

# THE FINAL CONQUEST

by Doug Goins

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Our family recently enjoyed a two-week vacation in Colorado and Arizona. During our week in Arizona, I had a rare privilege. I enjoyed a two-hour lunch with three men who serve together on the staff of Grace Bible Church in Sun City, Arizona. All three of these pastors are in their mid-seventies, have devoted nearly fifty years to pastoral ministry, and are committed to finishing their years of ministry with strength and effectiveness.

They spoke of their current struggles and joys. They were very candid on both accounts. Their struggles include continual spiritual warfare with a world system set against the work of God; and fleshly temptations that they haven't outgrown, even in their seventies. They talked about ongoing opposition from Satan himself. They shared war stories of the current battles in their lives: health problems, family difficulties, burdens for their children and grandchildren. They also discussed staff issues and congregational discontent in their churches. I was somewhat surprised that the intensity of the battles had not decreased at all. I said, "I thought perhaps it would get easier as you get older." One brother replied, "No, if anything the battle intensifies, at least if you vigorously continue to follow Jesus Christ."

I also saw joy in them during those two hours around the lunch table. They were relaxed and confident leaders who, from my perspective at least, had learned to rest in the Lord. They laughed easily, and their conversation was peppered with remarks about God's goodness and faithfulness, and how he solves their problems, meets their needs, and enters into their lives. These older men have an infectious optimism about the future. They really do believe that the best is yet to come. They are at rest in the Lord. If General Joshua, the leader of the nation of Israel, had been at that lunch table, he would have felt right at home with these pastors. By the way, one of those men is my dad, so I felt very blessed to be in that circle.

## **God's promises fulfilled**

These two themes of struggle and joy, warfare and rest are held in tension in chapters 11 and 12 of the book of Joshua. At the heart of this narrative, and at the exact mid-point of the book, is Joshua 11:23, which summarizes all the years of warfare: "So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war." This verse sums up the first twelve chapters of the book of Joshua.

The first ten chapters have been an exciting adventure story of God calling Joshua to lead the Israelites in military conquest of the land of Canaan, which God had given them. The book of Joshua covers twenty-five years of real history in the life of the people of Israel and is an important part of Holy Scripture, the inspired Word of God.

In the opening paragraph of the book, God called Joshua, commissioned him as a leader, and made three promises to him. First, God promised that Israel would cross the Jordan River from the Transjordan and enter the land of Canaan. Chapters 1 through 5 review the wonderful fulfillment of that promise, in the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River, and in the time of spiritual preparation at Gilgal.

Second, God promised Joshua that Israel would have victory over their enemies in the land of Canaan. Chapters 6 through 12 record battle after battle in which God fights for his people. We studied the victories at Jericho, on the Jordan, and Ai, and Gibeon in the central highlands in Canaan. We also reviewed battles fought in the southern kingdom of Canaan. The first fifteen verses of chapter 11 recount the final decisive battles in the north of Canaan.

Third, God promised Joshua that he would be able to divide up the land as an inheritance for the conquering

tribes, there would be peace in the land, and they would be settled. In chapters 13 through 22, the third section of the book, all of that will be accomplished.

## **The final challenge**

The first fifteen verses of Joshua 11 summarize the victories that God gives Israel in the northern part of Canaan. Verses 1 through 5 introduce us to the opposition of the northern kings:

When Jabin king of Hazor heard of this, he sent to Jobab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph, and to the kings who were in the northern hill country, and in the Arabah south of Chinneroth, and in the lowland, and in Naphoth-dor on the west, to the Canaanites in the east and the west, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivites under Hermon in the land of Mizpah. And they came out with all their troops, a great host, in number like the sand that is upon the seashore, with very many horses and chariots. And all these kings joined their forces, and came and encamped together at the waters of Merom, to fight with Israel.

Hazor, with all of its allies and armaments, confronts Joshua and the nation of Israel in what is going to be their last and most daunting challenge. Verse 1 tells us that Jabin, the king of Hazor, has heard about what God has done through the Israelites' mighty exploits in Canaan. The king is probably also well-acquainted with the forty-year history that preceded the crossing of the Jordan River: the Israelites' miraculous deliverance from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and their survival for forty years in the Sinai wilderness. With this knowledge, Jabin calls together these northern kingdoms for a unified attack on Israel.

