

What's the Message – Lesson 43

Today's lesson is entitled, "The Conquest of the Promised Land."

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Once again we pray that the Lord will use this lesson to help you better understand how God views the evil of false gods, and why the practitioners of Baal worship needed to be eliminated as a threat to the survival of Israel. Amen.

Last time we saw how the people of Gibeon deceived Joshua and the Israelites, and the immediate consequences – for Gibeon – of that deceit. But the impact of the deceit did not end there. A coalition was formed by the five kings of the neighboring cities and areas around Gibeon. These kings – all practitioners of Baal worship – felt they could not accept this peace with Israel, and would have to make war on the prominent city of Gibeon to teach them a lesson.

As you might expect, the Gibeonites went running to Joshua for help. But God had already determined the outcome and spoke to Joshua, as we read in chapter 10, verse 8: *Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands; there shall not be a man of them stand before you.*

So Joshua led Israel on an overnight march, and they came upon the army of this coalition suddenly, surprising them completely and throwing them into a panic. As verse 11 tells us: *And as they fled before Israel, while they were going down the ascent of Beth-horon, the Lord threw down great stones from heaven upon them . . . there were more who died because of the hailstones than the men of Israel killed with the sword.*

Now comes one of the most unusual and miraculous events in the entire Old Testament. There is no better way to tell this part of the story than to read verses 12 through 14 in chapter 10: *Then spoke Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord gave the Amorites over to the men of Israel; and he said in the sight of Israel, "Sun, stand thou still at Gibeon, and thou Moon in the valley of Aijalon." And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the nation took vengeance on their*

enemies. . . . The sun stayed in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. There has been no day like it before or since, when the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man; for the Lord fought for Israel.

Needless to say, Israel was completely victorious and the army of the Southern Coalition was totally destroyed. Then Joshua turned to each of their main cities, and one by one destroyed everyone of them. Chapter 10 of the book of Joshua ends with these verses:

So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel commanded. . . .

What follows next is sort of a *deja vu* all over again. Up in the northern part of the country, Jabin the king of Hazor heard about what had happened and became determined that he could put together a coalition and a large army that could stop the Israelites. Chapter 11, verse 5 tells us: *And all these kings joined their forces, and came and encamped together at the waters of Merom, to fight with Israel.* But verse 6 says: *And the Lord said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid of them, for tomorrow at this time I will give over all of them, slain, to Israel.* And, of course, that is precisely what happened. There were more battles, and the Israelites cleared out most of the country as directed – but not 100% of it. Still, chapter 11 is able to close with these words:

So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war.

And with that highly summarized accounting, we have the sense of what happened in chapters 10 and 11 of Joshua. But once again, I have to ask, these were wars fought some three thousand years ago. What significance do they have for us? Teacher, what is the message here that we should remember?

We need to go all the way back to the covenant that God made with Abraham in Genesis, chapter 12 to tie this all together. There was a promise of making the descendants of Abraham numerous, a great nation. That had clearly happened. They were also to receive land that would be their base camp. And because of the battles you have described, this had now happened. Jump forward in the book of Joshua, past the details of the allotments of the territories to each tribe, and look at the end of chapter 21.

The concluding sentence is: *Not one of all the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.*

This thought is repeated again in chapter 23 as Joshua nears his time of death, which leads logically into his conclusion for Israel in chapter 24, beginning at verse 14: *Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if you be unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

Next time we will begin our study of the book of Judges.