

Taking the Land: Joshua 10-12

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What are some things you would consider worth fighting for? What are some things you are fighting for? Life can present many battles, many challenges, that require focused and ongoing engagement. Maybe you have felt like you're in a battle to protect your children in one way or another, to promote their best interest. Maybe you've been involved in a noble cause like fighting for the rights of those less privileged than yourself. Maybe you've found yourself in a battle to save your marriage when it seems like many factors are waging war against it. People speak of battling against disease, disabilities, hardships. And these are battles indeed.

We live in a fallen world, and there are battles to be fought on many fronts. Probably anyone in the world, anyone who's lived very long, could think of certain battles they've had to fight.

For those who are in Christ, there is a particular battle that is unique to the Christian life. It's the battle against sin. The Christian life involves an ongoing fight against sin. It's a battle that begins on the day you become a Christian and continues until the day you die or Christ returns.

In a person's relationship with sin, there is peace with sin until God comes and regenerates that person. Until that person is born again and receives from God a new heart, new desires. If you're a believer, think about your life before you became a Christian. There wasn't really a fight against pride or selfishness or lust or gossip or racism. Rather, we were at peace with various sinful inclinations.

Like Dylann Roof who was at peace with his racism, who fed those sinful thoughts, that sinful prejudice and hatred, to the point of carrying out such an atrocity last week in Charleston, South Carolina when he sat in a Bible study for an hour with several African-Americans and then opened up fire on them, killing 9. What a chilling example of peace with sin that manifests itself in enmity with God and enmity with others.

But once God does a work in us to give us new desires, we then hate sin and want to turn away from it. For those of us who are believers, we now love Christ and want to follow Him. And thus begins the battle . . . the battle against sin. There's a powerful exchange of war and peace. The enmity with God turns into peace with God. And the peace with sin turns into enmity with sin.

I think of the Gibeonites, who we've been learning about in the book of Joshua. It would have made all the sense in the world for them to align themselves with the other Canaanite peoples—to be at peace with the Canaanites and united with them *against* Israel. But instead they made peace with Israel, and thus the Canaanites became their enemies.

That's what happens in the life of the believer. When we are united to Christ through faith, then Christ's enemies become our enemies. We enter into a battle that wasn't present in our lives prior to conversion.

It's an intense battle. It's an ongoing battle. And it's a battle that we know will lead to victory in the end because our Lord is fighting for us. His Spirit indwells us and enables us to fight with power.

We should be motivated and encouraged in these ways as we look at the story of the Israelites taking the land. They are acting on God's promises to them, that He is giving them this inheritance. God is fighting for them. And so they are going forth in these battles with that confidence.

Let me start by reminding you of the context of these chapters—Joshua 10-12—and then I'll highlight a few details for application.

Two weeks ago we studied the first part of chapter 10 where the Lord performed some amazing miracles that enabled Joshua and his army to defeat their enemies. The Gibeonites were under attack and needed help. They sent to Joshua asking for him to save them. So Joshua led the Israelite army to their defense. And as they fought against those 5 Canaanite armies, the Lord threw down large hailstones that killed many of those enemies. And then, in response to Joshua's request, the Lord also made the sun to stand still for about a whole day so that the Israelite army would have time to finish wiping out those 5 armies. It was a miraculous day.

Let's read of the remaining events that happened on that incredible day. You'll notice that it's not until Joshua 10:27 that there's a mention of the going down of the sun.

So all of this happened on that one day, that was the length of almost two days.

The fighting that has taken place up to this point in the conquest we could call the central campaign. They crossed the

Jordan, took Jericho, went up the hill and took Ai, and now have defeated these 5 other kings and their armies.

Verses 29-39 of chapter 10 recount very briefly the campaign in southern Canaan. They defeated city after city, seemingly with rapid success.

Then verses 40-43 summarize the advances they've made so far.

Chapter 11 tells of the northern campaign. Yet another coalition of armies united in opposition to Israel and fought them in this northern region. Israel defeated them and proceeded to take these surrounding cities.

At the end of chapter 11 we read of the defeat of the Anakim, the giants. Then the very last sentence of the chapter says that "the land had rest from war." This concludes the main fighting of the conquest.

