

## “An Inheritance to Israel”

*The eighty-third in a series: “I Will be Your God and You Will Be My People.”*

**Texts: Joshua 10:28-11:23; Hebrews 4:1-13**

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The Gibeonites made a very wise decision. They heard all about what YHWH, the true and living God, had done to Israel’s enemies. The Gibeonites knew that it was YHWH’s intention to cast them from Canaan. In an act of self-preservation, the Gibeonites sought to make a peace-treaty with Israel before their people (the Hivites) were completely wiped out. But the four kings who followed Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, chose poorly. As recounted in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Joshua, God gave Israel an amazing victory over these five Amorite kings who banded together and attacked the Gibeonites because they dared enter into a covenant with Israel. Throughout Joshua’s account of the pitched battle covering more than twenty miles, which resulted in the total destruction of all those who rejected the true and living God, God is giving us a sneak preview of Christ’s second advent and that final day yet to come, when the kings of the earth once again hide in caves to avoid the glory of the Lamb. Israel’s conquest of Canaan is a graphic picture of the day of final judgment. But it is also a picture of our Sabbath rest, when we receive our glorious heavenly inheritance, the theme of our text.

We return to our series on the Book of Joshua and the account of Israel’s conquest of the land of promise. We have made our way through the first twenty-seven verses of Joshua 10. We will make our way through the balance of chapter 10 and all of chapter 11. By the time we come to the end of this section of the narrative, we will read that “Joshua took the whole land,” including both the southern and the northern portions of Canaan. Israel will receive the promised inheritance. And God will keep his covenant promises to his people. At long last, the people of Israel will have blessed rest.

Before the people of Israel can receive the promised inheritance, the Canaanites must be wiped out as YHWH commanded. As we saw in the first part of chapter 10, YHWH had told Joshua not to fear these five kings nor any of the Canaanites—despite the ferocity of their armies—because YHWH would give them all into Joshua’s hands. When the combined Amorite army surrounded the Gibeonites (their former allies), Joshua led Israel’s army (several hundred thousand strong) in a daring night march, catching the Amorite forces surrounding Gibeon by complete surprise. The army of Israel then attacked and drove the fleeing Amorites some twenty miles toward the city of Makkedah. Having been totally routed by the armies of Israel, the Amorites then fell victim to a massive hailstorm sent by God which killed more Amorite soldiers than the Israelis had killed. It was a dramatic victory for Israel and after this remarkable day, no one in Canaan would ever remember Israel’s embarrassing defeat at Ai.

When the pitched battle between the armies of Israel and the five Amorite kings finally ended at Makkedah—more than twenty miles from where it started at Gibeon—the five kings hid in a cave. But they were quickly caught by Joshua’s men, subjected to having their captor’s heels placed on their necks, put to death and their bodies hung on trees, and then buried in the same cave in which they had hidden. While the first phase of the battle was now over, Joshua must press ahead to destroy seven important Canaanite cities to the south—securing that flank—before engaging yet another large Canaanite coalition to the north. This is why this period of biblical history is known as the Conquest. YHWH will fight for his people and the army of Israel will conquer all of Canaan in a bloody and relentless campaign.

We now pick up where we left off last time (Joshua 10:28) with those events which follow immediately after the defeat of the five Canaanite kings at Makkedah.

The previous battle—fought initially at Gibeon and then all the way to Makkedah—is the last battle in this section of Joshua in which we are given full details of the fighting. From here on, only bare bones summaries of the numerous battles are given the reader.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is the overarching sense that once the five Amorite kings and their armies had been defeated, and once God had given Joshua a cosmic sign when the sun stood still in the sky, Israel’s conquest of the land is inevitable. Who among the Canaanites can stay YHWH’s hand since he has promised Joshua that he will give all of Israel’s enemies over to Israel’s armies? No one. God’s purposes will be accomplished.

We have seen throughout the earlier chapters of Joshua that the people of Canaan who have been devoted to destruction know that YHWH is the true and living God. They know that they are squatters on his land, land which he intends to give his people. Instead, the Canaanites reject YHWH and worship their false gods. They stubbornly oppose YHWH’s purposes and they seek to fight against Joshua and Israel. Now, these tribes and their cities will be completely destroyed, one after the other. As we work our way through the rest of chapters 10 and 11, keep in mind the distances and the large numbers of soldiers involved, as well as the large number of Canaanites who are put to death by the sword. This is no small military operation. Joshua is a decisive leader and great general—a true biblical hero.

