

Joshua 10:1–27

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[0 : 00] It's an honour and privilege to be asked to preach for you today. During the Covid lockdown, we've been live streaming a service from this room, from our lounge, every Sunday morning.

And I've been teaching through the book of Joshua. And when Benj asked if I'd preach for you during his holiday this summer, we agreed that I would reprise my Joshua chapter 10 sermon. And because it's a famous chapter in the book of Joshua with some really interesting features. And because there's one or two unusual points that I think the Holy Spirit is teaching through this text that might be quite stretching, even quite provocative, for how we think about the Old Testament as Christian scripture.

If you have any questions or would like to raise any complaints about my message, then I would be just delighted to deflect them to Benj when he gets back from holiday. Now, although we'll focus on chapter 10 itself, it's only fair to give you a lightning quick run through of chapters 1 to 9 so that you know where we're up to in chapter 10 of the book of Joshua.

So, chapter 1. Chapter 1. The book of Joshua picks up where Deuteronomy left off. Moses has died. Joshua has succeeded him.

[1 : 20] And the Israelites are camped on the east of the Jordan, looking across to the land of Canaan. The Lord reassures Joshua that he is still with the Israelites. Therefore, they can be strong and courageous when he brings them into the land of their inheritance.

Chapter 2. Joshua dispatches some spies to scout out Jericho. They get cornered by Jericho's security intelligence services in the establishment of the prostitute Rahab.

But because she has heard about what the Lord has done and believes that he will do as he has promised, she negotiates a deal with the Israelite spies. She ensures their safe escape and they promise that her household will be saved when the Lord delivers Jericho into their hands.

Chapter 3. Israel crosses the Jordan. As soon as the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant step onto the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing and Israel was able to cross over on dry ground.

This brings a final closure to the Exodus that began over 40 years previously with a similarly miraculous passage through the waters when the Israelites were brought to safety through the Red Sea.

[2 : 33] Chapter 4. Twelve stones are taken up from the riverbed to become a memorial to the Lord, bringing Israel into the land of promise by an act of his mighty power.

In chapter 5, Joshua circumcises the Israelites now in the land. They had not received the covenant sign and seal in the wilderness. And then all Israel celebrates the Passover.

The next day they eat from the produce of the land for the first time. And so the manna stops.

Joshua then has a strange encounter with the commander of the Lord's army, who gives instructions ahead of the Battle of Jericho, which follows in chapter 6.

Those instructions involved a daily walk around the city, carrying the Ark, and seven such perambulations on the seventh day. After which, the blast of the trumpets and the war cry goes up. And do you know the story? The walls come tumbling down. The city is taken easily. Rahab's household is rescued. Everything in the city is devoted to destruction. Devoted to the Lord.

[3 : 36] Belongs to the Lord, as was strictly instructed. Well, almost everything. Because in chapter 7, when Israel takes on Ai, they lose and suffer fatalities.

The Lord was angry with Israel because, it turns out, someone stole some of the devoted things from Jericho. By a divinely guided lot, Achan is exposed as the malefactor and put to death.

This means that when the battle against Ai is joined again in chapter 8, it goes according to plan. After which, the covenant is renewed with the blessings and the curses read from Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, respectively.

Chapter 9. Several of the Amorite kings start organising themselves into an alliance to make war on Israel. But the people of Gibeon discerned correctly that nothing will stop the Lord from giving Israel the land.

Whatever it takes, they know they need to get in with the Lord and his people. And they go about this right desire, but in the wrong way. Devising a ruse to trick the elders into signing a covenant of peace with them.

[4 : 45] Apparently, they knew the Lord's law forbidding Israel from making peace with inhabitants of the land. So, they represented themselves as a delegation from a far, far off people.

Well, Joshua and the other elders fail to consult the Lord, and so they fall for the ruse, and they make a covenant of peace in the Lord's name with the Gibeonites. When they find out three days later that the Gibeonites live only a stone's throw away, the Israelites are livid.

But despite their anger, they rightly honour the terms of the covenant they have made, and spare the Gibeonites' lives, instead consigning them to manual labour in service of the tabernacle in perpetuity.

The Gibeonites' fellow Amorites, however, were not best pleased to learn of the events of chapter 9, as we shall see when we read chapter 10, which is following now.

