting against the knowledge of God.

Remember Romans 1 says that the truth about God is in every human heart. And people are suppressing that truth in unrighteousness, preferring darkness to light.

But to persist in that stand is then to stand under God's just judgment. So that warning then is an encouragement to learn from Gibeon, to seek mercy, to seek peace, by seeking Jesus and his forgiveness.

I think there's also a warning here against those who we could describe as so near and yet so far. Those 31 kings in Joshua 12, each of them live inside what God calls his promised land.

[15:08] Each of them knew God's plans. Each of them knew they could have sought peace like Gibeon, but they refuse. And I wonder today if there are some listening who have experienced many privileges at God's hand.

You have been to church perhaps since childhood. You have a Bible that you read and you have been taught the gospel and you have that family heritage, but still finding yourself fighting God's truth and resisting the claims of Jesus the Saviour.

If that's you, let me urge you to turn to him, to pray that your heart would be softened, your eyes to be open to the glory, the goodness and the love of the Lord Jesus, that you would have him as your Saviour.

There are warnings, but there are also encouragements. There are encouragements for us in our spiritual battle. So God works and the people work and the wars that they fight are an expression of their obedience.

Now, what war do we need to fight? It's not physical against armies. We need to fight against sin and temptation. And just as in the days of Joshua, we have the promise of God's help.

[16:32] We have God's spirit within us. We have God's word to guide us. We have the power of prayer. We have the gift of fellowship to encourage us to persevere.

And so we keep fighting the good fight of our faith, remembering victory is secure because of Jesus. Because in all this, we need to remember the gospel.

And what do we find in Jesus? We find here is Jesus. He is the perfect, sinless son of God. And Jesus, in love for us, as our representative, it becomes accursed for us.

He goes under the judgment of God. He goes under the curse for us, for our sin, so that we can look at the cross as a place of judgment and salvation, a place where Jesus is judged as if he were the worst of enemies, so that we who trust in him might be saved.

So that we would look to him today and keep looking to him today to recognize him as our only hope. If we are to escape eternal judgment, if we are to know peace and eternal joy, we need to be looking to Jesus.

[17:58] So from hard hearts, let's move to our second big theme of servant saviours. The book of Joshua, one of the aims that it's trying to achieve is to present clear succession.

God chose Moses and chose Joshua to take over from Moses. And as we read the stories, we meet Joshua and a little bit Moses, remember that they are not presented as the true heroes of the story, though they are faithful.

They are human agents for God, the great hero. They are servant saviours. And again, we'll see this in different passages that Joshua and Moses depend on God's guidance and they obey God's word.

So we read as Joshua and the people fight for Gibeon. So chapter 10, verse 6 onwards, they do that to, first of all, honour the peace treaty that was made.

Now Gibeon is part of the people of God. And they also fight, led by Joshua, following the Lord's command. Verse 8 of chapter 10, The Lord said to Joshua, Do not be afraid of them.

[19:14] I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you. And we see in the story of fighting for Gibeon, Joshua's great faith.

We are presented with the miracle of prayer. We see his desire to be obedient, completely obedient, so that he calls on God to stop the sun and the moon from moving.

And in so doing, they are able to completely defeat their enemies in line with God's plan. And we've got that miracle of prayer, that reminder that the Lord listens.

And the Lord listens to a human voice. And then in chapter 11, as the battle moves from the south to the north, we see Joshua fighting against kings and royal cities.

And if you turn to verses 12 to 15, verse 12, He totally destroyed them as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded. So here he is, being faithful to the command, which is, of course, God's command.

[20:24] And in verse 15, he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded. He was fully obedient. And then we're also reminded of Moses.

And whenever Moses is talked about here, so chapter 11, verse 12, Moses, the servant of the Lord, verse 15, as the Lord commanded his servant Moses, chapter 12, and verse 6, Moses, the servant of the Lord.

There's a pattern. Four times, Moses will be described as God's servant, a reminder that he too led the people under God's rule.

So what is Joshua 10 to 12 teaching us? He's teaching us, when we think about the big picture, that God appoints his chosen saviour, first Moses, then Joshua, and they would be a servant for God, one fully obedient to God's will.

Every battle they fought would have a God-centered focus. Now, do we see the significance for us when we recognise that those Old Testament saviours are types of signposts to the Lord Jesus?

[ 21 : 44 ] Jesus, we're told, in his own words, is both Messiah, he is God's anointed, chosen king and saviour, and he is the suffering servant.

I'm going to spend three weeks on Isaiah 53 with that focus. Jesus, we know from his own words and from his life, is fully obedient to his Father's will, and he goes into battle in obedience to his Father's will and seeking his Father's glory, and that leads him into that deepest of all spiritual battles.

It leads him to the cross, where he suffers and dies in our place for our sins to defeat the spiritual powers of darkness.

And what then is the victory that Jesus secures for his people? Well, after his suffering and after his death, there is victory over the penalty and the power of sin because he didn't stay dead, but he rose again.

The great enemy of death has been defeated. Peace with God is now reality for all who put their trust in the Lord Jesus. Eternal life is certain.

[ 22 : 56 ] In the true promised land, the new heaven and the new earth for all who will look to Jesus and be saved. So our question then is, will I be led by Jesus, the servant saviour?

