

JOSHUA

Lesson 15 - Chapters 10 and 11

Joshua 10 is a story told on many levels. It is, on the surface level, the story of the conquest by Joshua of the southerly part of the Land of Canaan. On another level it is the story of God's faithfulness to do what He has promised He would do for Israel: defeat the enemy ahead of Israel's army thus assuring possession of the Promised Land by His covenant people. On yet another level it demonstrates what happens when one is fully obedient to the Lord, when one does not fear the obstacles that the world throws in our way of attempting to carry out the Lord's commands, and that victory is always costly and only rarely a smooth road.

As we read Joshua we must, therefore, observe what happens in the context of not only the actual history of Israel being retold but also the much larger and more important never changing God-principles that are demonstrated in the process.

Before we get back into the direct exegesis of Joshua, I would like to take just a moment to add another tidbit to the ongoing dialogue I have had with you since that first day (several years ago) that we began to study Torah together. And that dialogue is about how to study the Bible, regard its words, and extract its meaning and principles. This directly relates to Joshua because it is important that we look at Joshua from the proper perspective if we are to glean from it what was intended.

It has become popular to study and debate the merits and principles of the Bible as though it is a book of sayings or Proverbs from beginning to end. Proverbs are the ancient Hebrew equivalent of sound bites. Proverbs are truths told in short, very general and often greatly oversimplified terms so they are easier to remember. Don't forget: the Bible was originally structured to be a spoken, not a written, word so memorization was central to its accurate transmission from generation to generation.

In order to make my point today, I will use this illustration: Proverbs are somewhat akin in their purpose and use to the individual bones of the human body, an adult having 206 of them. A single bone taken alone and examined is indeed valid and has importance; but it is only truly useful and meaningful, it's function and purpose is only fully understood, when it is viewed as a united member of the body and in its proper place. One single bone (set aside and viewed in isolation) is also not very indicative of the overall nature and substance of a human being to which it is part, even though that single bone can give us hints and clues.

While an entire skeleton (all 206 bones in their proper place) gives a real and discernable shape of a human being, yet a skeleton of it's own is not the full picture, nor can it support life.

As in the dramatic vision of Ezekiel in the Valley of Dry Bones, by itself skeleton bones form an inert framework and nothing more. It's not until we add internal organs, a brain, ligaments, muscles, flesh and our outer sensory organs (and then that supernatural breath of God) that we finally arrive with a complete and functioning person.

Further while a complete skeleton indeed gives us a general and standard shape of a human, the devil (as they say) is in the details. I dare say that if all of us in this room were suddenly reduced to nothing but our skeletons we would lose the ability to identify even our own spouses or children among us because it is the millions of subtleties of what grows upon these boney frames that makes us recognizable to one another and operational for the purposes we were created.

Just as I have metaphorically compared Biblical Proverbs as individual skeletal bones, so in Christian discussion and debate it is that individual phrases and verses plucked from our Bibles have become regarded in the same way as Proverbs (sayings that can be taken as is, without context, and as a complete and final thought). While there certainly is truth in those individual Scriptural phrases and verses to try and draw too much of a conclusion from one or two, or to try and regard a verse or phrase as sufficient of itself to stand alone, is a dangerous and self-deceiving activity.

Or more to the point at hand, it is all too common in our Judeo-Christian struggles over theological principles that we like to play the never-ending game of, "my verse is better than your verse". Take any given subject and usually we can find contradiction and enormous differences in the Bible IF we essentially make a verse or two into a Proverb and then hold it up against another. Using my skeleton illustration: how useful is it for us to argue, "my finger bone is a much truer picture of what a human being looks like and how he functions than your toe bone"? In fact how much can we actually discern if we were to take an entire hand bone structure and try to extrapolate only from it what a full human skeleton looks like? Because I could just as easily grab an entire foot bone structure and argue that IT better represents the human form. Who would be right?

The Lord was very wise and merciful in the way He gave us His Word of truth. He didn't show us ONE bone and tell us that this all we need to know, or that with this one bone all the others aren't really needed to properly define who He is, who we are, and the relationship and plan He has for us. He also didn't throw the 206 bones in a pile and say, "you figure out how to put it together". And thankfully He didn't give us a boxful of internal organs, another with our skin suit in it, a container full of ligaments and bucket with our sensory organs and say, "use your imaginations".