This morning's reading is from Joshua chapter 10, verses 1 to 27. Now Adonai Zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard that Joshua had taken A and totally destroyed it, doing to A 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.

[6 : 01] 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 A, and all its men were good fighters.

So Adonai Zedek, king of Jerusalem, appealed to Hoham, king of Hebron, Piram, king of Jarmuth, Jephiah, king of Lachish, and Debir, 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, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon joined forces.

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.

[7 : 25] 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, Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and you, moon, over the valley of Ajalon.

[8 : 35] So the sun stood still and the moon stopped till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as 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.

Now the five kings had fled and hidden in the cave at Makedah.

When Joshua was told that the five kings had been found hiding in the cave at Makedah, he said, Roll large rocks up to the mouth of the cave and post some men there to guard it.

But don't stop. Pursue your enemies. Attack them from the rear and don't let them reach their cities. For the Lord your God has given them into your hand.

[9 : 48] So Joshua and the Israelites defeated them completely. But a few survivors managed to reach their fortified cities. The whole army then returned safely to Joshua in the camp at Makedah and no one uttered a word against the Israelites.

Joshua said, open the mouth of the cave and bring those five kings out to me. So they brought the five kings out of the cave.

The kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon. When they had brought these kings to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders who had come with him.

Come here and put your feet on the necks of these kings. So they came forward and placed their feet on their necks. Joshua said to them, do not be afraid.

Do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is what the Lord will do to all the enemies you are going to fight. Then Joshua put the kings to death and exposed their bodies on five poles.

[11 : 08] And they were left hanging on the poles until evening. At sunset, Joshua gave the order and they took them down from the poles and threw them into the cave where they had been hiding.

At the mouth of the cave, they placed large rocks, which are there to this day. Amen. May the sunlight of understanding given by the Spirit rise upon us this morning and never set.

In Jesus' name. Amen. As I mentioned, news that the Gibeonites had switched sides and had made a covenant of peace with the Lord God and his people did not go down well among their former friends.

The five Amorite kings were not only alarmed that Israel had taken Jericho and Ai so devastatingly quickly and completely, but they were right royally peeved that Joshua no longer needed to expend any of his resources against mighty Gibeon and its famous warriors.

The Gibeonites had abandoned the Canaanite confederacy to take up with this Yahweh deity and his upstart general Joshua. Rather than take on Joshua directly, Adonai Tzedek and cronies resolved to bully the Gibeonites, to punish them, to regain their fortified cities and perhaps to make an example of them so that no one else will dare leave the Amorite union.

[12 : 43] So, Gibegon must not be followed by Hebrexit or Jeruseya. Come up and help me attack Gibeon, urges Adonai Tzedek in verse 4, because it has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites.

There's a parallel here, isn't there, with the experience of many new Christians. When someone decides, much like the Gibeonites, to throw themselves upon the mercy of the Lord God, to line up behind his champion, Jesus Christ, and to identify with his people, they often find that former friends, and in some cases even family members, turn against them.

Oregon of Alexandria, around the year 200, wrote the following on this passage. There is no doubt that when a human soul associates itself with the word of God, it is immediately going to have enemies, and that those it once considered friends will be changed into adversaries.

In short, pals sometimes become persecutors. I asked around in a Facebook group for personal examples of this. Jane explained how when she became a believer, her friends began distancing themselves from her, and her brother mocked her tirelessly.

When Leanne became a Christian, she was disinherited by her atheist father, who was livid that his daughter had thrown away all the advantages he had given her by going to live and work alongside her husband as a ministry couple in the East End of London.

[14 : 22] As a teenager, Alex was told by his father that if he attended that Christian camp, he would have nothing more to do with him. When Lucy became a Christian aged 19, her mother told her that if she were baptised, she would no longer consider her her daughter, and years later refused to come to her wedding.

In certain parts of the world, Christian converts from another religion routinely face threats of violence from family members, and sadly this has even been known to happen in the United Kingdom.

When someone lines up with Jesus and abandons aspects of their previous way of life, they often suffer estrangement from former friends, ridicule, aggressive questioning, and slander.

These are aspects of the spiritual battle. In which they're engaged, and in which they've just switched sides. As a turncoat and traitor to God's opponents, they become the target of spiritual

attack.

If you're not yet a Christian, but are interested enough to imagine you might become one, be warned. This is part of the cost you must be prepared to count.