Everything about this battle is massive. Jabin is the most powerful potentate in all of Canaan. Hazor is the most imposing city. Modern archeological digs there have revealed that the city covered two hundred acres. In contrast, Jericho was only four or five acres in size.

This is also the most formidable foe that Israel has faced so far in terms of troop size and weaponry. This enemy army had both mounted cavalry and chariot soldiers. These are new for Israel, and pretty overwhelming for an army that is far outnumbered and wholly composed of foot soldiers. Verse 5 describes the kings joining forces, being encamped together. The language here denotes a well-organized coalition of armies meeting together to form a strategy to attack and wipe out the nation of Israel to the south.

## **God's surprise strategy**

From Jericho onward, each successive battle that Israel has fought has been more difficult than the one before, and this one is the most overwhelming, the most frightening. Notice, however, in verse 6 how God speaks to Joshua. Look at the promise God makes, and how the promise is fulfilled. Verses 6 through 9 describe the decisive battle at Merom:

And the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, for tomorrow at this time I will give over all of them, slain, to Israel; you shall hamstring their horses, and burn their chariots with fire." So Joshua came suddenly upon them with all his people of war, by the waters of Merom, and fell upon them. And the Lord gave them into the hand of Israel, who smote them and chased them as far as Great Sidon and Misrephoth-maim, and eastward as far as the valley of Mizpeh; and they smote them, until they left none remaining. And Joshua did to them as the Lord bade him; he hamstrung their horses, and burned their chariots with fire.

Just as Joshua has done prior to other battles, he listens to the Lord. He tells Joshua not to be afraid. He wouldn't have said that if Joshua had not been fearful. God speaks into the fear, which is very understandable. Even though Joshua is a battle-hardened veteran, the fear of the opposition and the possibility of losing a battle still well up in him. But God assures Joshua that he has nothing to fear: God will win the battle on Israel's behalf. In verse 6 he says, "I will give over all of them, slain." This means that Israel will have to expend energy and attack Canaanite soldiers. Passivity will have no place in this battle.

Joshua uses a wonderful new strategy. God tells him to launch a surprise attack while the enemy is still gathered in counsel, unprepared for battle. God tells Joshua to disable the horses so they can't pull the chariots and the cavalry can't ride them, and then to burn the chariots so the army can't use them. Joshua does just that, and launches a successful sneak attack.

The Israelites chase these Canaanite soldiers to Sidon, and Misrephoth-maim and Mizpeh-both mountainous areas to the north and east. In their panic, the soldiers run into the mountains where chariots and horses are of no use. So they have evened the balance in terms of foot soldiers fighting foot soldiers, because the Canaanites are caught totally off guard. Once again in verse 8, as we've seen over and over, the Lord gave them into the hand of Israel. The Canaanite coalition is annihilated.

Verse 9, at the end of that paragraph, says, "Joshua did to them as the Lord bade him." This phrase highlights Joshua's consistent faithful obedience to do what God tells him to do, as he understands it. He doesn't cut corners; he doesn't try to do things his own way. The important lesson he has learned is that if he is going to succeed in battle, he must wage warfare God's way.

### **Full obedience**

The next section concludes the account of this northern campaign. It describes the mop-up operation. It's the same pattern we have seen in the central campaign and in the southern campaign, where Israel defeats the united armies first, and then deals with the cities, the pockets of opposition. Verses 10 through 15:

And Joshua turned back at that time, and took Hazor, and smote its king with the sword; for Hazor formerly was the head of all those kingdoms. And they put to the sword all who were in it, utterly destroying them; there was none left that breathed, and he burned Hazor with fire. And all the cities of those kings, and all their kings, Joshua took, and smote them with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded. But none of the cities that stood on mounds did Israel burn, except Hazor only; that Joshua burned. And all the spoil of these cities and the cattle, the people of Israel took for their booty; but every man they smote with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, and they did not leave any that breathed. 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.