Chapter 12 is a summary reaching all the way back to the kings that were defeated when Moses was leading Israel. Those battles happened before they entered the Promised Land. They defeated some of the land east of the Promised Land, and there were 2 and half tribes of Israel that settled there. The rest of chapter 12 lists the kings defeated under Joshua's leadership, the armies within Canaan that were defeated.

Well, let me now point out some details in these chapters that we can draw some application from for our own lives and the spiritual battles we face. Like Israel in the midst of the conquest, we too are in a battle. It's not a physical battle like they fought. Ours is a spiritual battle. Paul says in Ephesians 6,

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12, ESV)

In that same passage he exhorts us, *"In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one."* (Ephesians 6:16, ESV)

In another place, also in Paul's writings, we find a weighty warning and promise, *"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."* (Romans 8:13, ESV)

Our foes are not Canaanites, but rather the spiritual forces of evil, the flaming darts of the evil one, and our own flesh, those sinful deeds of the body that we must put to death. These are the battles we face, and will face, until we go to be with the Lord.

I'll focus now on 4 words of admonition and encouragement as we wage this war.

Remember

Remembering God's past faithfulness is a great asset we have in the present battle. Remembering that He has brought us through other battles, that He has given us victory, can be tremendously uplifting.

In the book of Joshua there are 7 stone memorials that are set up (4:20; 7:26; 8:28-29; 8:32; 10:27; 22:34; 24:26-27). These were for the purpose of remembering something, and each memorial was set up in a unique situation and for a unique purpose. One of them, which we talked about earlier in Joshua, was in chapter 4 when they crossed the Jordan and took 12 stones from the riverbed and set them up as a memorial of God's great miracle in bringing them into the Land.

Another one of these memorials shows up here in our text for today, in 10:27. Israel defeated these 5 kings. They killed the 5 kings. And they threw them into the very cave where they had been hiding. Where these kings had fled for cover now becomes their tomb. And then the Israelites set large stones at the opening of the cave. And those stones remained there, as it says "to this very day," meaning that the original readers of this material could have gone and found those stones. The stones were an ongoing memorial of that miraculous day, the day when the Lord fought for Israel with hailstones and by causing the sun to stand still in the sky.

Here are some practical ways of doing this in your own life. I mentioned some of these in the sermon on chapter 4, but this is a good reminder for remembering.

- 1) Think. What are some events that you can look back on as defining moments for you— moments when God showed His power in your life, when He was guiding you in a very clear way, when He answered a prayer, fulfilled a promise. Meditate on those events. Relish the memories of God's amazing grace to you.
- 2) Thank Him for those special times of very evident blessing.

- 3) Tell others about those times. Talk about it. This was the instruction back in Joshua 4, specifically regarding children: “When your children ask their fathers in times to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.’” (Joshua 4:21-22)
- 4) Traditions. As you think about Christmas traditions and Easter traditions and birthday traditions and Thanksgiving traditions, consider how you can incorporate ways of telling the stories of God’s faithfulness.
- 5) Transcribe. Keep a journal. Write out prayer requests, and then record the ways in which God answers those prayers. When you’re feeling discouraged, look back on those written records of God’s faithfulness.
- 6) Taste and see in your participation in the ordinances. The ordinances of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism are profound ways of remembering and proclaiming what Christ has done. God is gracious to give us these vivid reminders that incorporate our various senses. In the Lord’s Supper we take in our hands the bread and the cup. The senses of touch, smell, taste are all involved as we partake of a meal representing Christ’s death in our place. For the one being baptized, it is a most memorable experience as he or she is immersed in water. And as the rest of us participate in baptism by being there, we see with our eyes a dramatic parable of death, burial and resurrection.

So be intentional about remembering. This is a tool, a weapon we have to use in our spiritual battles.

One other observation in our text about remembering, and that is to remember God’s Word. We see Joshua doing this in 10:25. He tells the Israelite soldiers, “Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous.” Does that ring a bell? Where did we hear those words before? That’s exactly what the Lord said to Joshua in chapter 1. Three times the Lord said that to Joshua. “Be strong and courageous” (v. 6). “Only be strong and courageous” (v. 7). “Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (v. 9).