[15 : 34] Many of your friends and family will be understanding. Some will be supportive. But there's a good chance that some will oppose your new alignment in emotionally painful and spiritually challenging ways.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed by this Old Testament example. But also be comforted and encouraged by this same true story.

Be comforted by the picture of our adoption that this chapter provides. Those who had been foreigners, strangers, and enemies of God are now the object of natural-born Israel's deliverance. The biological members of the covenant community are prepared to shed blood to rescue these former outsiders. Similarly, St. Paul writes in Ephesians chapter 2, Remember that formerly you who were Gentiles by birth and uncircumcised, remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. The true Israel, the natural-born son of God, was prepared to shed blood to save adopted Gentiles like you and me.

[17 : 03] And be encouraged by this account, this chapter as well, because after all, it ends well for those who have sought a covenant of peace with the Lord, and badly for those who oppose him.

The Gibeonites are attacked by their past allies, and so they cry out to their new protector, and the Lord works through his people to rescue them. So too, new Christians facing the heat of a spiritual battle they cannot hope to win on their own, such as the opposition of former friends, can cry out to Jesus, and he will marshal the church, their new family, to come to their aid, in prayer, in fellowship, in dealing with doubts and questions, and in practical provision and support.

Now, I want to dwell a bit more on Adonai Zedek, king of Jerusalem, before we come to the famous bit about the sun.

This is the very first time Jerusalem, which means city of peace, city of Shalom, is mentioned in the Bible. This city will later become the royal capital of David and his dynasty, home to the temple, and eventually the site of our Lord Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

It's also the name given to the celestial city, the urban image of the new creation, that believers will inherit at the end of the age. So Jerusalem is a big deal in the Bible.

[18 : 31] So our ears should prick up, as we hear its first mention here in Joshua chapter 10. Now, the name of the king of Jerusalem, who leads the coalition against Gibeon in Israel, is Adonai Zedek, which in Hebrew translates literally as, my lord is righteousness.

My lord is righteousness. Now, Adonai Zedek's lord, his god, is not Yahweh, but rather one of the Canaanite pantheon of idols.

Baal, Molech, Chemosh, one of those. Put all this together, and we have in this name and title a claim. A claim. My lord, Baal, is righteousness.

His dwelling is the city of peace. Now, it might be noted that for a city of peace, it's rather warmongering. In fact, it is because Adonai Zedek, king of Jerusalem, Shalom, so despises the treaty of Shalom, in Hebrew, that Gibeon has made with the lord, that he assembles his axis of evil around his capital.

As for Adonai Zedek, the claim that Baal, or Chemosh, or Molech, is the lord of righteousness, was already hollow, given the depravity of Canaanite religion, conducted in his name.

[19 : 52] But it's now smashed by Adonai Zedek's crushing defeat, and humiliating defeat, death beneath Joshua's feet. Baal is lord of nothing.

So there's a negative kind of foreshadowing going on here. An anti-hero, who prefigures the true hero to come. Now by verse 27, Adonai Zedek, so-called lord of righteousness, the claimed king of Jerusalem, dies an accursed death, is hung out on a tree, his body taken down at sunset, buried in a cave, with stones rolled across the entrance.

This lord of righteousness, so-called, is idolatrous, guilty, and rightly condemned, and his tomb becomes a significant memorial to God's people of judgment, because it contains his accursed body.

Millennium and a half later, another lord of righteousness is hailed as the king of the Jews, and crowned with thorns in Jerusalem.

There, he dies an accursed death, is hung on a tree, his body taken down at sunset, buried in a cave, with a stone rolled across the entrance.

[21 : 15] But because this lord of righteousness is as good as his title, and because this man is as good as his name, Yeshua, Joshua, in Greek pronounced Yehuzas, Jesus, which means Yahweh's salvation, death could not hold him.

On the third day, the stone is rolled away from the cave, and his tomb becomes the great memorial of salvation to God's people, because it does not contain the body of the true king of Jerusalem. The figure of Adonai Zedek, and his office as king of Jerusalem, sets up a question that's answered first in righteous king David, but ultimately in great David's greater son, his descendant, Jesus Christ.

The question, who is the lord of righteousness, the true king in Jerusalem? Well, let's get to the battle itself.