Central to this narrative is Joshua's consistent obedience to God's requirements for holy war. We have addressed this difficult issue in some of our earlier studies. It is important to remember that spiritual victory requires that the enemy be completely defeated. We cannot leave a single pocket of resistance. The enemy must die. We shouldn't pity these kings or their troops, because like everything else in the land of Canaan, they were under the ban. They had been devoted to God's wrath. These people were violently opposed to God's work in that land and if they weren't destroyed, they would come back at a later date and try to destroy Israel. In light of Genesis 15:16 we see that the iniquity of these Amorites was completely filled up. The time of mercy and grace was past for them. God said they had to be slain.

In a spiritual sense, these verses remind us that God is still in the process of waging war against evil. The struggle is cosmic. One Old Testament writer, John Hamlin, in his book *Inheriting the Land*, says that we need a "stereoscopic view" of God at work in warfare in the Old Testament. He writes: "God fights for Israel-against Canaanite armies-as part of His battle against the powers of sin and death and hell. He works for salvation in the whole world. The reverse can also be said. At times in Israel's history God fights against them when they join the forces of chaos and destruction and are no longer on the side of His new creation."<sup>1</sup>

The question for us is not whether God is on our side in our personal lives, but whether we are on God's side. If we're not, we will end up like the Canaanites. First Peter 5:5 says that God wants to be our consistent ally, actively involved in our lives. But if we rebel, if we resist him, as the Canaanites did, he will become our active opponent. That is why it's so important to bring ourselves into conformity with God's will instead of trying to get the Lord to agree with our plans and our point of view.

The secret for Joshua was knowing and following everything that God had commanded through Moses in the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch. In Joshua 1:8-9, God spoke to Joshua: "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." The key is to play by his rules and submit ourselves to his authority in our lives.

Joshua 11:16 through the end of chapter 12 gives a summary of God's sovereignty at work through all these years of conquest. Chapter 12 recaps Moses' victory over two kings, Sihon and Og, in the Transjordan (see also Numbers 21). Then beginning in 12:7, we read a list of 31 Canaanite kings, all by name, whom Joshua defeated with the armies of Israel as the Lord fought for them. It's interesting that God carefully lists each king individually. We are under the king of all the earth. There were thirty-three petty kings, political and military authorities who tried to stand up against the God of all the earth. They got squashed. God will brook no competition, and he mows down thirty-three kings, because he is sovereign and his plans and purposes will be accomplished.

### **A long obedience**

Let's now examine this survey, in verses 16 through 22, of these years of battle and conquest. Joshua highlights a few new details here. Verses 16-22:

So Joshua took all that land [the entire land of Canaan], the hill country and all the Negeb and all the land of Goshen and the lowland and the Arabah and the hill country of Israel and its lowland from Mount Halak, that rises toward Seir, as far as Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. And he took all their kings, and smote them, and put them to death. Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon; they took all in battle. For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be utterly destroyed, and should receive no mercy but be exterminated, as the Lord commanded Moses.

And Joshua came at that time, and wiped out the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel; Joshua utterly destroyed them with their cities. There was none of the Anakim left in the land of the people of Israel; only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, did some remain.

That phrase in verse 18, "a long time," refers to the fact that the conquest lasted seven years, from the crossing of the Jordan to the final battle at the waters of Merom. This is an important detail. Warfare isn't quick and easy. Opposition doesn't just go away because we pray about it. This also highlights a wonderful aspect of Joshua's character. Joshua was a man who understood that he was in it for the long haul. He demonstrated patience and persistence. Joshua did not muster up these qualities on his own. Scripture is clear that these are fruits of the Holy Spirit in his life. These fruits develop through all the years of leadership, battle after battle. The apostle Paul challenges us with the same perspective. He says in Galatians 6:9, "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary."

There are many times in battle when I want to give up. I'm sure you feel the same way. One of the things that makes me want to give up is the character of the opposition. Verses 19 and 20 describe the hardness of heart of the Canaanite opposition. For seven years the Canaanites mounted tough resistance to God and his people, driven by an increasing hardness of heart. They were violently and angrily opposed to everything Israel represented.

