

## **Fighting to Rest – Joshua 11:1-23**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT**

Well, we've arrived at chapter 11 of Joshua today. You may be thinking: Wow! We're not even halfway done yet! And if you just look at the number of chapters, that would be true. However, in terms of the number of sermons on Joshua remaining, we're probably closer to 80% complete. That's because today's chapter is the last chapter remaining before we enter a long section in Joshua (chapters 12 through 21) that first provides lots of historical details and place names about the land conquered by Moses, the land conquered by Joshua, and the land still remaining to be conquered; and then outlines the specifics pertaining to the actual allotment of the land to the various tribes. We'll be moving pretty quickly through these chapters, summarizing with maps the information that's given in minute detail in the chapters. Then we'll take a little more time in chapters 22 through 24, which have quite a bit more meat for us to chew on as Joshua's life and the book of Joshua come to a close. So take heart! We're making good progress in our journey through Joshua.

As we prepare to zero in on chapter 11 today, I want to start by showing you some maps and pictures of the areas Joshua and Israelites have been conquering by God's power. Sometimes it helps to get the lay of the land and see some actual pictures so we're reminded that these are not just good Bible stories teaching us some principles about how to walk with God, but these are real, historical events that took place in real time in real places in the same real world that you and I live in today. Lots of archaeological evidence has been left behind of the cities and places mentioned in the book of Joshua, and I want to show you pictures of a few of them as we begin.

POWERPOINT SLIDES...

Well, let's turn our attention now to Joshua, chapter 11. Turn there in your Bibles, if you would. We're picking up the account just after Joshua and the Israelites, by the Lord's power, have utterly defeated the majority of the southern

region of the Promised Land, and have now returned to their main camp in Gilgal, near Jericho. The conquest of the Promised Land was on a roll and Joshua and the Israelites must have been rejoicing in the great victories God had just given them. But the rest, rejoicing and recuperation in camp were soon brought to an end as even bigger challenge was arising against the Israelites in the northern regions.

## II. THE SITUATION: A GREAT HORDE UNITED TO FIGHT ISRAEL (Vs. 1 to 5)

Let's get apprised of this new situation as we read verses 1 through 5 of chapter 11:

***1 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, 2 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, 3 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. 4 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. 5 And all these kings joined their forces and came and encamped together at the waters of Merom to fight with Israel.***

King Jabin of Hazor was a powerful man. We learn later in chapter 11 that city of Hazor was the head of all these kingdoms now gathered for war. When king Jabin heard about the swift and complete conquest of the southern regions of Canaan that the Israelites had just carried out, he realized it was now or never. If the rest of Canaan wanted to avoid the same fate, they needed to amass all the remaining unconquered armies to join together to fight Israel. And as Israel recuperated in their camp at Gilgal, a vast army described as "***a great horde, in number like the sand that is on the seashore,***" was gathering together to eliminate Israel once and for all. The vastly outnumbered Israelites with none of the latest military technology were about to come face to face with all the united forces of unconquered peoples in Canaan, fully outfitted with numerous horses and chariots.

Considering this situation from a human perspective, Israel didn't stand a chance, and you can imagine how intimidating and overwhelming it must have been for Joshua and his warriors to come over a hill and see that vast and well-equipped army. Do you think there might have been a temptation to be very afraid and run in the other direction? In the battles you've faced or are facing in your life, have you ever had this kind of experience? We're reminded here that the battles we're called to fight are real and from a human perspective often seem impossible to win. And, in fact, they are impossible to win by human strength and wisdom. But fortunately, human strength and wisdom are not the source of our victory, and Joshua was well aware of this reality and knew right where to go to figure out how to handle this great army.

### III. THE LORD GIVES THE BATTLE PLAN (V. 6)

Let's see how he proceeds in verse 6:

***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."***

We see here that Joshua had learned from his past mistakes and his first move this time was to inquire of the Lord before rushing to battle OR running in the other direction. And as Joshua inquired of the Lord, the Lord laid out the battle plan. He started by telling Joshua to actively reject the temptation to be afraid. This was a choice Joshua would need to make. He could spend his time thinking about how huge and well-equipped the enemy was and imagining all the worst outcomes and picturing the Israelite army slaughtered on the battlefield. Or he could refuse to go there in his mind and instead focus on God's promises and on putting into action God's instructions about how to proceed.

What were God's promises? Well, from last week, God had promised to fight for Israel and to give all their enemies into their hands as they followed him into battle. And in verse 6, God gave Joshua another promise to focus rather than his fear: he promised that the very next day he himself would give that gigantic army, slain, to Israel. And what were God's instructions about how to proceed? "***You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire.***" To put fear

behind and defeat this impossibly large and well-equipped army, Joshua would need to reject fear, trust God's promises, and put God's battle plan into action.