Will I trust him? In the spiritual battle that we go through, will I follow, in my commander in chief, will I follow in his footsteps?

In the fight that we are called to, where we're to fight against our sin, to be killing sin, to fight for holiness in our own lives and to look to extend his kingdom in our witness, in our words, in our actions, in the lives of others?

Will I follow King Jesus, the servant saviour? And the last big theme, in a sense, the dominant theme of chapters 10 to 12 is God's glory.

Now, if you enjoy sports, you'll know that sports journalists or in sports coverage, sometimes they like to highlight success and victory in a certain way.

[ 24 : 15 ] So they'll maybe highlight, that's now 20 wins in a row. Or this team has a record of 68 games undefeated. Or here's the number of victories that this player has had over other top 10 players.

And the point is that those details are intended to increase the glory of a team or an athlete. Now, you think about what we just sort of read in summary, Joshua 10 to 12.

What do we see in big, bold letters? We see God is glorious King. God is glorious Father for his people against his enemies, winning victory after victory.

So here is a cause for the Old Testament people of God to sing, great is thy faithfulness in every battle won, in every piece of ground taken, in every hostile enemy defeated, there is more and more evidence of God's faithful love of his keeping, his covenant promise.

So they have more cause to praise, to enjoy, to love, the more they see of God's acts, as Jonathan Edwards said. Two ways that we can think about God's glory and what he gives to his people.

[ 25 : 31 ] First of all, victory from the Lord. There is in chapters 10 and 11 a recurring phrase, I have given or I will hand them over. Let me show you a few.

Chapter 10, verse 8. Do not be afraid of them. I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you. Chapter 10, verse 30.

The Lord also gave the city and its king into Israel's hand. chapter 11, verse 6.

The Lord said to Joshua, do not be afraid of them because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them slain over to Israel. And chapter 11, verse 8.

The Lord gave them into the hand of Israel. So it's clear that this victory comes from the Lord, the Lord of glory. and his power is on display.

[ 26 : 30 ] In the account of the victory over Gibeon, we saw two things. In verse 10, the Lord throws the enemies into confusion. And verse 11, the Lord throws down great hailstones and more are killed by the hailstones that are killed in the battle.

We see God's glory too in the sun and the moon stopping. So either, and commentators take different views. Either God extends the day so that they're able to continue the fighting all day long or he extends the darkness of night so there is the night time raid and then in the chaos and confusion of night time that victory comes.

But it's a miracle either way. God's glory on display. The battle belongs to the Lord. Judgment and salvation come from him and he is the personal covenant making, covenant keeping, Lord and the people are invited to trust him and rejoice in him.

So there's victory from the Lord but there's also rest from the Lord. That's why we read from Hebrews at the beginning. In verse 11, chapter 11, verse 23, so Joshua took the entire land just as the Lord had directed Moses and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions.

Then the land had rest. from war. Think for a moment how amazing this is. Here is this tiny, inexperienced, landless nation and they have defeated 33 kings.

[ 28 : 07 ] And God has given them that land as their inheritance and he has given them rest. And what's that rest? Back to the Garden of Eden, it's rest to enjoy God in his creation.

Life with God in his place, under his rule and blessing. That's the ultimate gift. That's God's desire for his people then and his desire for his people now that we would live in his presence, enjoying his rule, enjoying his goodness all of our days.

So Joshua 10 to 12 gives us really helpful insight into salvation because it reminds us clearly we, the people of God, are saved by God's grace. Just as tiny Israel couldn't by themselves defeat vast nations, we cannot by ourselves defeat our enemy of sin leading to death.

By ourselves we will be fearful of death, we will be condemned by sin. There is no escape from that. We cannot make ourselves holy enough for God to accept this and so by ourselves we should face the same judgment and same curse as all those kings and all those nations.

But God, but God in his grace sent Jesus to redeem them. God gave Jesus as a gift of grace to us, infinitely costly to God as he gave his son up to death but free for us to receive by turning from sin and by faith in him.

[ 29 : 46 ] So we're saved by grace and we have the promise of a still greater rest. As Hebrews 4 said, the Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God.

And so the promised land, there's Israel inherited the land and having rest is just a picture of eternal glory still to come.

And God is the one who makes that possible. God is the one who is faithful and he will do it. He will hold us fast. He will not lose any and we must, as Hebrews says, we must strive to enter into that rest knowing all that God has done.

We must work. We must have faith in God's promises and God's character and we must live in obedience in the spiritual battles in the discouragements that we face.

So back to where we began and that question, why is this text here? Why do we need to read this? I hope by digging in we can see more clearly that chapters like these would become for us like old family albums.

[ 31 : 00 ] You know when you dig into your old family photos, you rake through them and you get those sweet reminders of love, of happy times, of connection to family members and that Joshua 10 to 12 would be a sweet reminder to us of God's loving faithfulness and of salvation that comes from him.

That it would take us to the whole big picture of God's salvation and God's desire that he would be with his people forever. That that picture, that story of God's salvation that climaxes at the cross, it would be our family album of memories, memories of God's faithfulness to strengthen us in knowing our Father loves us and that in Jesus our salvation and our future home is secure.

Amen.