

Unit I: From Nomadic Tribes to Settled People

Fighting among the Nations

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 108

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Joshua 6; 8:26; 10:28-43; 11:1-23; Deuteronomy 7:1-26

PRINT PASSAGE: Joshua 11:6-9, 16-23

KEY VERSE

For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses. (Joshua 11:20, KJV)

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For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses. (Joshua 11:20, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Discover that God is with us in both our triumphs and struggles.
- Understand that God guides us each step of the way in life.
- Show faithfulness in all that they do and praise God.

*Key Terms

Attacked (verse 7)—Hebrew: *nâphal* (naw-fal'): overwhelmed; cast down; knocked out; "fell upon" (KJV). God commissioned Joshua to attack the massive army of the Canaanite kings at the waters of Merom.

Captured (verse 17)—Hebrew: *lâkad* (lawkad'): seized; caught; grasped; "took" (KJV). Joshua captured all the kings from Mount Halak toward Seir and Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon.

Deliver (verse 6)—Hebrew: *nâthan* (naw-than'): to bestow, bring forth, give up (over); "hand . . . over" (NIV). The Lord informed Joshua not to be afraid of the kings of Shimron and Akshaph or the Canaanites, the Amorites, Hittites, or Perizzites because He was going to give them into his hands the next day.

Inheritance (verse 23)—Hebrew: *nachălâb* (nah-khah-lah): possession; estate, patrimony, portion, or an heirloom. God gave the land of Canaan to the people of Israel as an inheritance.

Mercy (verse 20)—Hebrew: *techinnâb* (tekhin-naw'): supplication for "favour" (KJV); grace; entreaty; plea. The Lord did not allow there to be any mercy offered to the cities against which Joshua waged war.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



The Biblical Context

Joshua 11 belongs to a broader summary describing how the Israelites settled in the land of Canaan. These chapters look back on earlier events through a theological perspective shaped by God's covenant instructions. The book of Joshua was preserved to help later generations understand their identity as God's people, especially as they reflected on seasons when faithfulness was difficult to sustain (Wray Beal, 160-163).

Many readers have struggled with the violent scenes described in these passages. These conquest accounts function as theological reflections rather than simple military reports, pointing the Hebrews toward dependence on God instead of celebrating destruction (Brueggemann, 135-138). The text presses readers to consider the seriousness of covenant faithfulness and to recognize the consequences that follow persistent idolatry.

These narratives were preserved to remind the Israelites that the land was a gift from God, not something gained through human strength or military power (Coogan & Chapman, 208-210). Even in situations that challenge our understanding, the passage reminds us that God is still guiding His people and remains in control.

Joshua 11 must be read as a theological summary that reinforces Israel's identity as a covenant people shaped by God's promises and commands. The narrative emphasizes that the land was ultimately a gift from God. This perspective challenges later generations to trust in God's sovereignty. Rather than glorifying warfare, the passage calls attention to Israel's dependence on God and the seriousness of remaining faithful to the covenant.

Introduction

News headlines often confront us with stories of conflict, wars between nations, violence within communities, and hostilities that seem impossible to heal. Many people wonder where God is in such moments. Even people of faith can struggle when suffering and destruction dominate the landscape of their lives. These situations are not new.

The Hebrew people faced similar tensions as they entered the Promised Land. The battles described in the Book of Joshua are troubling for many readers, raising ethical, emotional, and spiritual concerns. Some wonder how a loving God could be connected to stories of conquest and violence. Others wrestle with how these texts speak to faith today without being misused to justify harm.

As believers we understand that in the midst of times of turmoil, God is still present. Rather than ignoring or simplifying the challenges, Scripture calls us to wrestle with them thoughtfully. Joshua 11 reminds us that Israel's story was shaped by struggle, fear, and obedience, but also by God's enduring presence and promises.

