

JOSHUA

Lesson 16 - Chapter 11

I gave you a little preview of Joshua 11 last week, and we'll begin today by re-reading the chapter in sections. We'll take a few short detours today and see some foundational theological principles emerge within these historical accounts that form the basis for the book of Joshua. Further we're going to review and discuss some fundamentals for understanding what we're reading in our Bibles and how to place it in a cultural context so that we can get the most from it in our modern times.

Open your Bibles to Joshua chapter 11.

RE-READ JOSHUA 11:1 – 7

After warring with the kings and potentates who dominated the southern portion of the Land of Canaan, Joshua now does the same with those leaders who dominate the northlands. It is the powerful and influential Yavin King of Hazor (Hatzor) who calls his neighboring kingdoms to arms to confront the invading Israelite horde. As we discussed last week this follows the pattern of the warfare for the south of Canaan (Joshua chapter 10) in that it was the Canaanite kings who precipitated the conflict as opposed to Joshua and his Israelite army attacking the cities that belonged to the Canaanite coalition's kings. Further we read Ezekiel chapter 38 and the first few verses of 39 that show this same pattern of warfare being used in a time that lies ahead for those of us living today, in a battle better known as Armageddon. And the pattern is that the armies of those nations that do not wish to submit to the authority of God, and who will determine that Israel must be wiped out, will leave behind their homelands, fortresses and strongholds and move their armies into Israel (the Valley of Jezreel) to attack the forces led by Messiah. This will prove to be as foolish and full of destructive bravado then as it did long ago for the kings of (first) the south, then the north, of the Land of Canaan.

And the reason these various Canaanite kings will do this foolhardy act of leaving positions of strength to come out into the open to fight Israel (and thus losing the military advantage of defending nearly impregnable cities from behind thick stone walls) is because God has supernaturally drawn them into doing it. The Lord did to the Canaanites what He will do to the leaders of the world's nations in a time not so far ahead of us: He will harden their hearts just as He did with Pharaoh. God will fill them with vengeance and rage and cause them to commit to a suicidal stratagem of war. These nations will be unable to resist, pulled as a moth to a flame to their inevitable destruction at the hand of the Lord's hosts.

Hatzor (Hazor) was the prince of kingdoms and royal cities in northern Canaan in Joshua's era, just as Jebus (Jerusalem) was the prince of the southern Canaanite kingdoms. Hazor had been a tremendously large, powerful, influential city for at least 1000 years before Joshua and the Israelite army had arrived in the Promised Land. Even though the oldest layer of civilization at Hazor has yet to be reached, already the godfather of Hebrew archaeologists, Yadin, has dated the lowest strata of the ruins of Hatzor to 2700 B.C.

Since we have and will continue to incorporate matters of archaeology in Torah Class to aid our understanding of these ancient Bible times, let me remind you about layers and strata. Cities were built, destroyed, re-built, destroyed, re-built again over and over for millennia. Most of the time these cities were rebuilt directly upon the rubble of the previous one that was destroyed. There are many practical reasons for doing this: usually a major city was located on important highways and trade routes so to move it somewhere else made no sense. A major city was located near a dependable water source sufficient in volume to serve the needs of a substantial number of people, and these could not just be found any old place. Often as not it was the plentiful nature of a water source that was the original reason a city was founded there. Since city dwellings and walls were invariably made of a combination of mud brick and stone, when the city was destroyed the building material may have been knocked down but much of it was fully reusable. So rather than go through the arduous task of moving heavy stones several thousand feet from one location to another, or going through the slow and laborious procedure of hand-shaping new stones needed to rebuild, they simply recycled what was already there.

Therefore, over the centuries, these ancient cities found themselves sitting atop literally mountains of rubble and history. Beneath these cities were multiple layers of the previous civilizations, looking much like a cross-section of a chocolate layer cake. The manmade mountains that formed the foundations for the most recent cities were given an official name: tels. Archaeologists carefully dig down through these accumulated layers and as they uncover each one there are usually plentiful artifacts like pottery, skeletal remains, clothing, weaponry and so on that enable them to get some of idea of the time period that particular layer began and ended in destruction. The technical name for these layers is strata.