We realize here in chapter 10 that Joshua is clinging to those words of encouragement. He is holding on to those promises. What a great example for us, that we ought to be hiding God’s Word in our hearts. Each week we have a fighter verse that is listed in the worship folder and on the website and in the weekly email. There’s even an app you can get on your phone to give you

a convenient way of looking at that verse throughout the week. It's no mistake that they're called fighter verses. We need to remember these promises and commands from the Lord in the midst of our battles. This is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and we need to use this weapon on a daily basis. So remember God's faithfulness and remember God's Word.

Obey

The second word is obey. Something that shines brightly in these chapters is Joshua's obedience. And obeying the Lord comes with blessing. The Lord gave instructions to Joshua, and Joshua sought to follow those instructions, and as he did so the Israelites experienced victory in battle after battle after battle.

Now the lesson here is not that we can earn favor with God by our obedience. The Bible teaches very clearly that we are saved by faith alone through the work of Christ—His perfect obedience and His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection.

But there's also a very clear principle in Scripture that obedience brings spiritual blessing, whereas disobedience brings discipline. We saw this earlier in Joshua when Achan's secret sin brought severe punishment on himself and his family. And it was also a major setback for all of Israel because they were defeated by Ai as a result of that sin. Disobedience will have negative consequences.

But there is so much joy in obedience. There is freedom in obedience. As we seek to follow the Lord's commands to us, we will experience more freedom from sin and less negative consequences of sin. So there is much incentive to obey. The Almighty God of the universe demands our obedience. And He promises many good things when we do submit to Him and obey.

Listen to the repeated mention of Joshua's obedience in chapters 10-11.

“So Joshua struck the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but devoted to destruction all that breathed, *just as the LORD God of Israel commanded.*” (Joshua 10:40, ESV)

“And Joshua did to them *just as the LORD said to him*: he hamstringed their horses and burned their chariots with fire.” (Joshua 11:9, ESV)

“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.*” (Joshua 11:12, ESV)

“*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 11:15, ESV)

“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.” (Joshua 11:23, ESV)

That’s powerful and inspiring. That should give us a tremendous motivation to pursue obedience. Just think about the detailed instructions the Lord gave to Moses and to Joshua. He didn’t leave them wondering how this was all going to happen. He told them exactly what to do.

Then think about what we have. We have this entire Bible to instruct us about how to live our lives. We have extensive guidance from the Lord. We should be attentive to His commands and careful to follow what He tells us to do. As we do so, we will experience victory and blessing. I’m not saying everything will be perfect. But we will receive spiritual blessings from the Lord as we follow His revealed will for us.

The other thing this makes us think about, sadly, is our inability to obey perfectly. Even as we are empowered by the Spirit to obey, we will never achieve perfection in this life. And that disappoints us. But the other encouraging thing to think about is the reality that someone else has obeyed perfectly in our place. The second Joshua, Jesus Christ, obeyed every last detail of the Father’s will for Him. Here’s another place where we see Joshua pointing to Jesus. Joshua’s careful obedience is a foreshadowing of Jesus’ perfect obedience. And for all of us who will never be able to obey perfectly in this life, we look to our perfectly obedient Savior, Jesus Christ. His sinless life, His righteousness, is credited to us by faith.

Persevere

One thing that struck me in these chapters is the contrast between 10:42 and 11:18. In 10:42, in the summary of the southern campaign, we read that “Joshua captured all these kings and their land *at one time*, because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel.” Apparently it was a swift campaign through those southern cities, taking them all in a relatively short period of time.

But then in chapter 11, after recounting the battles in the north, we read in 11:18 that “Joshua made war *a long time* with all those kings.”

People have tried to estimate how long the conquest took. One clue we have is in Joshua 14:7 where Caleb gives his age at the time when he receives his inheritance. He says that he was 40 years old when he went from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land. That was 2 years into their time in the wilderness, which leaves 38 years more in the wilderness. And Caleb says that he is now 85 at the time he’s receiving his portion of the land, following the conquest. 40 years (Caleb’s age when he spied out the land) + 38 more years in the wilderness = 78 years. Subtract that from his current age of 85 and we’re left with about 7 years which would have been the timespan of the conquest.

So it appears that certain portions of the conquest may have happened very swiftly. But overall it lasted several years.