As you study this lesson, reflect on moments in your own life when circumstances felt overwhelming or morally complex. Consider how God might be inviting you to trust His guidance even when answers are not easy or immediate.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Facing Hard Challenges with God's Assurance (Joshua 11:6-9)

KJV

6 And the LORD said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire.

7 So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly; and they fell upon them.

8 And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephothmaim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining.

9 And Joshua did unto them as the LORD bade him: he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire.

NIV

6 The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them, slain, over to Israel. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots."

7 So Joshua and his whole army came against them suddenly at the Waters of Merom and attacked them,

8 and the LORD gave them into the hand of Israel. They defeated them and pursued them all the way to Greater Sidon, to Misrephoth Maim, and to the Valley of Mizpah on the east, until no survivors were left.

9 Joshua did to them as the LORD had directed: He hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots.

In these verses, God speaks directly to Joshua at a moment of great pressure. A massive coalition of northern kings has gathered against Israel with armies described as numerous as sand on the seashore, equipped with horses and chariots. Fear would have been a natural and understandable response to such overwhelming odds. Yet God assures Joshua that victory does not rest on military strength but on God's presence. This encouragement echoes earlier promises given during Israel's journey, reinforcing continuity in God's covenant guidance (Wray Beal, 164-166).

The command "do not be afraid" underscores a central biblical truth: courage grows from trust in God rather than confidence in human ability. Joshua's obedience reflects a willingness to move forward despite uncertainty. Joshua is commanded to hamstring the horses and burn the chariots. These were the most advanced military technologies of the ancient world. By destroying them rather than keeping them, Israel declared that their security rested in God alone, not in military superiority or in human resources alone.

These "do not be afraid" assurances remind God's people that they are not abandoned during times of crisis (Brueggemann, 138-140). God's guidance does not eliminate hardship, but it places difficulty within the promise of God's continuing presence. Joshua's leadership reflects obedience rooted in trust rather than aggression or self-reliance. He moves suddenly and decisively at the Waters of Merom, catching the coalition off guard. Victory came through obedience, not superior strategy. Joshua did exactly as the Lord had directed him to do.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What difficulty or challenge are you facing in your life today? How might trusting God's presence help you respond with courage rather than fear?

Understanding God's Purposes in a Violent Story

(Joshua 11:16-20)

KJV

16 So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same;

17 Even from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baalgad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them.

18 Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.

19 There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle.

20 For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

NIV

16 So Joshua took this entire land: the hill country, all the Negev, the whole region of Goshen, the western foothills, the Arabah and the mountains of Israel with their foothills,
17 from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, to Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings and put them to death.
18 Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time.
19 Except for the Hivites living in Gibeon, not one city made a treaty of peace with the Israelites, who took them all in battle.
20 For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

This section summarizes Israel's military campaign and raises challenging theological questions. The text describes widespread destruction and attributes the outcome to God's purposes. The passage presents one of the most geographically comprehensive summaries in the book of Joshua, describing territory stretching from the hill country and Negev in the south to the mountains of Israel and the Valley of Lebanon in the north. These passages should not be read as endorsements of violence. Instead, they function as theological reflections shaped by later generations who were trying to understand Israel's failures and God's covenant expectations (Coogan & Chapman, 210-211). The narratives also serve as warnings against drifting into idolatrous practices, which ultimately damaged Israel's spiritual identity and faithfulness (Brueggemann, 140-142). Verse 18 adds a crucial detail often overlooked: Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time.

The text invites readers to grapple honestly with Scripture, acknowledging discomfort while seeking deeper understanding. Wrestling with difficult passages can strengthen faith rather than weaken it, encouraging humility and discernment. Verse 20 contains the passage's most challenging statement: the Lord hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel. This theological language echoes the Exodus account of Pharaoh and emphasizes that outcomes rested in God's hands. This passage serves as a reminder that Scripture invites engagement, not avoidance. These narratives challenge recognition that God worked within the cultural and historical realities of ancient Israel while remaining faithful to His covenant purposes.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How do you respond when Scripture raises difficult questions? What helps you engage challenging passages faithfully rather than avoiding them or oversimplifying their meaning?