And God calls each of us to do the same things in our battles. From Joshua's experience here, we're reminded of two essential truths that apply to our own battles and fears. First of all, communicating with the Lord and receiving his battle plan prior to entering the battle is the key to winning the battle. We should never rush into a battle without consulting the Lord and considering what his plan and purpose is for that battle and if it's a battle he wants us to fight. Knowing his Word inside and out will help keep us on target with his purposes and battle plans and continual prayer before and during the battle will keep us dependent on him and able to hear from him as we go.

Secondly, God calls each of us to actively reject fear and he shows us how to do it. We do it by refusing to dwell on the "what ifs." This is a choice we have to make and it usually requires great effort to not go down that road. God calls us to instead, actively dwell on and believe his promises that he is actively fighting for us, that he is the source of our victory, not us, and that he will give us what we need as we take courageous action in obedience to his Word. Getting active in doing things to carry out what we know God wants us to do is a key strategy in defeating fear and despair and the enemy's lies. If we're just sitting around thinking all the time and imagining worse case scenarios, we'll lose the battle before it even begins.

Well, God commanded Joshua to hamstring the horses and burn the chariots. So what does it mean to hamstring a horse? A little research informed me that to hamstring horses "...made them ineffective for battle, useful only as plow or pack animals" (*Satellite Bible Atlas*). Another source said that "to 'hock' or 'hamstring' a horse was to cut the sinew in the back legs so as to render the animal incapable of speed" (*Christiancourier.com*). You horse lovers out there are probably cringing and wondering why God would do that to those poor horses! We'll have to trust this one to God and his wisdom. But clearly God had an important purpose in it. Hamstringing their horses and burning their chariots would prevent any further use of the horses and chariots to wage war against the Israelites.

It's also interesting to notice that God didn't want the Israelites to take the horses and chariots to use for their upcoming battles. Wouldn't they have been better

equipped to do battle with future enemies if they had horses and chariots? Well, this reminds us again that God doesn't want his people depending on earthly techniques and methods for gaining victory over their enemies. He didn't want the Israelites relying on the latest military technology as they continued to take the Promised Land. Instead, he wanted them to rely on him alone to guide them through their battles and bring the victory. As David later wrote in Psalm 20, verse 7:

***Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.***

#### **IV. JOSHUA CARRIES OUT THE LORD'S BATTLE PLAN (Vs. 7 to 15)**

Let's move on now to verses 7 through 15, where we see Joshua putting fear behind and courageously implementing the Lord's battle plan. Beginning in verse 7:

***7 So Joshua and all his warriors came suddenly against them by the waters of Merom and fell upon them. 8 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. 9 And Joshua did to them just as the Lord said to him: he hamstringed their horses and burned their chariots with fire. 10 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. 11 And they struck with the sword all who were in it, devoting them to destruction; there was none left that breathed. And he burned Hazor with fire. 12 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. 13 But none of the cities that stood on mounds did Israel burn, except Hazor alone; that Joshua burned. 14 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. 15 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.***

Joshua and his warriors rejected fear as commanded by the Lord and engaged in battle exactly according to the Lord's plan. And the Lord brought the victory as promised. As we look at the layout of verses 7 through 9, it's interesting to notice how they exactly parallel what the Lord had just spoken to Joshua. First, the Lord had told Joshua to put fear behind him. We read in verse 7 that Joshua and his warriors came suddenly against them and fell upon them. I'd say they'd left fear behind, wouldn't you?

Second, the Lord had promised to give the enemy into the hand of Israel, and we read in verse 8 that the Lord gave them into the hand of Israel, allowing them to strike them and chase them until there were none remaining. The Lord kept his word as he always does. And finally, the Lord had instructed Joshua to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots. We read in verse 9 that Joshua did exactly that. The Lord's instructions were obeyed completely and his promises were fulfilled perfectly. As God's people took courageous and obedient action flowing from their trust in him, God provided them with everything they needed to win the battle decisively and completely.

Look at verse 15 again for a moment. It sums up for us so well the secret of Joshua's success in battle:

***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.***

And in verse 9:

***...Joshua did to them just as the LORD said to him...***

And in verse 12:

***...just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded.***

Obedience to God and his Word doesn't get much more complete than that, does it? Joshua had made his mistakes in the past and I'm sure he still made some in the future. But in this great war Joshua demonstrated that he had taken the time to study and know and immerse himself in God's Word and was fully committed to following it completely. Joshua had studied and absorbed and internalized God's guidebook: the terms of God's covenant given through Moses and his instructions about how to take the Promised Land and carry out his judgment on the people in the land. ***He left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses.*** That could only be possible if he was living and breathing God's Word... reading, studying, memorizing, meditating on, and applying it to his life and daily choices.

