

VICTORY AT GIBEON

JOSHUA-THE ADVENTURE AND VICTORY OF FAITH

by Doug Goins

In the last two weeks I've had conversations with a couple of people who have recently chosen to follow Jesus Christ. They both expressed surprise at the opposition they have experienced from both family and friends. They talked about personal struggles they didn't anticipate in breaking away from habitual ways of thinking and behaving. One person even talked about having nightmares and irrational thoughts of suicide as a result of choosing to surrender their life to Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Ephesians 6 makes very clear that the Christian life is one of ongoing warfare. It's not just an occasional skirmish that we're engaged in. We are in a pitched spiritual battle with satanic evil and with the world system, which is violently opposed to the advance of God's kingdom on earth. Even within ourselves there is fleshly resistance to all the good things that God wants to do for us. Did you realize that it was going to be that way when you decided to become a Christian?

The Scriptures make frequent reference to the warfare that marks the life of God's people. The apostle Paul said to Timothy, his son in the faith, "Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:12). Our confession of Jesus Christ as Lord is going to prompt opposition and struggle. At the end of his life as he awaited execution in a prison in Rome, Paul again wrote to Timothy, saying, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7). It is a life-long battle.

When we choose to join God's family through faith in Jesus Christ, we're automatically engaged with God in this battle against the forces of sin and death and hell, the forces of Satan himself.

Revelation 12 describes our Satanic enemy as "the deceiver of the whole world," as "the accuser of our brethren," as one who "has come down to you in great wrath," and as one who "was angry" (vs. 9, 10, 12, 17). His assaults are real, and a lifestyle of spiritual warfare is our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

This spiritual battle is going to be evident in Joshua 10, which is an account of the nation Israel's intense, sustained warfare against an alliance of five Amorite city-states that have attacked Gibeon, Israel's new covenant partner. This chapter is going to illustrate for us the challenge that Paul gives to Timothy: "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." (2 Timothy 2:3-4.) This chapter helps us understand what it means to be victorious soldiers, to be strong and courageous in the face of the enemies and to keep marching forward to claim the new territory that God wants us to take. In his farewell speech to Congress on April 19, 1951, General Douglas MacArthur said, "In war there is no substitute for victory." Joshua would have agreed with that.

Evil opposition

The first fifteen verses summarize the attack on Gibeon and their miraculous rescue by God through the nation of Israel. There is going to be a victory at a narrow mountain pass at Beth-horon, which will be the center of this battle. Verses 1-5 summarize the Amorite opposition:

When Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were among them, he feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were mighty. So Ado'ni-ze'dek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, to Piram king of Jarmuth, to Japhi'a king of Lachish, and to Debir king of Eglon, saying, "Come up to me, and help me, and let us smite Gibeon; for it has made peace with Joshua and with the people of Israel." Then the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered their forces, and went up with all their armies and encamped against Gibeon, and made war against it.

Because we have chosen to follow Jesus Christ we are a threat to those who oppose His kingdom.

This king of Jerusalem, Ado'ni-ze'dek, hears about the victories in Jericho and Ai and about this new alliance. Verse 2 says that he fears greatly, because Gibeon is a strong city with a great army, and they should have been part of the alliance against the nation Israel. So he shifts into high gear. He contacts these other four kings and has them join him. All five of these cities are within a thirty-mile radius of Gibeon, south and southwest of the city. And the attack on Gibeon begins.

Have you noticed that as you choose to take new spiritual ground for the sake of Christ's kingdom many non-believers are threatened by your spiritual influence?

These kings that Ado'ni-ze'dek recruits are natural enemies who have spent most of their time fighting each other. But once the common enemy is identified in terms of the threat to the land, they immediately rally together. In this light, it struck me that if Joshua and Israel had stayed in Gilgal, which was a very fertile, beautiful plain by the Jordan River, and had set up their own little city-state, there would have been no opposition from these Amorites in the land. But it was Israel's energetic commitment to obey God, to occupy the land that God had given them, that triggered the violent opposition. And like Israel, every one of us who wants to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ will face strong opposition. It's an important principle in life, don't forget it.

God is a faithful commander in chief

Verses 6-10 talk about God's faithfulness in keeping his covenant, in ministering to the nation Israel and to the Gibeonites as well:

And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal, saying, "Do not relax your hand from your servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us; for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the hill country are gathered against us." So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor. And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands; there shall not a man of them stand before you." So Joshua came upon them suddenly, having marched up all night from Gilgal. And the LORD threw them into a panic before Israel, who slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and smote them as far as Azekah and Makkedah.