Rather He built principle upon principle in a precise order that He fit together just so, and then He gave us examples of the meaning and effect of those principles at work, and how they operated, connected and combined with other of His principles in order to form a more complete picture. By means of divine inspiration in the stories of real people in real situations in the Bible, Yehoveh told us what it was all working towards, and even gave us an example of the lifestyle we should lead while the Lord was unfolding His plan. He told us what pleased Him and what didn't, what works and what doesn't work in His economy.

If we want to actually understand the Bible we must look at it as a whole, not a collection of pieces that could be connected in any number of ways or occur in any order. We also cannot separate out a tiny piece or two and have it stand as representative of the whole. Nor can we intentionally throw away or ignore bits and pieces that, when looked at individually and without regard to the whole, seem to be redundant or even contradict other bits and pieces.

So I think we have come to a point after all this time of studying together that I want to say this to you in the strongest possible terms: don't challenge one another based on one or two verses that you so prefer to all others that for you it's the final word on any given subject. It is this mindset that has led to the concept of doctrinal based (as opposed to Scriptural based) Christianity, and the result is myriads of competing denominations. The Bible is not structured that way nor was it ever intended to be used that way. Even the extensive Law of Moses that the Lord set out with a list of 613 negative and positive commands doesn't give a full enough picture, so Moses gave Israel his sermon on the mount in Moab, and the Father gave us many examples (in the form of stories and narratives) to follow or in some cases avoid, and He developed patterns so we could discern whether what we were thinking (about what He was saying) actually fit His intentions.

There are no shortcuts to learning or discussing God's principles; and tossing isolated versus back and forth at one another in order to defend or to uphold some doctrine we have adopted is not useful. Rather it is essential that once a person has become a Believer that he earnestly studies God's Word beginning at the beginning with the only preconceived notion being that it is the truth. It is vital that we assemble the whole truth of God in the order it was given employing all the parts and pieces and discarding none.

Let's get back to Joshua and see both the history of Israel unfold and the playing out of God's principles as they move from theory to practice.

RE-READ JOSHUA 10:15 – end

Joshua and the Israelite army soundly defeated the southern Canaanite coalition forces and the kings who headed up the defeated forces fled the scene to try and save their lives. They stole away to a place called Makkedah and hid in a cave there. But they were soon found and Joshua was informed.

Joshua was currently with the troops and their families at the semi-permanent Israelite encampment of Gilgal. So he traveled southwest to Makkedah and there ordered the 5 kings to be sealed inside they're hiding place using large rocks to cover the mouth of the cave. This jail would be guarded by some soldiers until Joshua had finished off as many of the coalition's defeated troops as he could. Priority number one was to destroy the enemy armies; dealing with the captured kings could wait.

Basically Joshua's orders of verse 19 were for Israel's forces to move rapidly and catch up to the various groups of surviving enemy soldiers; and starting at the rear of their columns, slaughter them. Israel would have divided their forces into several groups as each of these 5

armies had a different destination. The hope was that by attacking the enemy in this way, it would be like eating a stalk of celery; you start chomping at the bottom and work your way up to the tip. In other words Joshua didn't think that his various battalions of troops had time to beat the 5 armies back to their fortified cities and cut them off. Rather Israel would start attacking at the rear, as soon as they caught up to them, and move their way forward with the hope that they would fight their way to the front of the column, killing them all in the process before any particular army reached the security of their walled city. But we find out in verse 20 that while Israel got most of them, some still make it back to safety.

We don't really know how much time elapsed from when the 5-king coalition attacked Israel to when the fighting stopped and then Joshua finally dealt with the 5 kings. It could have been several weeks, even more. Although the tone of the narrative makes it seem as though this all happened in a couple of days, it's really only the typical Hebrew/OT Biblical way of recording such things. Time wasn't all that important. Exactly what happened in what order wasn't always important (but when it was, it was made quite clear).

Back in verse 15 we're told that after the main battle at Gibeon, Joshua and all of his fighting men returned to their home base of Gilgal. So it's not like the battle of Gibeon just continued on with the pursuit of the now fractured and divided enemy forces. A wonderful God-principle is in play here. After their missteps at Ai and then with making peace with Gibeon, Israel determined to obey the Lord and do it His way from then on. Thus they handily defeated the army of the 5 kings and now their reward was not only swift victory but also they were ushered safely back to home and family. They returned to their camp where they had wholeness, safety, and health. Battle was not Israel's natural state that God intended for them; shalom was their natural state. Obedience brought them more quickly back to the goal of safety and security and peace, and this as a reward and gift from the Lord.