Now some of you who've joined us in the middle of our Joshua study could be troubled by how God commanded the Israelites to devote all the people in the land to destruction. If so, I'd encourage you to go to our website and read the sermon text of one of my Joshua messages called, "Devoted." It will help you understand why God had decreed this kind of judgment on the people in the land of Canaan. Suffice it to say for now, that God had given these people hundreds of years to turn from their great wickedness and sin and had actually held off judgment for a long time until their sin reached such a level that he could wait no longer to carry it out. We'll talk about this a little bit more as we look at our final verses for today.

#### **V. ISRAEL FIGHTS TO REST THROUGH CONNECTED OBEDIENCE (Vs. 16 to 23)**

Let's read in verses 16 through 23 the results of this great war and the rest God brought to the land as his people fought courageously in connected obedience. Picking up in verse 16:

***16 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 17 from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, as far as Baal-gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. And he captured all their kings and struck them and put them to death. 18 Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. 19 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. 20 For 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. 21 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 Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua devoted them to destruction with their cities. 22 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. 23 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.***

We get a very expansive picture in these verses of what God brought about as Joshua and the Israelites fought a courageous war in dependence on him and obedience to his commands. Listen to this summing up of what God accomplished as his people followed him through several years of vigorous warfare:

- 1) Joshua took ALL that land;
- 2) Joshua captured ALL their kings and put them to death;
- 3) The Israelites took them ALL in battle;
- 4) Joshua cut off the Anakim, the giants, and devoted them to destruction with their cities; - *Those giants who had frightened the Israelites into refusing to enter Promised Land 40 years earlier, were easily dealt with by the power of God.*
- 5) Joshua gave the land for an inheritance to Israel;
- 6) The land had rest from war.

Those are some pretty impressive results, aren't they? But notice that these things didn't happen instantaneously. God's people didn't just pray and then watch God send down fire and brimstone to clear out the land for them. Instead he called them to engage in battle with him...vigorous, challenging, risky warfare lasting for many years. We're told that Joshua waged war a long time with those kings. Later information in the book of Joshua allows us to estimate that it took 5 to 7 years for all this to happen. This reminds us as well that victory in our battles is rarely instantaneous. Instead, it takes perseverance and endurance and

patience requiring us to trust God, continually seek his wisdom, and obey his Word even when it seems too hard.

The description given in the text of the land taken by the Israelites at this time shows us that they had conquered a very large portion of the land promised to them by God. In chapter 12, we'll get a synopsis of the lands still remaining to be conquered, but clearly the Israelites fighting in the power of God had made incredible progress and had not been defeated by any of the kings or cities they had come against. And only one city during all that time had chosen to surrender to God and his people, rather than fight against them...the city of Gibeon, inhabited by Hivites. All the rest had chosen to fight rather than surrender. You probably noticed that it was the Lord himself who caused this to happen. Verse 20 tells us 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."*** The time for repentance and receiving God's mercy had passed...the door was shut...all that remained was the pouring out of God's judgment for the great sin in the land and the Lord hardened their hearts so he could carry it out.

May this be a wake-up call to anyone here today who is still hiding from or fighting against God, refusing his offer of mercy through repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ's work on the cross. God has gone to the greatest lengths imaginable to make it possible for each of us to receive his mercy instead of his judgment for our sin. He desires to show each of us mercy. Scripture says so. That desire to show us mercy motivated him to send his only Son, Jesus, to live a completely obedient life and die on the cross to pay the penalty we each deserve for our sin. This enabled a holy and just God to show mercy and grant forgiveness to those who will simply own up to their sin and cry out for his mercy, believing in Jesus Christ as their only Savior and Lord.

God has been relentlessly and patiently offering this free gift of his mercy through Christ for thousands of years now. But let's never forget that there will be a day when that offer of mercy is gone, when all that's left is the carrying out of judgment on those who've rejected his offer. It will be too late when we die and it will be too late when that final day of God's judgment comes in the last days. The Lord will again harden hearts and the opportunity to receive his mercy

through Christ will be withdrawn. Don't let that happen to you. If that's where you are, talk to me today about getting right with God through Jesus.

Well, let's look back at verse 23, as we wrap up this section. In this verse we get a final summary statement of what God had accomplished as Joshua and the Israelites fought with him in connected obedience:

- 1) Joshua took the whole land that the LORD had outlined through Moses;
- 2) Joshua gave the whole land for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments;
- 3) The land had rest from war.