Obviously the deeper down one digs the older the remains are in relation to the ones that are above it. This is NOT a phenomenon this is only in Israel or the Middle East; it is worldwide because the same reasons for rebuilding a city upon the ruins of the previous one are applicable no matter where one lives. But because of the constant warfare of the Middle East, and because it is the cradle of civilization for this planet, we find the oldest remnants of mankind's communities there. Thus Israel is littered with countless tels. Only about 5% of them have even been archaeologically excavated.

The finding and definite identification of the city of Hatzor is a recent discovery and it confirms what was written about that place in Hebrew, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian records going back 3500 years and more. Hazor was huge, complex, and vital. The city of Hazor covered an area of over 175 acres. It was the major seat of government for that region; it was a superpower of a kingdom. It was more than a mere regal city (of which there were dozens in Canaan). Therefore its king was highly regarded and his leadership accepted by his allies. So we read in

verse one that Yavin (the current king of Hatzor) sent word of the need to put aside differences and come together for war; he sent this word to Yovav king of Madon, and some other unnamed kings of the royal cities of Shimron and Akhshaf, and also to some lesser kings that ruled smaller city/states in the northern hill country. Just to demonstrate the dominance and power of the king of Hazor we find that even the kings of kingdoms in the region of the Aravah and the Shefelah heeded the call to arms. The Aravah is basically the long winding valley that follows the Jordan River from the Sea of Galilee (also called the Kinnareth in the Old Testament) to the Dead Sea. The Shefelah is the foothills that transitions to the coastal plain as we move west from the mountains of Canaan to the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Canaanites from the east and the west composed of Amorites, Hittites, Perrizites, and Hivites also responded to Yavin's call to arms and joined the enormous northern military alliance quickly formed in order to fight Israel.

There were so many soldiers in this alliance that verse 4 says they were as the sands of the seashore. This is a good point for me to remind you that the Bible contains many common sayings and idioms and expressions; the Scriptural words saying that there were as many enemy soldiers as there were grains of sand on the seashore is not meant literally; its only an expression of a huge number. Remember this as you find that same expression elsewhere in the Bible.

Continuing on this little detour: many have asked me if we are to take the Bible literally and/or do I teach the Bible literally and I always tell them, "yes". But it's necessary to define what the term "literally" means when referring to Bible study. I promise you that no Bible translation you have ever read is literal if literal means a direct word-for-word transliteration from the original language because much of the time it would make no sense since different languages locate their verbs and adjectives in different places within a sentence in relation to their nouns, or prepositions are not employed at all, or the tenses we rely on are not at all the way the ancients thought of them. Latin, for instance, tends to group verbs and adjectives altogether and then the reader must sort out which noun each verb or adjective is referring to. Hebrew does not have a past or future tense, instead it has perfect and imperfect and it is not the same as present and future. Most languages contain words that do not have direct word-for-word equivalents in other languages, but instead are unique for their culture. For instance the word **shalom** in Hebrew is variously translated in our English Bibles as grace, or peace, or wellbeing, and a few other one-word meanings. But in fact **shalom** is a concept more than a mere word and there is no direct single English word equivalent that can express the concept of shalom. Further just like in English or any other advanced language Hebrew uses poetry, hyperbole, simile, and makes abundant use of metaphors, all of which we find in the Bible. The Bible uses a literary form called parable as well and so when interpreting the Bible we must recognize which kind of these many literary devices is used by the author in any given passage otherwise we can get way off track in determining its meaning.

Not long ago my wife and were traveling in the car and she wondered out loud if we could stop at a certain restaurant (one which I wasn't particularly thrilled about) but being the good husband I agreed and jokingly replied, "whatever floats your boat". That is a very common American expression that she certainly understood, and it generally means that if it makes you happy, let's do it. But if this conversation was written down and translated for use in a

different language within a different culture my response to my wife would be rather confusing to the reader. What does eating have to do with boats floating? It's similar when reading the Bible.