Yet we, as modern day Believers, must learn a hard lesson from this; a lesson that Joshua and his fighting men learned happily sooner than later. When God says that He has already turned the enemy over to them it doesn't mean that Israel can sit in the comfort and ease of their camp, pray and praise the Lord, and just wait for the enemy to surrender. It was Israel's job to go and CLAIM that victory that the Lord had already given to them. But to claim it meant to battle for it. To claim it meant lives had to be risked, injuries endured, hardships experienced, and fears overcome. The Lord gives us fertile fields for growing food; but **we** must plant the crops and guard them from weeds and pests. God's amazing processes cause the seeds to germinate, the rains to fall, the plants to grow and the grain to ripen; but **we** have to go to the fields and harvest the results, gather and winnow it, and then prepare it for either storage or immediate consumption. God has His part; we have our part; that is the very definition of a relationship. Our part, however, is NOT to simply sit and watch as God does His part. Even at Jericho when the walls of the city fell down by supernatural command and not because of a siege, Israel was still required to crawl over the rubble and put the inhabitants of Jericho to the sword. The inhabitants would have resisted; Israel did not come out unscathed.

Victory comes at a cost even though the Lord has assured the victory. Obedience leads us to victory, disobedience leads us to defeat. Either way personal risks must be taken, and casualties will happen. To claim a victory does not mean to only sit and pray. It doesn't mean

(as it too often is practiced in the modern Church) that we raise our hands and shout with assuredness, “Lord, we claim this victory over sickness”. Or, “we claim this victory over evil”, and this is the sum total of our effort. Sitting and praying is the equivalent in Joshua of “seeking the Lord’s council”; this is but the necessary and obedient preliminary step. Asking God what to do and how to do it comes first, but after the sitting and the praying and His council is given, it is time for action. And the action can mean life-threatening challenges. It can mean fearful encounters. It can mean opening our lives for change that may or may not meet our expectations. But why would we expect divine victory to be easy and painless in this world? God’s own Son went through Hell in order to give us Heaven. But in the end, it was all victory. Our difficult task is to see it as God sees it.

After chasing the remnants of the 5 defeated armies, the Israelites once again return for some R & R. This time, though, verse 21 has the Israelite troops at Makkedah. Some scholars find this to be in conflict with the statement just 6 verses earlier when it says the Israelite troops returned to their encampment at Gilgal. I think we’re dealing with a tempest in a teapot; it was normal then, as now, to set up temporary bases as troops moved away from the home location. Gilgal was home base, Makkedah was a temporary base for the troops involved in the current foray. The bulk of Israel likely remained in Gilgal; those troops chosen to give chase to the enemy survivors had a remote base set-up at Makkedah where Joshua had decided to bivouac while waiting to deal with those 5 kings.

The end of verse 21 says that no one said a word against any of the people of Israel. What it literally says is, “**....but against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog whet his tongue**”. This is a Hebrew idiom that means that the returning troops didn’t encounter any hostility on their way back, nor upon entering the Makkedah area. None of the friends and allies of those 5 kings dared to harass Israel, and none of the residents of the city of Makkedah (the namesake and location of the cave those 5 kings were now imprisoned in) made any trouble for Israel.

The time of reckoning was at hand; Joshua ordered that the 5 kings be brought to him. What a regal parade that must have been! Imagine, the kings of Jerusalem (Jebus at this time), Hebron, Yarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon arrayed before Joshua knowing what awaited them; first humiliation then death. Joshua would use these kings to make a point; he called his officers forward, had the kings lay prostrate on the ground before Joshua and then, in turn, each of Israel’s army commanders put their foot on the necks of these kings.

I know this sounds Barbaric, but it was not about stomping on these kings’ backs or necks to cause injury. It was but a standard Middle Eastern symbol to indicate to all present just who ruled over who. For a common Israelite to put their foot on the neck of royalty was probably pretty intimidating for Joshua’s officers; kings were held high and they were greatly feared. It was commonly understood that they were MORE than human; that kings were connected to the gods and some would become gods upon their death. But at the same time it demonstrated to those who placed their foot on the neck of the kings and to all the younger officers who were present and watching, that it was Israel (and by default Israel’s God) who was superior despite the title of king that these men bestowed upon themselves. In fact Joshua needed to exhort his officers to come forward and engage in this symbolic gesture by telling

them not to be afraid or confused; which means they indeed were a bit reluctant to do this act.