As the next phase of battle unfolds, the first city to fall is Makkedah, the place where Israel’s armies are currently camped. As we pick up the narrative in Joshua 10:28, we read *“As for Makkedah, Joshua captured it on that day and struck it, and its king, with the edge of the sword. He devoted to destruction every person in it; he left none remaining. And he did to the king of Makkedah just as he had done to the king of Jericho.”* The total destruction of each Canaanite city and all of its inhabitants, along with its king, will be repeated numerous times, with Joshua giving us little detail of each battle, only a brief summary. The image is that of a powerful and relentless operation by the army of Israel, as they move throughout Canaan, completely destroying all opposition.

Having wiped out Makkedah, Joshua now sets his sight on the southern portion of Canaan. The next city to fall is Libnah. *“Then Joshua and all Israel with him passed on from Makkedah to Libnah and fought against Libnah. And the LORD gave it also and its king into the hand of Israel. And he struck it with the edge of the sword, and every person in it; he left none remaining in it. And he did to its king as he had done to the king of Jericho.”* This action was followed by the destruction of Lachish. *“Then Joshua and all Israel with him passed on from Libnah to Lachish and laid siege to it and fought against it. And the LORD gave Lachish into the hand of Israel, and he captured it on the second day and struck it with the edge of the sword, and every person in it, as he had done to Libnah.”* Lachish was a bit tougher than Makkedah or Libnah, especially when other Canaanites rallied to their aid. As we learn in verse 33, *“then Horam king of Gezer came up to help Lachish. And Joshua struck him and his people, until he left none remaining.”* The opposition at Lachish may have been stronger, but the result is the same. Israel’s opponents are wiped out, their cities captured all the inhabitants killed.

The next city to fall is Eglon, some forty miles to the south of Jerusalem out in the Judean wilderness, and just a few miles to the south of Lachish. As we read in verses 34 ff., *“Then Joshua and all Israel with him passed on from Lachish to Eglon. And they laid siege to it and fought against it. And they captured it on that day, and struck it with the edge of the sword. And he devoted every person in it to destruction that day, as he had done to Lachish.”* Lachish took two days to fall, but the larger Eglon fell in one. The armies of Israel march on.

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<sup>1</sup> Howard, *Joshua*, 256.

The next city to be attacked was Hebron, a large city some twenty miles to the east of Eglon. *“Then Joshua and all Israel with him went up from Eglon to Hebron. And they fought against it and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword, and its king and its towns, and every person in it. He left none remaining, as he had done to Eglon, and devoted it to destruction and every person in it.”* This was followed by an attack upon Debir, to the south and west of Hebron. *“Then Joshua and all Israel with him turned back to Debir and fought against it and he captured it with its king and all its towns. And they struck them with the edge of the sword and devoted to destruction every person in it; he left none remaining. Just as he had done to Hebron and to Libnah and its king, so he did to Debir and to its king.”*

The relentless nature and totality of Israel’s conquest is summarized for us in verses 40-43. *“So Joshua struck the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but devoted to destruction all that breathed, just as the LORD God of Israel commanded. And Joshua struck them from Kadesh-barnea as far as Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon. And Joshua captured all these kings and their land at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel. Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.”* The armies of Israel have marched countless miles and fought many battles. YHWH fought for Israel and has given Joshua the skills and abilities to lead Israel’s soldiers. There were no Canaanite kings or armies in the south left to oppose Israel. In fact, when the campaign in the south was over and the southern flank secured, Joshua and his armies were able to return to Gilgal, no doubt to refit and rest.

As we’ll see in the next chapter, while this summary seems to indicate that this all happened very quickly, in Joshua 11:18 we read these battles took much time. What we have here in the last half of Joshua 10 then, is a very brief summary of an extensive military campaign which played out over many miles and no doubt over several years. But we also find the account of a complete and total Israelite victory in which YHWH did for Israel exactly what he promised to do. YHWH fought for Israel, he gave them the land and he will give them rest, because for a time, Israel obeyed the covenant.

**III. Apparently, not everyone in Canaan got the message that the enemies of Israel do not stand a chance against YHWH. Yet another Canaanite king from the northern part of Canaan attempts to do the same thing Adoni-zedek attempted to do, and that is form a coalition of tribes to oppose the advancing Israelite army. The result will be the same—total defeat.**

As we have seen throughout the Book of Joshua, the enemies of Israel “heard” what had happened to Pharaoh’s armies when Israel left Egypt, they heard what had happened to Jericho, to the Amorite kings and to the cities in the south of Canaan. Israel’s success was well-known throughout all of Canaan. The remaining Canaanites could have done what Gibeon did and make covenant (peace treaty) with Israel, but they chose not to. They could have called upon the name of YHWH before it was too late, but they refused. Instead, these people choose to worship created things rather than the creator. They would rather indulge their sinful flesh than submit to God’s law.