The main point of this paragraph is that we can trust God to keep his commitment to us. Here he is willing to stand behind even a covenant relationship that was founded on sinful, manipulative deception and sinful gullibility (see chapter 9).

The men of Gibeon look across the Judean hills and see all these armies coming to lay siege against their city. They send messengers down the hill to Gilgal and holler, "Help! Please come to our rescue!" Joshua immediately gathers the troops, and says, "We've given our word before the Lord of heaven. We will come to their rescue." A God who keeps his covenants calls for a people who maintain their covenant relationships. Verse 8 tells us that Joshua prays, and God responds with those wonderful, encouraging words: "I will be with you, and you will win the battle." Joshua has heard those words from the Lord before, when he was

anticipating the battle at Jericho and then the second battle at Ai.

The text tells us that, having marched all night uphill, they carry out a surprise attack at dawn. They rout the enemy, and the Amorites flee in a panic. They experience a partial victory there at Gibeon, but then they have to pursue the fleeing troops down through this mountain pass at Beth-horon.

God keeps His word, and maintains His active power and presence throughout the long day of battle.

The Christian life is not an easy life, but even in times of greatest difficulty God is still faithful to keep his covenant. Joshua, the nation of Israel, and their allies in the city of Gibeon learned this. God keeps his covenant with people who believe in his faithfulness.

Miraculous intervention

The battle unfolds in verses 11-15, continuing down through the pass to the valley of Ai'jalon. Two great miracles, the supernatural resources of God at work on Israel's and Gibeon's behalf, are introduced:

And as they fled before Israel, while they were going down the ascent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw down great stones from heaven upon them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died because of the hailstones than the men of Israel killed with the sword.

Then spoke Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD gave the Amorites over to the men of Israel; and he said in the sight of Israel,

**"Sun, stand thou still at Gibeon,
and thou Moon in the valley of Ai'jalon."**

**And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed,
until the nation took vengeance on their enemies.**

Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stayed in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. There has been no day like it before or since, when the LORD hearkened to the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel.

Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.

These are the last recorded miraculous interventions that God makes in the history of the conquest in this book.

God's provision goes beyond the physical material resources of our natural existence. He is willing to use supernatural resources to achieve His sovereign purposes. I'm not talking about miracles on demand. I'm talking about sovereign decisions on God's part to reverse the natural order for his honor and glory, to further the work of his kingdom on earth.

In the miracle of the hailstones, the Lord is assisting an army that is weary. Remember, they have hiked all night, twenty-five miles uphill; engaged in hand-to-hand combat through most of the day; then pursued the Amorite army, which was in flight, down through this narrow mountain pass. So God providentially sends in reinforcements of heavenly artillery, machine-gun fire of hailstones. These hailstones are sort of like the "smart" bombs we saw in the Gulf War, which could identify the targets to hit. The hailstones hit only Amorite soldiers, never Israelite soldiers. The text says that there are more Amorites killed by hail than by the conventional military weaponry of the Israelite army.

But that miracle of hailstones is nothing compared to the miracle of extending the daylight hours so Israel can secure a complete victory over the enemy. If nightfall came, it would be easy for the enemy to escape. So Joshua says, "Lord, I want them where I can see them. Keep the daylight hours here. My men are tired, we want to finish the battle." And God hears Joshua's cry to reverse the natural order. He extends the hours of the day long enough so that Israel can finish the battle.

I've read a lot of scientific theories that try to explain empirically how this could have happened. How did God stop the earth on its axis, move heavenly bodies from their courses, and so on? But how do you explain any miracle, for that matter? I think the simplest answer is the answer of faith. God says through the prophet Jeremiah, "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?" (Jeremiah 32:27.) The Lord is in control of the natural elements. In Psalm 74 Asaph says that day and night belong to the Lord. Everything he has created is his servant. If God can't perform the miracles described here, then he can't perform any miracles. He is imprisoned by his own creation, unable to use or suspend the very laws that he built into it. I have difficulty believing in a God of such limitation. Our God gives supernatural resources to us when we are maintaining covenant relationship with him.

It's easy for us to say, "That was great for the people back in those days, but we don't see God doing those kinds of things today. Does God still he suspend the natural laws that he put in place?" A wonderful example of this is the testimony of Ed Woodhall about his grandmother, whom God miraculously healed from breast cancer when she was a young woman, giving her sixty more years of life. An equally phenomenal miracle that happened that very day was the eternal life she received by faith. She will live forever with the Creator God of the universe. Which is the greater miracle-healing from breast cancer or eternal life in Jesus Christ?