Too often well meaning pastors and Bible teachers will look at Biblical Hebrew idioms, expressions, poetry, parable, prophecy, and other ancient literary structures and make no distinctions among them and this can lead to the strangest doctrines. So when I say that I teach the Bible literally that means that I research to find the literal MEANING and INTENT that the author had in mind within his culture at the time of his writing it. And for us that means understanding primarily the Hebrew culture at its various points in history as it evolved and changed over a period of about 1400 years (the culture of Abraham looked very different than the culture of Jesus); 1400 years is the time frame over which the various books of the Bible (from Genesis to Revelation) were actually written.

Back to our study. The combined military forces of all these northern Canaanite kings set out to meet Israel not just with a sea of soldiers, but with advanced weaponry that Israel did not possess: horses and chariots. Israel had faced such weapons when Pharaoh came after them and now they are going up against them again. Headquarters of the northern forces was established at a place called the waters of Merom, also known as Merom springs. There is no consensus on exactly where this place is located although the latest scholarship generally agrees that likely it was very near to Hazor.

When we understand the enormity of the enemy army bent on turning Israel back, and on the frightful weapons at their disposal, we can certainly better understand the Lord's admonition to Joshua, "don't be afraid...." Anyone with any comprehension of what kind of formidable foe the Israelites were about to face would acknowledge that from a human, earthly standpoint fear was a reasonable response. But when the Lord God says that this enemy will be handed over to you, dead, then one must decide whether to believe God or your own eyes. The Lord issued Joshua this one, recorded instruction: hamstring their horses and burn their chariots.

Hamstringing an animal is as one might envision it; it is literally the maiming of the animal by cutting the vital tendon called the hamstring that runs the length of the back of its leg. There was no repairing it, and the beast was totally disabled. By disabling the horses the chariots became useless, and then by burning the idle chariots one of the primary weapons of the enemy could not soon be put back into service.

Israel wasted no time and so rather than wait to be attacked, they suddenly moved against the northern coalition at their headquarters at Merom, and apparently the enemy was a bit surprised at such a bold tactic by Joshua.

Let's see what happened. Turn again to Joshua chapter 11.

RE-READ JOSHUA 11: 8 – 15

Israel won in a route. And of course as the enemy saw themselves being annihilated, each

king's army disengaged from the battle and began to race towards home and the hoped for safety of their particular fortified city. Greater Tzidon was the capital of the Phoenicians at that time, located along the Mediterranean Sea, and the term "Greater" simply indicated that it was the royal city among all the other cities of the Phoenician kingdom. Naturally the enemy headed there with Israel giving chase because the royal city was where the army headquarters was always located. Where Mitzpah is located is unknown, primarily because there were many towns with this same name. Mitzpah means "watchtower" and every city and most villages had watchtowers.

Displaying obedience to the Lord, Joshua obeyed God's command and whenever his men captured a chariot with its horses the soldiers maimed the horse and burned the chariot. I think that we should view the maiming of the horses and destruction of the chariots in three levels as opposed to only a battlefield tactic. First is that undoubtedly the Lord wanted to deprive the enemy of their major battlefield weapons platform. Chariots were key to the northern coalitions' strategy. And by destroying the chariots not only was their plan undone but also they would not be able to rapidly regroup and thereby present a continuing major threat to Israel who had no kind of weaponry to counter these fearsome iron chariots that could ride into the enemy and break up any kind of tactical battlefield formation.

Second is that the Lord did NOT want the Israeli army to have these chariots and horses for themselves. Think about: logic says that if Israel had acquired the trained horses and chariots from the enemy, it would have been rather easy to capture some soldiers who knew how to operate and use them, have those soldiers train Joshua's men, and then Israel could have employed this advanced weaponry themselves. The problem is that Israel, being as human as anyone else, would certainly have done what they did in the recent past and decide that they didn't need to consult God concerning upcoming battles with the Canaanites; with such powerful weaponry as chariots at their disposal (something that only a handful of Canaanite kings possessed) it was obvious they could probably just overwhelm any enemy. The Lord was preventing Israel from dismissing Him and instead relying on their own power and strategies, which was a certain path to defeat but a trap they fell into all too often.