Joshua and his entire army march through the night from Gilgal. The lord reiterates his earlier promise to reassure him, do not be afraid of them, I have given them into your hand, not one of them will be able to withstand you.

[22 : 31] As the battle is joined, it is the lord who does the main fighting. He throws the Amorite axis into confusion, he drives them to flight, and he hurls deadly hailstones down on them.

Joshua's army just needs to conduct a mopping up operation in pursuit. It's not a particularly comfortable or fashionable depiction in 21st century Britain, but the lord as warrior is a strong biblical theme, and it's part of the good news.

It's what ensures that one day every knee will bow before him. We are combatants in the great spiritual battle against sin, the world, and the devil. But we do not need to fear, because with our warrior God on our side, who can stand against us?

None will be able ultimately to withstand us. That's why Paul speaks of Christians with a military metaphor as more than conquerors through Jesus.

Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor anything else in all creation is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ. That the lord is warrior is good news.

[23 : 45] We turn at last to the amazing miracle at the heart of this chapter. This is such an astounding, shocking, mind-blowing event that it's recorded not only in the book of Joshua, but also in the annals of the long-since-lost book of Jashar.

You know the stupendous thing I'm talking about, right? Hard to miss it in the reading, isn't it? No, no. Oh, no, nothing to do with the sun not setting for a whole extra day.

Oh, it's nothing to do with the Lord subverting what was commonly worshipped by the Canaanites to bring about their judgment. No, nothing to do with the almighty creator suspending all known physics to bring about inexplicable astrological phenomena to help his people defeat their enemies. No, that's not it. That's small fry. A God who can create everything from nothing by his word is easily able to pause the earth's rotation while somehow keeping gravity going.

Of course, the one who wrote the laws of nature is not bound to them. See instead what the author thinks is so stupefying about what happened that day.

[25 : 02] It says, On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel, Sun stand still over Gibeon and you moon over the valley of Ajalon.

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 Joshua, the sun stopped in the middle of the day 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. That's what's so special about it.

Not stopping the sun in the middle of its course in the middle of the sky to speak from a human perspective of course. But that the Lord should obey which is what listened to really means here. A human being. That the Lord should hear and heed what a man asks him to do. First, this episode teaches us about the wonderful miracle of prayer.

[26 : 08] It is quite amazing, quite amazing that the God who created and sustains the universe by the might of his power should listen to and respond to. What a mere speck, blob of sentient matter

utters in its heart.

Our prayers might not be for the suspension of astrophysics but the fact that God answers them puts our petitions on a continuum with Joshua's famous request.

God who heard Joshua and stopped the sun in the sky is the same God that hears and considers your appeals for the everyday safety of your family, the protection of your church, the effectiveness of your Christian witness.

We should daily be astonished by the privilege we have of addressing the Lord God Almighty as our Father in Heaven. And we should be staggered by the fact that he is prepared to deploy his infinite wisdom and power in response to our supplications.

If we find prayer boring and unnecessary, as I confess I sometimes do, well it can only be because we don't recognise it for the miracle of grace that it really is.

[27 : 21] May God open our hearts to the wonders and the privilege and the power of prayer. But second, this passage shows us our need for a mediator.

While in some ways as we've just seen, this extraordinary event overlaps with the principle of ordinary prayer, it's also clearly unique. It shows a man, Joshua, the Lord's anointed, almost commanding the Lord what to do as he intercedes for Israel.

And the Lord obeys the voice of this righteous man, this mediator who pleads before God for God's people. Again, a millennium and a half later, a second Joshua, Jesus, in Greek, would similarly intercede with the Father for his people in words of authority approaching the register of command. Protect them by your power, he says, by the power of your name. Sanctify them by your truth. Make all of them one. I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory.

All those prayers taken from Jesus' prayer in John chapter 17. And as the book of Hebrews assures us in chapter 5, during the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

[28 : 47] Joshua chapter 10 verse 14 says, there has never been a day like it before or since when the Lord listened to the voice of a man. That is, wonderfully, no longer true.

There has been a day since when the Lord listened to and obeyed the voice of a righteous man, his son, the second and greater Joshua, the Lord of righteousness and true heir to David's throne in Jerusalem, Jesus Christ.

This God-man commanded the light of his salvation to rise over an earth covered in darkness and the sun has still not set on that day.

Thanks be to God. Amen.