I was part of an elder's meeting a number of years ago that Pat Patnor came to. She was a young mother physically doubled over with crippling arthritis. It was robbing her husband of his wife and her children of their mother. The pain didn't allow her to sleep for more than five or ten minutes at a time. I saw Pat miraculously healed of that degenerative arthritis. God gave her back to her family and gave her life and health. But he did it for his honor and glory. Pat now serves at PBC Cupertino as the shepherd of women's ministries, and God uses her powerfully as a teacher and counselor.

Certain victory

In verses 16-27 there is an extended description of the necessary conclusion of the battle. There is also a very important spiritual conclusion. This passage records the capture and execution of the five Amorite kings:

These five kings fled, and hid themselves in the cave at Makke'dah. And it was told Joshua, "The five kings have been found, hidden in the cave at Makkedah." And Joshua said, "Roll great stones against the mouth of the cave, and set men by it to guard them; but do not stay there yourselves, pursue your enemies, fall upon their rear, do not let them enter their cities; for the LORD your God has given them into your hand." When Joshua and the men of Israel had finished slaying them with a very great slaughter, until they were wiped out, and when the remnant which remained of them had entered into the fortified cities, all the people returned safe to Joshua in the camp at Makkedah; not a man moved his tongue against any of the people of Israel.

Then Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave, and bring those five kings out to me from the cave." And they did so, and brought those five kings out to him from the cave, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. And when they brought those kings out to Joshua, Joshua summoned all the men of Israel, and said to the chiefs of the men of war who had gone with him, "Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings." Then they came near, and put their feet on their necks. And Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and of good courage; for thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight." And afterward Joshua smote them and put them to death, and he hung them on five trees. And they hung upon the trees until evening; but at the time of the going down of the sun, Joshua commanded, and they took them down from the trees, and threw them into the cave where they had hidden themselves, and they set great stones against the mouth of the cave, which remain to this very day.

Joshua finds out that the five kings have escaped and are holed up in this cave. This was a cowardly, almost treasonous act that these kings committed. They abandoned their troops, ran together to protect their own lives, and hid in this cave. Joshua tells his men to leave them in the cave so they can finish the mop-up operation.

At the end of the battle, Joshua performs a public ceremony of pulling the kings out of the cave and having his generals put their feet on the neck of each king. This ceremony is going to give encouragement and strength to his soldiers. The victories that they have accomplished at Jericho, Ai, and Gibeon have given them control of the central part of the land of Canaan. They still have ahead of them a difficult, extended campaign in the south, followed by an extended campaign in the north. Joshua's military strategy of dividing and conquering has worked; the nation has been split down the middle. But with more battles to fight, Joshua wants to remind the troops that the Lord is going to continue to give them victory throughout the land. So the actions of Joshua in executing these five kings contain powerful symbolism for the nation and for us today: completed warfare and the guarantee of future victory.

Our own call to battle and the battle strategy given in Ephesians 6 make clear the intensity of our ongoing warfare with sin and Satan and the necessity of armed conflict. We can fight with absolute confidence that Jesus Christ, as our commanding general will ultimately triumph over the forces of sin and death and hell.

You can go to international museums now and see ancient near eastern murals and relief sculptures that show this action in the orders that Joshua gives the generals, to place their feet on the necks of the five kings. These artists, who were like court historians, recorded these scenes so that it would be clear to posterity exactly who the winners and losers were.

This spiritual principle appears throughout the Scriptures. King Solomon, speaking of his father David's success against the enemies of Israel, talks about a time when the Lord put David's foes under the soles of his feet (1 Kings 5:3). David himself saw his military victories as the promise of a day when God would make his own enemies his footstool through the spiritual victory of the coming Messiah (Psalm 110:1). The apostle Paul picks up the same phrase, referring to Jesus Christ's ultimate victory over sin in 1 Corinthians 15:25: "For He [Jesus] must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet."

That certainty of who the winner is going to be and what part we play in the process of victory is really important. It answers the deepest question of our hearts, which Paul asks in Romans 8:35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" That list of struggles defines life as it really is. We are never told that we won't have difficulty. We are engaged in a spiritual battle to the death. But the answer to Paul's question says that Jesus Christ is the ultimate Victor: "But in all these things [all these terrible, limiting circumstances] we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:37-39). He won't just preserve us. Victorious Christian living is possible through Jesus, who demonstrated the victory through his act of love and sacrifice on the cross. The kings are executed. Victory means putting to death the enemy. There is something in me that resists that necessity. I want to ask, "Wouldn't it be better to just humiliate the kings or make a public symbol out of them, perhaps make them spend the rest of their lives in the cave, or just parole them to Gilgal? Why do they have to execute them?" But Joshua does execute them, and he hangs them on a tree for a day to show that they are under God's curse. Then he has their bodies put back in the cave, and he has a monument built to stand for all generations. In our earlier studies we've seen God's clear mandate to Israel, his call to holy war against sin. As with everything in Canaan, these kings are under the ban, devoted to God's judgment. They were in violent opposition to God's work in that land, and if they weren't destroyed they would come back to try to conquer the nation again. Remember, the iniquity of the Amorites is full (see Genesis 15:16). The time for mercy and grace is past for these men and their followers. It isn't enough to leave them skulking in a cave. They had to be slain. We shouldn't pity these kings at all.

