

March 12

Joshua 10

Joshua 11 and 12

Since we discussed Gibeon a bit yesterday, we are going to skip it today and head straight to Joshua 10

The first thing worth noting in this chapter is the fact that Joshua and his army rushed to the defense of Gibeon. That is further confirmation of just how seriously they took their oath with regard to Gibeon, in spite of the deception perpetrated, and the false conditions under which it was given. The people of God really did believe that their word was their inviolable bond. Let me explain what I mean here. I really believe that if I had been Joshua - relaxing in camp with my army after a satisfying worship service there at Ebal and Gerizim - and the messenger reached me, telling of the plight of the treacherous allies at Gibeon, who had weaseled a treaty of peace out of me under the falsest of pretenses - I would not have been in any great rush to march to their defense. 'After all,' I would have reasoned, 'I did promise that I would not destroy them, before I found out that they were not a distant people like they pretended to be. But if somebody else wants to do that job for me, and it happens before I can reasonably be expected to get my army there to defend them, well that's a different thing altogether. Let's see now, an expedition to fight a confederacy of five armies is a very serious thing. It's going to take a bit of time to prepare for this one...' Well, you get the picture. I'm sure that I would have been tempted to think that way - to drag my feet just long enough for someone else to do my dirty work for me - and be freed of the inconvenient arrangement to which I had too hastily agreed. I'll bet you would have done that too. And maybe Joshua was tempted in that way, but he talked to the Lord about it, and he knew that Israel had to honor its commitment to Gibeon - not look for a way out of it. Is there a place that you have given your word, and you need to keep your word even though it hurts?

The attribute of omnipotence, teaches us that God can do absolutely anything at all, anytime He pleases, because all power resides in Him. On the day that Israel went to war on behalf of Gibeon, God exercised His omnipotence by performing two very great miracles. The first was the miracle of the hailstorm. Apparently the hailstones were extremely selective in where they fell - only upon the retreating enemies - none upon Israel's soldiers who were pursuing them. Our God is the Lord of all creation. It is a small thing for Him to use nature to accomplish His purposes. This story does not get told in Sunday School as much, but it is definitely as cool as the Jericho walls.

By the time that nightfall was approaching, the victory was already secure. The power of the confederacy was broken and the armies of the five kings were in full retreat. It was an utter rout. But Joshua, knowing that he has not finished the task, asks for this most astonishing thing - "Lord, make the sun stand still over Gibeon and the moon over the valley of Aijalon." And God answers Joshua's prayer!!

The omnipotence of God shows all through this account. But just as incredible to me is the audacious faith of Joshua. What kind of faith do you need to pray a prayer like that? And he prayed it in the sight (and therefore the hearing) of the entire nation of Israel. We need to understand that there is a certain amount of risk attendant to praying that way. What would happen if God didn't choose to answer that prayer? What would happen to Joshua's credibility then? Would the people continue to follow him? I doubt that very many of us would ever have dared to pray such a bold prayer, if only because of the risk that was attendant to it. But Joshua has such a big view of God and is so confident that he knows what God wants to do (that is a key to understanding what is happening here) that he doesn't just pray a safe prayer like, 'Lord bless us and help us somehow to finish what we have started here.' He prayed, "*Lord make the sun stand still!*" I want to see the sun stand still, how about you?

(On Video, see map)

Onto to chapter 11, 12 and came to the conclusion of the rather brief account of the military exploits of Joshua and the children of Israel in the land of Canaan. When they crossed the Jordan River, from the east side to the west bank at Gilgal, they were in the middle of a narrow country that runs mostly north and south. By conquering Jericho and Ai, they succeeded in gaining the high ground on the plateau, where most of Canaan's cities were situated, effectively splitting the region in half. From that point they went south to conquer the southern cities and from there went north to conquer all the northern cities where they encountered the awesome fighting machine, the chariot, which they had never seen before.

After the battle at Merom, the cities of the northern confederacy fell, each in turn, to Joshua and his army. What is described in just a few verses may actually have taken several years. Even the Anakites - the giants of whom the Israelites of Moses' day were so afraid - became the victims of the Israelite conquest. Chapter 11 concludes with these stirring words. "*So Joshua took the entire land just as the Lord had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.*"

Which leads us to a very important question. Why all the killing? Did God really have to kill hundreds of thousands of people to accomplish his will? Doesn't this make him like Hitler? A few comments will help with perspective.

- 1) God has rights over life and death. God brought you into this world and he can take you out. As a matter of fact, he always does. The agent may be cancer, famine, flood, or a military battle... but everybody dies and God has the right to choose how we die and how long we live. This is not a moral dilemma for God. He always does it with every person. It is how we roll.
- 2) God has been patient. Remember when Abraham came through this place? God said "The sins of the Amorites have not reached their full measure." He gave them time... over 400 more years! They never turned to him.

- 3) The sin quotient was high. This was a culture where war was normal. Temple prostitution was a way of life. People lived in defiance of God. Deception was normative. And possibly worst of all, human sacrifice was an ordinary way of life. Babies would be regularly sacrificed to Molech by throwing them into a statue that was heated to intolerable temperatures. This is why Moses commanded "Do not give your children to Molech."
- 4) God had a bigger plan. He was preparing the nation of Israel to be a people who respond to him in faith. He was creating a culture that would be ready for a messiah. He was building trust with a people in a geographic location. He was going to save the world through these people. And just as a doctor is willing to amputate a foot that is filled with gangrene to save the body, so God is willing to sacrifice a people group to save the world.
- 5) Mercy for Canaan, mercy for the world. There are eternal implications here. The people from Canaan were not connecting with God. They were not going to spend eternity with him! So, by ending their race, he was sparing the next generation from an eternity of condemnation. At the same time, he was creating a solution through the people of Israel that would save every people group in the world through Jesus. This is mercy for Canaan and for the world.

I know this is challenging stuff. But God is good - all the time. When he does things like this, he is wise and we can trust him! Trust him a little more today.