Immediately thereafter Joshua had the 5 kings executed and their bodies impaled on wooden poles. Even though most versions say they were “hung on a tree”, the hanging did not mean with a rope around their necks, and the Hebrew word for tree and for wood is the same: **ets**. Rather as was customary and pictured on several old Assyrian reliefs, this meant being killed and then their lifeless bodies hung on a pole. This act of impalement was (since time immemorial) an Oriental symbolic gesture that meant the condemned person was also cursed. In fact we see the Hebrews agree with and perfectly understand the meaning of being hung (impaled) on a tree as indicating being cursed (which by definition means being cursed by a god).

CJB Deuteronomy 21:22 *"If someone has committed a capital crime and is put to death, then hung on a tree, 23 his body is not to remain all night on the tree, but you must bury him the same day, because a person who has been hanged has been cursed by God- so that you will not defile your land, which ADONAI your God is giving you to inherit.*

And this law from Deuteronomy is also why we read in verse 27 that at sunset (meaning before the current day ended) the kings' bodies were removed from their death stakes and thrown back into the same cave where they had been hiding.

This understanding about the correlation between being impaled on a pole (a tree) and being cursed by God of course didn't change much over time. Listen to Paul in Galatians:

CJB Galatians 3:13 *The Messiah redeemed us from the curse pronounced in the Torah by becoming cursed on our behalf; for the Tanakh says, "Everyone who hangs from a stake comes under a curse*

It didn't matter that the form of the wood that a condemned person hung from was shaped like a pole or a cross, or whether they were impaled through their bodies or impaled through their hands and feet like Yeshua. The tradition was that impalement on a wooden device indicated that God ALSO cursed the condemned person.

Verse 28 explains that once the execution ceremony was completed the Israelites attacked the city of Makkedah (where part of the Israelite army was currently encamped) and killed its king. There were 7 cities located in the general region of Makkedah; Makkedah proper, Livnah, Lachish, Gezer, Eglon, Hebron, and Debir. In turn each of these cities were attacked, and various descriptions are given as to exactly how each city was treated. The long and short of it was that the people were killed, the possessions and livestock were taken as spoils for Israel, and as a result a large portion of the southern half of Canaan was now under Israeli control.

Part of the reason that so much ink is devoted to going through the treatment of each of the cities, one by one, and explaining what happened is to emphasize that Joshua and his men did exactly as they had been instructed by the Lord through Moses. Quick reminder: the instructions had to do with the protocol God established for Holy War. And in Holy War ALL the spoils of war belonged to the Lord. Since it all belonged to Him He determined what of the

spoils would remain as devoted to Him, and what the people of Israel could take for personal use. That which was devoted to the Lord became (literally) holy property; that which Israel could possess became de-sanctified (non-holy) and thus it was safe for Israel to appropriate.

The first city taken by Israel, Jericho, was a special case because it was the firstfruits of the people and property of the Land of Canaan. Therefore the Lord kept everything from Jericho for Himself. Keeping everything means (generally speaking) that everything was deemed as holy, and thus destroyed and/or burned up. However beginning with Ai (the 2nd city taken), we see that only the structures and the enemy people were to be God's spoils; pretty much everything else the Israelites could have. But the only way something could become God's, and given to God for His exclusive use, was for it to be destroyed and usually burned to ashes.

So the point in the final 12 or 13 verses of Joshua 10 is to show that Israel had learned their lesson, understood that God meant what He said concerning the laws of Holy War (the Law of Herem), and so scrupulously obeyed those laws in the conquering of southern Canaan.

However we'll see a heavy implication in chapter 11 that Israel may NOT have destroyed and burned some of those southern cities. If that is the case then they did NOT perfectly obey God despite their claim that they did. But apparently they did so well enough that the Lord did not punish them for their imperfection.

Verses 40 –43 offer a summation of the southern attack. And it outlines the area that was affected by Israel. It was from Kadesh-Barnea to the city of Gaza (yes, the Gaza we know of in the news), and then east to Gibeon. It also speaks of the land of Goshen. This is NOT the same land of Goshen that Israel lived in while in Egypt; it's just named the same (a very common occurrence).