Thinking of this in terms of our own spiritual battles, maybe you’ve experienced this sort of thing as well. At certain times it seems that God is giving you great victory, swift victory, over many spiritual foes. But still, the battle goes on, year after year after year. We must be prepared to continue in these battles. We must persevere in the fight of faith.

Another observation from this passage relating to perseverance has to do with the Anakim mentioned at the end of chapter 11. Do you remember these guys? The Anakim were the giants who the spies were so afraid of back in Numbers 13. Joshua and Caleb were the only ones who trusted the Lord and knew that the Lord would give the victory. But the other 10 spies were scared of those big guys who made them feel like grasshoppers by comparison. Well, they weren’t invincible after all. Even the Anakim fell before the Israelites.

Matthew Henry draws a helpful application for us: “Giants are dwarfs to Omnipotence; yet this struggle with the Anakim was reserved for the latter end of the war, when the Israelites had become more expert in the arts of war, and had had more experience of the power and goodness of God. Note, God sometimes reserves the sharpest trials of his people by affliction and temptation for the latter end of their days.”¹

¹ Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 312). Peabody: Hendrickson.

That may seem ominous. It makes us wonder, Oh what horrible trials am I going to have to face in the future. But the encouragement comes in the knowledge that God will empower us to defeat even the most formidable foe.

Matthew Henry goes on to say, “Death, that tremendous son of Anak, is the last enemy that is to be encountered; but it is to be destroyed. Thanks be to God, who will give us the victory.”² So we can face life, we can face whatever trial may come, we can face death, with the confidence that God is going to give us the victory.

But we must be patient and persevere. In Exodus and Deuteronomy the Lord explained ahead of time that the conquest was going to take some time, that it was going to happen *little by little* (see Exodus 23:29-30 and Deuteronomy 7:22). And that, again, is parallel to the Christian life and our spiritual battles. A person who is young in the faith should not naively assume that sanctification is going to be completed all in one year. No, it’s going to take time . . . lots of time. In fact, it will take the rest of your life, and only when you go to be with the Lord will the process finally be completed.

So we should thank God for the times when He gives us significant victories, significant advances in the fight against sin. And at all times we must be diligent to keep fighting.

A.W. Pink, commenting on Joshua 11:18 “Joshua made war a long time with all those kings,” writes, “These words tell us of the constancy, and the stability of those who served under him. They did not take things easy after Jericho was captured, nor relax their efforts when Ai fell before them, but continued steadfast until they had completed the task assigned them. What a noble example for the Christian to follow in the prosecution of his spiritual warfare! Let him not be appalled by the obstacles confronting him, deterred by the number of enemies to be overcome, nor disheartened by his failures along the way. Patience and fortitude must be earnestly sought from above.”³

Fight

And lastly, I just want to close with a simple exhortation to fight. At points in Joshua we may be somewhat shocked by the

² Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 312). Peabody: Hendrickson.

³ A. W. Pink, *Gleanings in Joshua*, page 322.

blood and gore. As we read of the Israelites putting their feet on the necks of these Canaanite kings, and then killing them and hanging them on trees, and then burying them in a cave . . . we might wonder, “Is this the Bible or the script for a Hollywood movie that I wouldn’t let my kids watch?” This is pretty graphic and gruesome.

But do you know what it makes me think of? It makes me think of some statements that came from the mouth of Jesus that are equally graphic and gruesome.

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’”
(Mark 9:42–48, ESV)

Now I hope we all understand that Jesus is using hyperbolic language here. He is describing something in a graphic way in order to make a point. He wants us to realize how serious this fight is and how fiercely we must fight. He’s not calling for anyone to literally cut off a hand or foot or gouge out an eye. What good would that do anyway? None. Because the hand, foot, eye are just means for carrying out sin. But that’s not where the sin is rooted. Sin is rooted much deeper than that, in our hearts and minds. So what is Jesus saying? He’s saying that we must understand the life and death weightiness of battling sin. If you don’t fight sin, if you are at peace with sin, then you’re not a believer and you will end up in hell.

But those who have been changed by God from the inside out and therefore hate sin and love Christ, they are the ones who are forgiven and who will live the rest of their lives battling sin with a vengeance. So let this be a powerful word of warning to you today, and a powerful word of encouragement never to let up in this fight. Persevere in the fight. And fight with a passion. You will find great joy and blessing as you do so. It’s worth the fight.