Entering the Rest God Promised (*Joshua 11:21-23*)

KJV

21 And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities.
22 There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained.
23 So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.

NIV

21 At that time Joshua went and destroyed the Anakites from the hill country: from Hebron, Debir and Anab, from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua totally destroyed them and their towns.

22 No Anakites were left in Israelite territory; only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did any survive.

23 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.

The final verses of this passage emphasize completion and rest. After prolonged struggle, the land is described as having “rest from war.” This rest signals more than the absence of conflict; it represents the fulfillment of God’s promise to give Israel a place to live in covenant relationship with Him. Joshua defeats the Anakites, a people remembered in Israel’s tradition as giants who once terrified the spies Moses sent into Canaan (Numbers 13:33). The earlier generation refused to enter the land because they feared these formidable inhabitants. Now, under Joshua’s faithful leadership, Israel conquers what their parents feared.

The rest described in Joshua points to a theme found throughout Scripture, God’s desire for His people to live in peace shaped by obedience and trust (Wray Beal, 167-169). This rest is not automatic or permanent; it depends on continued faithfulness to God’s instruction. The geographical summary in verse 23 is comprehensive: Joshua took the entire land, just as the Lord had directed Moses. This phrase emphasizes fulfillment of divine promise and continuity of leadership from Moses to Joshua. Yet the text includes an honest acknowledgment: some Anakites survived in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod. The conquest was not absolute. The rest that God promises in Scripture is not gained through force or domination. It is received as a gift when God’s way is honored and trusted (Brueggemann, 144). This truth reminds us that God remains faithful to every promise He has made even in times of struggle and difficulty.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Where do you long for rest in your life? How might trusting God’s promises help you move toward peace, even after experiencing seasons of struggle or uncertainty?

A Closing Thought

Joshua 11 challenges readers to face Scripture honestly and faithfully. Today’s passage reminds us that God’s presence sustains His people through difficult and complex circumstances. While these verses include struggle and discomfort, ultimately, they point toward God’s faithfulness and His promise of rest. This lesson invites us to trust God in uncertainty, wrestle faithfully with Scripture, and remain committed to God’s guidance as we seek peace grounded in covenant faithfulness and dependence on His enduring promises.

Your Life

Identify a situation in your life that feels complicated or unresolved. Spend time this week reflecting on how God is present with you in it. Write a brief prayer or journal entry expressing your questions and believe that your honesty with God will deepen your faith and spiritual growth.

Your World!

Many people struggle with faith when they encounter violence or injustice. Share how taking Scripture seriously, even when it raises hard questions, has shaped your trust in God. Make space for hopeful conversation and invite others to explore a faith that asks questions while continuing to trust God’s promises.

Closing Prayer

Faithful God, guide us through difficult questions and challenging moments. Help us trust Your presence, seek understanding, and walk faithfully toward the peace You promise. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

The lesson topic for Sunday, September 27, 2026, is "Joining Forces with Unlikely Allies." The Devotional Reading is Matthew 25:31-46, the Background Scriptures are Joshua 2:6:16-25; Matthew 1:5; James 2:25; Hebrews 11:31, and the Printed Passage is Joshua 2:8-13; 6:16-17.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, September 21	"Welcoming Strangers"	(Joshua 2:1-7)
TUESDAY, September 22	"Faith without Works Is Dead"	(James 2:18-26)
WEDNESDAY, September 23	"May the Nations Know God's Salvation"	(Psalm 67)
THURSDAY, September 24	"Faith to Live By"	(Hebrews 11:1-2, 29-31)
FRIDAY, September 25	"God Shows No Partiality"	(Acts 10:34-48)
SATURDAY, September 26	"Rahab's Faith in Israel's God"	(Joshua 2:8-14)
SUNDAY, September 27	"Rahab Is Spared"	(Joshua 6:6-17)

Notes