Verse 20 states clearly that God hardened the hearts of the Canaanites. This was not to keep them from repenting from their sin of rebellion against him. We have seen two cases of salvation out of judgment. In the city of Jericho, which was already under God's judgment, Rahab was saved because she called out to the Lord in repentance. The Gibeonites, even though they were manipulative and deceitful, were honest in their

confession of faith in the Lord. Yes, they had mixed motives, but they were increasingly repentant in their relationship to Joshua and to Israel.

The stories of Rahab and the Gibeonites demonstrate God's unchanging purpose. Paul says in Romans 10:13 "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." It's important to understand this. God did not harden the Canaanites' hearts to keep them from repenting from sin, but to keep them from surrendering to the nation of Israel dishonestly, with false motives. Remember when God hardened Pharaoh's heart against the Israelites in Exodus 9. In chapter 8, the text says that Pharaoh first hardened his own heart against God, and then God sealed the process, confirming what was already happening in Pharaoh's heart.

God had been patient with the Canaanites for 650 years, as long as there was any hope of repentance. But their sin had reached its full measure. Verse 20 says that God's command was that they be exterminated. That was the only way that God's larger saving purposes could be fulfilled. Remember: God wanted a people of purity and holiness from whom the Messiah could come to bring salvation to the world.

Verses 21 and 22 mention the Anakim, or the sons of Anak. They were a race of giants. This is the first mention of the Anakim in the account of the conquest in the book of Joshua. Caleb will face them again later. Forty years earlier, the twelve spies went into the land of Canaan from Kadesh-Barnea and saw these giants and the fortified cities like Hazor. Ten of the twelve were scared to death. As a matter of fact, they returned and reported that they felt like grasshoppers compared to these giants (see Numbers 13:33). The other two spies, Joshua and Caleb, replied, in effect, "No big deal. The Lord will take care of them." It took more than forty years before the Lord fulfilled that confidence, but verses 21 and 22 tell us that God did in fact give Israel victory over the giants who were so frightening. Can you imagine dreading the confrontation with these superhumans for forty years? Yet when the time comes, God fights the battle on Israel's behalf.

### **Called to complete the conquest**

This summary, verses 16 through 22, reviews seven hard years of consistent opposition in completing the conquest of Canaan. The Israelites are always outnumbered and out-gunned. They are facing people who hate them. The warfare is driven by people whose hearts are hardened against Israel and God; the opponents are gigantic, unbeatable foes. It's tough through all those years to keep believing God in the face of that kind of opposition.

Do you ever feel ready to throw in the towel? As you look at the spiritual opposition in your life, do you feel unrelenting pressure from those around you who would love to pull the rug out from under you in your walk of faith with Jesus Christ? Are you faced with a situation in your life that is overwhelming and totally unmanageable from a human perspective? It may be a debilitating illness, or perhaps a family crisis that you can't solve. Whatever your case, look again at the reassuring conclusion to the first half of this book of Joshua in verse 23:

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.

We all need to be reminded to hang in there. We will prevail---not because we're tough, or have the right strategies---but because we're on God's side. We can trust the promise that God made to Joshua before the battle: "Do not be afraid of them, for tomorrow at this time I will give over all of them, slain, to Israel" (11:6). Our call is to believe that promise and to walk into the battle by faith. The Puritan Thomas Manton wrote, "Every divine promise has annexed to it the challenge, 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?'" Personal opposition and spiritual warfare give us the opportunity to prove God's sufficiency. God never promises more than he's able to perform. His word never exceeds his power. The apostle Paul made that clear in 1 Thessalonians 5:24, "He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it." Whatever God calls us to do, he promises to fulfill it through us. So don't give up. We are called to complete the conquest.

When I was a student at Whitworth College thirty years ago, the college president was a godly gentleman named Frank Warren. I remember him saying at freshman orientation, "It's always too soon to quit!" He was

speaking in the context of college academics, but through the years I heard him repeat that sentence many times, applying it to spiritual life and to relationships. It's always too soon to quit.

I recently read a poignant story of a pastor whose wife deserted him for another man. For seven years she alienated herself from him. During those seven years there was a two-year period when she came home and slept in the same bed with him, but never allowed him to touch her sexually. Personally and biblically he had every right to divorce her and trust the Lord for remarriage. She had deserted him. But despite that terrible pain of rejection, this man asked God to teach him what he needed to know about submission, faith, faithfulness and adaptability.