But third and most important it seems to me that in declaring that the horses and chariots were to be destroyed and/or made unusable by men, God was declaring the ban upon these items. The pattern seems too obvious to ignore. In other words the Lord declared under the Holy War provisions that the chariots and horses were spoils of war that HE was separating out and keeping for Himself. The horses and chariots became God's holy property and thus neither Israel nor anyone else would be allowed to have them. And how is holy property generally delivered into God's hands? It is destroyed. I see the matter of the destruction of the horses and chariots as an outcome of the Law of Herem, The Law of the Ban, and far less as merely an excellent battle strategy as was some of Israel hiding in ambush as in the battle for Ai.

Once the battle was largely decided Joshua turned back and captured the crown jewel of the north, Hatzor. He killed King Yavin, executed all of Hazor's inhabitants, and set fire to the city. That's pretty straightforward and was done according to the Lord's instructions given years earlier to Moses; but then the next two verses (12 and 13) are frankly confusing. And there is much scholarly debate over just what we are to make of it.

In verse 12 we're told that Joshua went on to capture and destroy the cities of the other unnamed northern Canaanite kings, and kill all the cities' residents, but then in verse 13 we're told that he did NOT destroy any city that had been built on a tel. If we take this in its plainest meaning it seems to say that only NEW cities that had NOT been built upon the ruins of previous cities were put under the ban; in other words the typical city that HAD been built on a tel was spared except for Hazor, which was destroyed.

Now I have to tell you this is very problematic, and I'll explain why in a moment.

Verse 14 once again demonstrates that while the enemy cities and they're inhabitants were set apart and devoted for God as ban (as His holy property), the other spoils like gold and silver, cooking vessels, weapons, food, clothing, and so on went to the Israelite soldiers and their families as war booty. Then verse 15 says that because of the orders Moses had given to Joshua, Joshua followed them accordingly and thus was obedient to God. Here's where the problem lies.

When we get into chapters 12 and 13 we're going to find reference that more than implies that indeed Joshua did NOT destroy all the cities he captured, of either the north or the south of Canaan. Yet clearly God told Moses, and Moses told Joshua, that ALL cities of the Land of Canaan were to be destroyed, and that no mercy was to be shown, because they were all under the ban (no exceptions). We find these instructions in Numbers and Deuteronomy in various forms some that deal with the cities of Canaan, others that deal with cities outside of Canaan whereby total destruction is only warranted when the enemy refuses to make peace.

Here's the thing: despite the words that Joshua obeyed all the words of God to Moses, we see that this must be some kind of overview and generalization because clearly that is not the case IF perfection is the standard. Joshua did not do precisely everything commanded, and we'll find examples later in Judges, and even in Chronicles and Samuel that address this. Further HAD Joshua annihilated all the inhabitants of Canaan as instructed, the realities that face Israel then would have been exceedingly different that what they were. They would not have found themselves facing the same enemy over and over again. Further modern day Israel would not STILL be facing many of the enemy that Joshua was supposed to have eradicated.

I liken the sense of verse 15 (that says Joshua completely obeyed Moses) to the sorts of pronouncements we see in God's favor of King David when He says that David is a man after God's own heart. Yet we also see David do some of the most heinous things, and commit very serious sins. This plays very much into my approach to God's word whereby it is dangerous and misleading to play the game of, "my verse is better than your verse". There is simply not a single, standalone verse that overrides all others. We cannot pluck verses out of the context of either their chapter, book, or even their place and purpose in the Bible as a whole and hold them up as the final word on the subject. They are pieces of a much bigger picture. They are directions to knitting together a pattern; or as we get to the NT especially the verses of Biblical texts become demonstrations and illustrations and fulfillments of the ongoing, long ago established God-patterns.

Joshua's job was to conquer Canaan, destroy all the existing cities, and kill all the Canaanites.

The only alternative Canaanites had was to pack up and leave Canaan, or to do as Rahab did at Jericho; give up allegiance to her false gods and worship only Israel's God. By doing this she was saved, and ALL Canaanites had this option open to them.