There is much disagreement on the location of these ancient cities. So where you see them on the maps I've been showing you are approximations.

The chapter ends with Joshua and his fighting men returning to their main encampment of Gilgal, where the Tabernacle was set up and the sanctuary rituals, sacrifices, and services of the High Priest, common priests and Levites would go on for many decades.

Gilgal, then, was the original semi-permanent location for the Wilderness Tabernacle in the Land of Canaan. Many years later it would move and for many more years reside in Shiloh. What is important to grasp is that wherever the sanctuary of God was resting, there was the most important place in the Holy Lands for the people of Israel. There is where they all went for their pilgrimage festivals; there is where they went to present their sacrifices; there is where they took their firstborn sons to redeem them. When God called for a holy convocation of Israel, for decades and decades after crossing the Jordan, that place was Gilgal. It would be around 3 centuries before Jerusalem would finally take on that especially holy status by moving the priesthood and the sanctuary there to Mount Moriah.

Let's move on to Joshua 11.

READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 11 all

Just as chapter 10 was the historical and theological story of the conquering of southern Canaan, chapter 11 is the story of the conquering of the northern areas of Canaan. As is obvious by the reading, chapters 10 and 11 form one unit. The chapter division between the two probably shouldn't be there from a literary and historical viewpoint. Further, we see both a historical and theological pattern develop between these two chapters: historically we see a northern coalition of kings and their city/states formed to try and thwart the invading Israelite army from overtaking their many kingdoms, mimicking what happened in the south. And theologically we see the pattern of God instructing Joshua and promising him victory; Joshua obeying and instructing Israel; Israel obeying and thus victory is achieved by means of battle.

The chapter begins with the King of Hazor receiving intelligence of what had happened in the south, of the stunning defeat of the 5-army coalition and destruction of many major Canaanite cities and their inhabitants by the Israeli forces, and so the King of Hazor forms an alliance with the kings of Madon, Shimron, Achshaph and other kings of northern Canaan. This is a military alliance with the purpose of attacking Israel before they can gain a foothold in the northern territory.

It is interesting to me that in the recently completed southern campaign and now in the north of Canaan, it was the Canaanites who ignited the battles. They had HEARD of Israel's intentions, believed it thoroughly, and so responded with a pre-emptive strike. The question this raises is, "why did Joshua (or was it God?) wait for the enemy to strike Israel's forces before they carried out the Lord's standing order to take Canaan for its inheritance?"

I'm not sure that there is a good theological answer to this, but there is a good human behavioral answer: Israel's army and leaders were reluctant. They were in no hurry to subject themselves to war and the accompanying hardships, injury, and death. Likely a great deal of procrastination on Israel's part would have led to the Canaanite forces more thoroughly readying themselves and making it all the more difficult to route them out of their strongholds; and the Lord knew Israel well.

Further, it was really in Israel's best interests that the response of these various major city-states in Canaan was to band together and leave the relative safety and security of their fortresses to engage Israel out in the open. It kind of validates the old cliché of providing an opportunity for Israel to kill many birds with one stone.

If these various kings from all over Canaan had decided on a strategy of relying on the impenetrability of the high and thick walls, and strong defensive positions (usually these walled cities were on elevated land and hilltops) of their capital cities, the war of conquest would have gone on for much longer than it did because each and every city would have required a lengthy siege by Israel to take it. So much like as the Lord dealt with Egypt's Pharaoh, He put a hardness in the hearts of these Canaanite kings and a foolhardy arrogance in their minds, and God literally drew them out of their barricaded strongholds into a place where He could have them slain in one major stroke. The point being that not only was there a supernatural

influence exerted by Yehoveh upon Joshua and the army of God, but also upon the enemy.

This is another pattern that emerges from the Tanakh, the Old Testament, that never changes. Watch as the Lord uses this exact device, of pulling mighty armies, foolishly and arrogantly, away from their home bases and strongholds so that they may be destroyed in one decisive battle. Open your Bibles to Ezekiel 38.

READ EZEKIEL 38: 1 - 39:5

The Lord will DRAW the enemies of Israel out into the open and there they will be destroyed. Just like in the conquest of Canaan. We'll continue with Joshua chapter 11 next time.