And so despite the overwhelming evidence that YHWH was fighting on behalf of Israel and that no Canaanite force could possibly be a match for the armies of Israel, out of desperation, yet another Canaanite king formed an alliance in a futile effort to thwart God’s purposes. As we read in verses 1-3, *“When Jabin, king of Hazor, heard of this, he sent to Jobab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph, and to the kings who were in the northern hill country, and in the Arabah south of Chinneroth, and in the lowland, and in Naphoth-dor on the west, to the Canaanites in the east and the west, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivites under Hermon in the land of Mizpah.”* Jabin’s call to arms was heeded, as is apparent in verses

4-5. *“And they came out with all their troops, a great horde, in number like the sand that is on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots. And all these kings joined their forces and came and encamped together at the waters of Merom to fight against Israel.”*

While Hazor is a large city, the other cities named in verse 1 were not. In verse 2, four different regions are mentioned, constituting the entire northern portion of Canaan. The Canaanites must have realized that Israel’s threat to their very existence is great, and so they summoned help from far and wide.<sup>2</sup> Instead of waiting for Joshua and the armies of Israel to attack them, Jabin will do as Adonai-zedek did. He will attempt to take the initiative and attack Israel, before Joshua can attack him.

At this point, the size of the Canaanite army and the number of horses and chariots they possess is meaningless to the eventual outcome. YHWH will ensure that Israel prevails. According to verse 6, *“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. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire.’”* Once again, Joshua will go on offense and attack Jabin’s army before Jabin can maneuver his force into position to attack Israel. Joshua is not only promised another victory by YHWH, he is commanded to hamstring all the horses (cut their hamstrings by a blow from the sword) and burn all the Canaanite chariots. Nothing is to remain of Jabin’s northern Canaanite army which can ever be used again against Israel.

Instead of a detailed account of this great battle, Joshua gives us a short three verse summary in verses 7-9. *“So Joshua and all his warriors came suddenly against them by the waters of Merom and fell upon them. And the LORD gave them into the hand of Israel, who struck them and chased them as far as Great Sidon and Misrephoth-maim, and eastward as far as the Valley of Mizpeh. And they struck them until he left none remaining. And Joshua did to them just as the LORD said to him: he hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots with fire.”* Since the LORD works through means, Joshua and the armies of Israel do the fighting, while YHWH gets the glory. Just as in the southern campaign, Joshua was able to position his army so as to completely surprise the Canaanite force at Merom, which is beyond the Sea of Galilee, and nearly 100 miles to the north of Israel’s encampment at Gilgal. Israel’s armies drove their enemies as far to the northwest as Sidon (a city in modern Lebanon), and as far as the valley of Mizpeh to the northeast (almost to modern Damascus in Syria).

Joshua and his men carry out the Lord’s instructions to the letter, and throughout this entire account, Joshua becomes an example to all of God’s people of an obedient servant and decisive leader. By the time Israel’s armies are finished campaigning in the north, all Canaanite opposition has been crushed. And just as he did in the south, once the Canaanite army is wiped out, Joshua quickly consolidates his victory. He will now destroy all of the major Canaanite cities throughout the northern portions of the land of promise. Soon the Conquest will be complete and Israel will possess the land of promise.

As recounted in verses 10-13, *“And Joshua turned back at that time and captured Hazor and struck its king with the sword, for Hazor formerly was the head of all those kingdoms. And they struck with the sword all who were in it, devoting them to destruction; there was none left that breathed. And he [Joshua] burned Hazor with fire. And all the cities of those kings, and all their kings, Joshua captured, and struck them with the edge of the sword, devoting them to destruction, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded. But none of the cities that stood on mounds did Israel burn, except Hazor alone; that Joshua burned.”* Since Hazor was the home of Jabin, who led the Canaanite coalition, it

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<sup>2</sup> Howard, *Joshua*, 265-266.

would be burned and left in ruins. In the case of the other cities, the inhabitants were killed, but the cities were left intact. This was the fulfillment of Moses' prophecy in Deuteronomy 6:10-11: "*And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant*"—you will eat and have your fill. The bounty of Canaan will be Israel's inheritance.

This is exactly what happens once the Canaanite armies have been defeated. As we learn in Joshua 11:14-15, "*and all the spoil of these cities and the livestock, the people of Israel took for their plunder. But every man they struck with the edge of the sword until they had destroyed them, and they did not leave any who breathed. Just 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.*" While we may be startled by the death of so many, remember these people knew that YHWH was the true and living God, they knew that this land was his, and they rejected him anyway. This is why, as we saw last time, the language of the Conquest reappears again the New Testament, when the apostles speak of the Second Advent of Christ and the Day of Judgment in much the same terms.