In a similar way, what we're called to do is examine the cave of our own thought life, the things nobody else may know about, and ask ourselves, "What things that are in resistance to God's purpose are still skulking in my life? What are the fleshly, destructive tendencies that are empowered by Satan? How are they planning to undermine who I'm called to be in Jesus Christ?" We must be willing to submit to the crucifixion of self if we want to enjoy victory in Jesus Christ. We can't leave sin lurking in the hidden recesses of our heart, without its being brought into the light and judged. The good news is that if we face whatever "kings" that are committed to pulling the rug out from under our walk with Jesus Christ, we will know forgiveness, empowerment, cleansing, and direction for life. Jesus the Savior and King, of whom Joshua is a type or a foreshadowing, is

the one who defeats our enemies as they rise up, whether it's the fleshly things in us that resist God, satanic evil, or the influence of a world system that doesn't like what we stand for in relationship to God. With Jesus it's guaranteed that we can live in victory over all those things.

Now without any break in the narrative, verse 28 says immediately,

And Joshua took Makkedah on that day....

Then a whole series of battles with seven different cities in the south unfolds. Each battle gets only one or two verses. But between each battle are action connectives-they moved, they went, they traveled; continuing the work of conquest. It's very intense warfare when you read about each of the battles individually. But two things are mentioned in verses 28-42: First, the Lord gave the victory, and second, Joshua did everything God commanded him to. He carried out warfare God's way.

Verses 40-42 summarize the southern campaign:

So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded. And Joshua defeated them from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon. And Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel.

Returning to Gilgal

The very last verse of the chapter is quiet and reflective:

Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.

This is the fifth time Gilgal is mentioned. It's the place Israel started the attack from and the place they return to. It's a place of reference throughout our chapter. It's a spiritual base camp that they come back to. Remember, Gilgal is the place where Joshua set up the stones as a memorial of the nation's crossing through the Jordan River, a symbol of death to the wilderness life and of resurrection life in the new land. It was the place of circumcision, where the reproach, shame, and humiliation of the past was symbolically rolled away. It was the place where Passover was re instituted, which represented intimate fellowship with the Lord. It was the place where the people began to live off the provision of the land instead of depending on the miraculous provision of manna. It was the place where God showed up in front of Joshua with sword in hand, "the commander of the army of the LORD," and Joshua fell on his face in worship and submission before him. It was the base camp they came back to after both the humiliation at Ai and the victory at Ai.

And now these weary soldiers, probably after weeks in the south of the land, return home. Imagine how good those tents must have looked, and their wives and children. We as Christians need a Gilgal that we can return to, a place of rest and renewal. Gilgal has great community significance. It's a sanctuary where God's people gather to hear his word. Remember, our warfare is not fought in isolation. We have fellow soldiers in the fight. We gather together as the church partly so that we can hear war stories that encourage us, strengthen us, and give us strategy for how we can fight the battle. We need those stories. Throughout the conquest of Canaan, Israel returns over and over to this very significant place. There they find encouragement, rest, motivation, and strategy for continued warfare. Like Gilgal, our getting together at church on Sunday morning, in homes, and wherever we gather as the body of Christ ought to be times of rest, worship, spiritual encouragement and empowerment for a life of warfare through God's word.

In his book *Victorious Christian Living: Studies in the Book of Joshua*, Alan Redpath makes this profound statement on Page 153 about the relationship between Gilgal and our lives as Christians now:

May I remind you of the great words of New Testament truth and salvation which have their roots deeply imbedded in Gilgal. Here they are; refresh your memory. It was a place of

remembrance, where all of God's people together went down unto death; it was a place of resurrection, where together they came up with their leader into life. It was a place of renunciation, where they cast off the carnal existence of the wilderness; it was a place of restoration, where they came again into fellowship with the Lord. It was the place of realization, where they began to taste of the strong food of the land; it was the place of revelation, where they met their Captain with a drawn sword.

The Christian life has its roots firmly imbedded in Calvary, the place where we died with Jesus and rose with Him, where we deliberately renounced carnality and have entered into a living fellowship with our Lord, where we have begun to take the strong food of His Word and to realize every moment of our lives that the Captain of the Lord's hosts is with us.

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