Let me remind you very carefully again God's reason WHY this particular enemy was to be erased from the face of the earth, and all vestiges of their false religions were to be eradicated; the concern was that Israel would be tempted to worship their Canaanite gods and this would, by definition, automatically incur God's destructive wrath. Israel was not allowed to compromise, and God was not about to compromise. And, of course, later books of the OT go on to chronicle Israel's growing taste for their pagan neighbors' false deities and their fascinating and tempting worship celebrations and festivals. The Lord sent His prophets to warn Israel of what He told them through Moses would happen if they went down that path, and then when Israel did not heed these warnings we read of the eventual destruction and exile of Israel from the land Yehoveh had given to them. Disobedience to the God of Israel can be subtle, and its effects can often take time to be realized. But never think that somehow the effects will not eventually be manifested.

RE-READ JOSHUA 11:16 – end

Here is a retrospective view of the conquest of the whole land. Joshua took the portions of southern Canaan that have already been described in chapter 10, and he took the Aravah (generally that long rift valley that follows the Jordan River from its outflow of the Sea of Galilee down to the input to the Dead Sea), and the mountains of Israel and the foothills that become the lowlands leading towards the Mediterranean coast. The northern extent of the conquest was to Mt. Hermon.

Part of this retrospect helps us to see the political and wartime realities that in such a monumental quest don't really follow a smooth road, or a timetable, or have sharply defined outcomes. We're told that Joshua fought for a long time. In other words the major battles are the ones that have been recorded, and they actually were the shortest in length of time. The longer and more protracted skirmishes and battles over small pieces of territory, against lesser kings and local potentates, would go on for an indefinite period of time. In fact this is exactly as the Lord said it would be.

CJB Exodus 23:29 I will not drive them out from before you in one year, which would cause the land to become desolate and the wild animals too many for you. 30 I will drive them out from before you gradually, until you have grown in number and can take possession of the land.

Our conflict with Iraq, coupled with Israel's never-ending battle to exist surrounded by the world of Islam, who doesn't want it there, is an excellent demonstration of what went on during the conquest of Canaan. Who will ever forget the famous scene of President Bush, mere weeks into the battle for Iraq, landing a jet on an aircraft carrier to the slogan of, "Mission Accomplished"? Years later after Saddam Hussein was removed from power, while progress has been made and a new Iraqi central government is operating, pockets of conflict continue.

Winning the major battles and projecting power and authority in a general way is one thing; controlling every tribe, every village, every area in a region is another. There is always an ebb and flow; two steps forward, one step back. There is always a local tribal prince or war lord who sees an opportunity for personal power and gain. There is always a nearby nation who has a reason to see to it that your nation isn't as stable as it could be. Almost immediately after Israel took general control of Canaan, Egypt tried making inroads. The Philistines were constant trouble. The northern boundaries of Israel were always at risk depending on the attitude of the current ruler of the Mesopotamian kingdoms of Babylonia and Assyria.

So at the same time that we must not be naïve and think that Joshua did everything exactly as he was supposed to, neither should we think that he was a failure or rebellious against the Lord. He did a very good job; he was loyal and trustworthy. But he was just a man with flaws and faults and an inherent evil inclination that battled against his good inclination. Perfection was never an option. If men could achieve perfect obedience to the Father, then the need for a Savior vanishes.

Thus we have this interesting statement in verse 20 that says that it was the God of Israel who actively CAUSED the kings of Canaan to come against His people. Why would God do such a thing? Why would the Lord arrange for Israel's enemies to attack them, especially since this was not an act of God punishing Israel? The next few words of Joshua 11 answers that question: it was so that these Canaanites be utterly destroyed, which was the Lord's goal. But Yehoveh affecting the minds of these Canaanite kings and tribal princes was also because Israel had made peace with a Canaanite kingdom that approached them with a desire for peace: Gibeon. And God did NOT want this to happen again so He simply put it in the enemies' hearts to NOT to seek peace with Israel. Problem solved.