In Joshua 11:16-17, we find the following summary statement. "*So Joshua took all that land, the hill country and all the Negeb and all the land of Goshen and the lowland and the Arabah and the hill country of Israel and its lowland [all references to the southern part of Canaan], from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, as far as Baal-gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon [references to the northern part]. And he captured all their kings and struck them and put them to death.*" Israel's armies had taken the entirety of the land promised to them, from the north to the south. All Canaanite kings have been killed. Their soldiers, horses and chariots have been destroyed. Nothing has been left behind with which Israel's enemies could rise up against them. In these verses, we find the description of a complete and total victory and Israel's Conquest of Canaan.

But in verse 18, we read that "*Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.*" From the relentless nature of the fighting and the total destruction of the Canaanites and their cities given in rapid-fire summary form, it sounds as though Israel fought one battle right after the other. But the campaign to take Canaan took some time. In fact, in Joshua 14:10, Caleb speaks of having spied out this land some forty-five years earlier. If you subtract the time Israel spent wandering in the wilderness, this puts the duration of the Conquest at somewhere between five to seven years.<sup>3</sup> This was a sustained military campaign.

In verses 19-20, Joshua tells us that "*there was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. They took them all in battle.*" As I said, the Gibeonites, who were great fighters, chose wisely. But Joshua goes on to say that "*it was the LORD's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the LORD commanded Moses.*" God fulfilled his promise to his people. He gave to Israel the land he promised them. And he used Joshua and his brilliant leadership as the means to do so. Notice that Joshua, the humble servant and great general, attributes Israel's victory to the purposes of YHWH.

Chapter 11 ends with the account of one more battle. "*And Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of*

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<sup>3</sup> Howard, *Joshua*, 273, n. 278.

*Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua devoted them to destruction with their cities. There was none of the Anakim left in the land of the people of Israel. Only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did some remain.*” The Anakim were great warriors, whom the Israelites feared. From the way the narrative is inserted here, either Joshua is summarizing something which happened earlier (during the southern phase), or which happened after the majority of the Canaanites had been wiped out. If it is the latter, this would mean that the Anakim were attempting to exploit the fact that there were no other Canaanites left in the south to oppose their taking of whatever they wanted. However we see this, it is certainly fitting that the last battle recorded in the Conquest is the defeat of Israel’s fiercest foes—the Anakim. They too are completely defeated and their cities are wiped out.

The chapter ends with a brief summary of the Conquest. *“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.”* Given all that has gone before, Joshua’s assertion is almost anti-climatic. But let us not miss the importance of what is said here. Joshua took the land of Canaan and gave it to Israel—although there are still some outlying areas yet to be conquered. In Joshua 12, we will find a list of all the kings that Israel defeated, and then in chapters 13-21, Joshua will describe how the land will be divided up among the twelve tribes. But here at the end of the bulk of the fighting, we read that news for which Israel has longed, *“the land had rest from war.”* The people of God now possess the promised land. They will live in peace. All that God promised them is now theirs.

**W**hat then can we say by way of application?

As we saw when we covered the first 27 verses of chapter 10, the New Testament looks back on the Conquest as a “dress rehearsal” of sorts for Christ’s second coming. The complete and total conquest of the Canaanites pales in comparison to what will happen on that day when Jesus comes back to judge the world, raise the dead and make all things new. But Joshua’s assertion that Israel entered the land, received the promise and enjoyed rest from war, is also spoken of in the New Testament. In our New Testament lesson (Hebrews 4), the author of Hebrews looks back upon this period in Israel’s history as follows. *“For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.”* Now we see that Israel’s entrance into the land, the time of peace and rest is not the final reality. This is a “dress rehearsal” for the ultimate Sabbath rest—heaven.

What Joshua could not yet see is that the greater Joshua, Jesus Christ, was yet to come. Through Jesus’ death upon the cross, God conquers our great enemy, which is the guilt and power of sin. Through his resurrection Jesus will conquer even death itself. The reality is that the Canaanites were not Israel’s greatest foe. No, sin and death are our greatest enemies, and Jesus Christ came and defeated them both, casting them forever from that good land where we at long last will receive everything God has promised to us. If God promised an earthly inheritance to Israel—the land—he’s promised a much greater inheritance to us, an eternal Sabbath and heavenly rest. And just as Israel’s great general, Joshua, oversaw the conquest of the land and the defeat of all the Canaanites, so too greater Joshua (Jesus) has conquered death and the grave and won for us entrance into heaven itself. And there we will enter our Sabbath rest, we will be at peace forever, as we dwell in the glorious presence of the Lord Jesus himself.