Aaah...rest at last. After years of fighting for it, God gave the people some much needed rest from war. Joshua had spent the time to know and fully understand the terms of God's covenant and his instructions for conquering the Promised Land, and he had made every effort to follow them completely. And as he remained connected to the Lord and following his instructions, he led the Israelites to that beautiful rest God had promised. This was an earthly rest from war here in Joshua chapter 11, but it points to an even better and enduring rest...a rest that's been available to all the people of God throughout history, but that's even more profoundly available today to those who've come to new life through Jesus and now have God's Holy Spirit living inside them...a rest for our souls.

## **VI. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION**

Sadly, the Israelites rest in the Promised Land didn't last in the long-term. During Joshua's remaining life, the land experienced an unprecedented period of rest from war. Why? Because God's people as a whole were seeking him, trusting him and walking in his ways. They were paying attention to the Lord's guidebook and seeking to live their lives by it. Joshua as leader set the example and he confronted people when they veered off the path. But after Joshua's death, people began to forget and go astray from God's ways...they strayed off the path to rest. There were many ups and downs throughout Israel's subsequent history...times when Israel's leaders were seeking the Lord and leading the people to live by God's guidebook and times when God was ignored and disobeyed and great upheaval and war came on the land. Eventually, things got so bad that the

Lord allowed Assyria and Babylon to conquer Israel and Judah because of their disobedience and worship of other gods. But prior to this conquering the prophet Jeremiah had boldly proclaimed how God's people could return to the rest God wanted to give them. These are the familiar words from Jeremiah 6:16 that the Lord told Jeremiah to tell the people:

***16 Thus says the Lord: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls."***

What's was God's message to his people? Do you want rest for your souls? Know my Word...seek it out and understand it...and then walk in it. This is the same message we see displayed in the book of Joshua and especially chapter 11. Joshua showed us that *knowing and courageously obeying God and his Word is the only certain path to rest*. And we can only do this in dependence on God. Do you want rest for your soul?...A rest that can be found even in the middle of active warfare and even when battle outcomes are not what we had hoped for? There's only one path that leads to that kind of rest. It's the path of connected and courageous obedience to God and his Word.

What does connected and courageous obedience look like in our lives today? It looks like you talking to God throughout each day, praising him and asking for his wisdom, guidance and strength in everything you do. It looks like you reading and studying his Word on a daily basis and being willing to believe and obey it by the power of the Spirit. It looks like you actively rejecting Satan's lies and temptations to fear and despair, choosing instead to believe God's truth and get busy living it out and carrying out his purposes. It looks like you accepting whatever challenges God has allowed into your life and allowing God to determine what victory will look like for you. It looks like you connected to Jesus Christ and allowing him to carry the weight and give you what you need moment-by-moment to accomplish his will.

What's the biggest enemy of living in God's rest?...*a hard, stubborn heart of unbelief*. Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 make it very clear that a hard heart of unbelief, which is exposed through our disobedience to God and his Word, is what prevents us from entering God's rest. Hebrews 4, verses 7 through 12 sums it up well for us:

**7... "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. 9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, 10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. 11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**

The word of God is living and active and powerful and learning to believe it and live it out by God's power is the only path to rest for your soul. Do you believe that today and does it show in your daily habits and life? Don't harden your heart to God and his Word like the Israelites later did. Don't neglect it and forget it. Don't live in the disobedience that comes from refusing to know and believe God's Word. Fight, strive, as you call continually on Jesus, to reject unbelief and live out God's Word. Jesus will conquer your unbelief and guide you to his rest as call on him and learn to walk in his ways. Draw near to him. Seek him. Come to him. Abide in him. He says to each of us in Matthew 11:28-30:

**28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."**

He's the only one that can conquer our unbelief and teach us how to live in the rest that only comes from courageously obeying God and his Word.

## SERMON APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

**Read Joshua 11, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read. Look at the surrounding verses, take your time and talk to God as you read and meditate on it. Think through the following, writing notes and thoughts and looking up related Scriptures as needed:**

Write down from the passage or from what was shared in the sermon: 1) a truth that stands out to you; 2) anything you believe God is showing you or telling you personally through it; 3) any related Scripture that comes to mind; 4) any questions you have.

Have you ever faced an “enemy” in your own life that you wouldn’t have been able to defeat apart from the Lord’s power? Describe the situation and what happened. What evidence did you observe of the Lord fighting the battle with you?

Describe your daily communication with the Lord. What’s going well and what would you like to see improve and change? What are some ideas you have for improving your communication with the Lord?

Read Jeremiah 6:6-19. What are God's instructions about finding rest for our souls? Why didn't the Israelites find God's rest?

Read Hebrews 4:7-16. What are some key truths about God's rest you can glean from these verses? What role does God's Word play in finding rest?

Share an example of a way God has changed your thinking and actions through his Word. What are some of your struggles with reading God's Word regularly and actually putting it into practice?

**Write down any other thoughts, notes or applications below:**