Can it be that in modern times the same dynamic and pattern is still playing out among essentially the same ancient people? Can it be that the same ancient enemies of Israel, living with Israel and nearby Israel, are still having their hearts hardened by the Lord so that they do NOT do the very thing that would seem to be in their own self interest and result in such a good thing to most people on this earth; to establish peace in the Middle East? Maybe what seems to be such a good and worthy goal of the US, Europe, the UN, most of Christianity and all of Israel itself to find a way to peace with its neighbors is running exactly counter to God's will. Remember: God's stated goal concerning Canaan and the Hebrew people was to eradicate false gods and the people who are dedicated to worshipping them. And central to that goal is that those who are God's people will not be tempted into including those false gods in their own worship, and thus setting themselves up for God's wrath.

Do you see this? Do you see that peace in the Middle East is not really on God's agenda, per se? His goal is to WIN! His goal is not to find a way to common ground or to coexist with an enemy and a false deity named Allah (or any other for that matter) but to, in time, draw these enemies out of their strongholds and into a final decisive battle with the Lord as the Divine Warrior. Of course, as with the book of Joshua, they think they are primarily fighting Israel when actually they are fighting Israel's God.

Armageddon is but the final chapter of the 3300-year-old conquest of Canaan that to this day

has never been completed. Even the name of the leader of the conquest remains the same: Y'hoshua, long hand for Yeshua.

The final verses of Joshua 11 explain that a very mysterious people who descended from Anak (and thus are called the Anakites) were also hunted down and killed by the Israelite army. In the general region of Canaan none were left alive, however some did survive in the area occupied by the Philistines: Gaza, Gat, and Ashdod. The Anakites are associated with the Rephaim, a race of evil giants from before the time of the Great Flood. You can go back into earlier lessons for a more in-depth lesson on these fierce warriors of old, who are said to have originally come from fallen angels impregnating human woman. In a nutshell the term giant doesn't mean any more than an unusually big man; perhaps as much as 8 or 9 feet tall. Goliath was an Anakite who lived near Gaza. They were troublesome for everyone in the region, not just Israel.

We also find out that it was not until AFTER the events described in chapters 10 and 11 that the land within Canaan started to be officially distributed to the various Israelite tribes. And as we'll find out in later chapters, it wasn't that it happened evenly or all at once. Essentially tribes were deeded (so to speak) their territory and the boundaries to that territory were fairly well defined, but it was that tribe's duty to take control of it and to establish and maintain tribal authority each over their own territory. Some tribes moved quickly to that end, others more slowly. Some established a real dominance, while others had only the weakest of footholds. Some got their territory early on, some not until later.

After that in verse 22 we're told that finally, the land rested from war. But this was not a lasting rest; it was only until the land was allotted to each tribe and then further battles would begin anew for Israel to solidify their gains. The Hebrew word used here for rest is **shaqat**, and the concept is one of peace or at least a lack of war. It indicates a respite or a cessation of hostilities. So we can say that there was a lull in the action for a period of time, likely while all parties had grown weary of the conflict and needed to lick their respective wounds. In ancient times wars were usually fought in-between harvests, outside of rainy seasons, and at times when movement of forces was easier and other practical needs (like farming) had been met. So if after several weeks the objective had not been met, battle was routinely put on hold while the other necessities of life were addressed. If a king had a standing army with enough resources supplied by the civilians, then this didn't necessarily apply.

Israel did not have a standing army. Joshua's forces were farmers, herders, and craftsmen, not professional soldiers. So every day at battle was another day that a family could not establish a field, or a vineyard, or an orchard. Yet battle was necessary to inherit what God had decided long ago.

With the major battles behind them, conquering was now going to give way to settling for Israel. The Land of Canaan had been prepared for Israel's occupation by removing the wicked squatters, the various pagan peoples who had populated that region. This entire saga has been a source of major heartburn for Christians for centuries. The idea of a loving God declaring the current inhabitants of Canaan (regular everyday folks) as no longer welcome and worthy of nothing but displacement or annihilation doesn't really jibe with Christian attitudes

and traditions of peace at all costs and turn-the-other-cheek. But I offer to you that the problem is with us, the church, not with God. For the Holy Scriptures are very straightforward on this matter; it's the doctrines of our religious leadership (Jewish and Christian) that have gone astray.

We'll begin Joshua 12 next time.