One summer this pastor went to a Bible conference where Corrie ten Boom was speaking. When he returned to his room one evening, he found a letter from Corrie ten Boom slipped under his door. Someone had told her of his circumstances and she had been deeply touched by the torture he was experiencing. She had never met him, but was inspired to write him a note of comfort and encouragement. She said that even though he might not feel like it at times, he was covered over and protected by God's wings (see Psalm 17:8). And then she wrote these words, "When you are covered by God's wings, it can get pretty dark." The light tends to get blocked out. Her biblical words brought hope to the pastor. Today that man and his wife have a restored love relationship and a renewed marriage because God was faithful, and because that pastor did not give in to the temptation to quit. He was more than a conqueror through Christ who strengthened him, and he would have been in good company with General Joshua. That pastor also would have felt comfortable at our pastors' lunch table, sharing stories of battles fought and won through Christ.

## **Spiritual rest**

The last sentence of 11:23 speaks of the rest that God gives: "And the land had rest from war." That rest fulfilled the promise God made to Joshua in chapter 1, verses 13 and 15. God's words to Joshua are a restatement of Moses' message to the people on the plains of the Transjordan. This gift of rest is mentioned four more times in Joshua as the Israelites divide up the land and encounter little pockets of resistance. It is always mentioned in the context of the cessation of war.

Joshua could lead the nation of Israel into that kind of literal, physical rest. His armies could pacify that land. But Hebrews 4 tells us that there is a kind of rest that Joshua couldn't lead the people into. The physical pacification of the land of Canaan was not God's complete rest. There is a kind of rest that only Jesus Christ can give us. For us, the conquest of Canaan represents claiming our spiritual rest in Christ. It is a picture of the rest that we experience as Christians as we surrender completely to the lordship of Jesus Christ, as we learn to let go of confidence in ourselves and trust God more for every aspect of our life.

What does this rest look like? I saw it in my three seventy-year-old brothers in arms—a relaxed confidence in God's goodness, faithfulness and provision. I saw it in their joy and in their hopeful optimism about the future. They rested in the fact that the God who had rescued them so often in the past could be trusted to do so again. We will explore this rest in more detail in the passages to follow.

I heard a story at *Promise Keepers* this year which illustrates these ideas of a resting heart and confident hope. One of the speakers told of an American missionary couple and their family who were home on furlough, spending their vacation at a cabin near a lake. They had three children, ages twelve, seven and four. One day the four-year-old slipped away from his brother and sister, went out on the dock to play, and fell into the lake. He didn't know how to swim and he wasn't wearing a life jacket.

The screams of the two older children alerted the father to the danger. He ran out on the dock and the kids pointed to where their brother had fallen in. The father dove into the lake. The water was only about ten feet deep, but it was so murky that he couldn't see a thing. He went all the way to the bottom and felt around frantically for his little boy. Finally, he ran out of air, came to the top, took another huge gulp of air, and went down again, searching for his son. On his way down a third time, his hand brushed his little boy's leg. He turned and found his four-year-old son with his arms and legs wrapped tightly around one of the pilings, about three feet below the water. The father pried him loose, carried him onto the lawn, and they both caught their breath. After about thirty minutes, when they had calmed down and things were restored to normal, the father

asked, "Son, what were you doing down there, hanging on to that piling?" The little boy answered, "I was just waiting for you, Dad."

Hanging on for dear life is reality. Spiritual warfare is reality. Fighting the battle to take new spiritual ground and not giving up is reality. But hopeful, confident rest is reality as well, knowing we are covered by the great protective wings of our Lord, trusting our faithful Father God to deliver us, fight for us and give us victory over the most daunting circumstances. That is our confident hope.

1. *Inheriting the Land*, Hamlin, John. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983, p. 96.

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## JOSHUA-THE ADVENTURE AND VICTORY OF FAITH

Joshua 11:1-12:24

Fourteenth Message

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August 18, 1996

Catalog No. 4467

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