Joshua 10:1-43
The Conquest of Southern Canaan

Review and Introduction

I imagine that most Christians, when asked about the book of Joshua, would say that it is a narrative about the military conquest of the Promised Land. And so it is, but there is so much more. So far in our study of this extraordinary narrative, we have seen the transition in leadership from Moses to Joshua. We have read of the conversion to faith of a prostitute and her family. We have learned of great victories and dramatic defeats. We have witnessed the consequences of sin and the benefits of repentance. We have examples of God's will being sought for and God's will being ignored. There has been treachery, deceit, and foolishness. Clearly, there is much in this book besides merely battles and conquest.

But today, our passage will meet the needs of those of you who enjoy military history. Today, we have an account of battle after battle, as the Israelites moved from their well-established position in the central hill country into southern Canaan. And, again, we will learn that it was not the profound military strategy of Joshua or his outstanding leadership that proved the difference between victory and defeat. As ever, with the Israelites and with us, the battle is the Lord's.

The Amorite Strategy

Our account begins not within the camp of the Israelites, but in the councils of the Amorite king of Jerusalem.

"[1]Now it came about when Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had captured Ai, and had utterly destroyed it (just as he had done to Jericho and its king, so he had done to Ai and its king), and that the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were within their land, [2]that 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. [3]Therefore Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent word to Hoham king of Hebron, to Piram king of Jarmuth, to Japhia king of Lachish, and to Debir king of Eglon, saying, [4]'Come up to me and help me, and let's attack Gibeon, for it has made peace with Joshua and with the sons of Israel.' [5]So 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 together and went up, they with all their armies, and camped by Gibeon and fought against it" (v. 1-5).

Once again, our narrative begins with a rumor. What had been heard this time? A great deal, it seems. The king of Jerusalem, Adoni-zedek, had heard that the Israelites had destroyed both Jericho and Ai, killed their respective kings, and made a treaty with the Gibeonites in the central hill country. This alliance with Gibeon had given Israel control of the central hill country. The Israelites now had access to the coastal plains as well as to northern and southern Canaan. They had driven a wedge deep into Canaan. Something had to be done. The sense of urgency can be seen in the opening two verses, which make up one sentence in which the King of Jerusalem seems to be unable to take a breath until he has expressed his fears.

The king of Jerusalem was terrified. He was convinced that not only was Israel's God powerful, but that Israel had gained a valuable ally. He was king of Jerusalem, and other kings (specifically Jericho and Ai) had not fared so well after encountering the Israelites. The treaty with Gibeon seems to have been of special concern. Consider how that city was described. It was a great city, like a royal city, greater than Ai, and all its men were warriors. Ai had been a smaller outpost of Bethel, but Gibeon was the leader of the coalition in the center hill country, and now Gibeon and its satellite city-states were allied with the Israelites.

The response of the king of Jerusalem was to try to form a coalition not for making peace, but for war. Adoni-zedek likely believed that he had no other choice than to fight. It was unlikely that he could repeat the Gibeonite subterfuge. After all, Joshua was not likely to allow another people group within Canaan to live. Any delegation of emissaries offering peace terms would be closely scrutinized. It was possible, perhaps, that the king of Jerusalem could have tried to convince his entire population to follow Rahab and make a genuine confession of faith and turn their allegiance to the God of Israel, but that would only have been perceived as weakness, and the king would likely have been overthrown. Therefore, Adoni-zedek did the only other thing he could. He prepared for war.

He sent word to the kings of cities in the region, "Hoham king of Hebron, to Piram king of Jarmuth, to Japhia king of Lachish, and to Debir king of Eglon" (v. 3). Each of these cities likely benefited from trade with Jerusalem, and they were located in strategic areas to stop the Israelite advance into southern Canaan. That these, and not other cities, were the object of a military alliance indicates that these were the more powerful cities in the region as well. This was no random assemblage. This was a concerted effort by allied city-states to stop the Israelite advance into Canaan.

Historically speaking, this is the only example in the book of Joshua of correspondence between the Canaanite kings. In our first talk, we considered the Amarna letters, the historical record of correspondence between kings in Canaan and between those kings and Egypt at the time of the conquest. Those letters remind us that such correspondence as this must have occurred on a regular basis. Scripture has used the phrase "so-and-so heard" many times thus far, but it could easily also mean "so-and-so read." Our text may be a summary of such a letter, or perhaps its brevity may imply the urgency of Adoni-zedek.

There are two further things to notice. First, we should recognize that this is not the same coalition as in Joshua chapter nine. That alliance was both broader in scope and had been formed on the understanding that Israel was vulnerable. This was a specific coalition of southern city-states in Canaan who were more desperate. They formed their alliance not out of eager anticipation for war, but out of a sense of despair and self-preservation. Second, we should also understand that these kingdoms were not preparing for war against Israel. They hoped to attack Gibeon, destroy the alliance, and regain control of the central hill country of Canaan.

In summary, the treaty with the Gibeonites that we discussed last time compelled these Amorite city-states of southern Cannan to go to war against Gibeon. That meant that Joshua and the Israelites had to honor their treaty and respond to the attack. And that response led to further battles and the resulting conquest of southern Canaan.

Gideon's Call and Israel's Response

The leaders of Gideon learned of the impending attack upon their city and determined to prevail upon their powerful allies to honor their treaty.

"[6]Then the men of Gibeon sent word to Joshua at the camp at Gilgal, saying, 'Do not abandon your servants; come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites that live in the hill country have assembled against us.' [7]So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the valiant warriors. [8]And the LORD said to Joshua, 'Do not fear them, for I have handed them over to you; not one of them will stand against you.' [9]So Joshua came upon them suddenly by marching all night from Gilgal. [10]And the LORD brought them into confusion before Israel, and He struck them down in a great defeat at Gibeon, and pursued them by the way of the ascent to Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. [11]And as they fled from Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, the LORD hurled large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword" (v. 6-11).

We can see that there was a clear expectation from the Gibeonites. They reminded Joshua and the Israelites leaders that they were "your servants" (v. 6). It was the obligation of the stronger party to protect the weaker. The Gibeonites had signed the treaty with Joshua and the leaders of Israel, and now they expected Joshua and Israel to honor that treaty. This was a test of Israel's commitment. They had made their oath in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, and they needed to keep that oath.

"All the kings of the Amorites" (v. 6) was likely an exaggeration intended to imply the need for urgency. The Gibeonites were well aware that, despite their own coalition of city-states, they were no match for the larger and more powerful alliance of the kings of southern Canaan. They needed help, and Israel was their only hope.

Despite the trickery involved in making the treaty, Joshua and the leaders remained true to their word. Joshua took "all the people of war with him, and all the valiant warriors" (v. 7). What is intended here, I think, is that the main force of the Israelite army marched out with Joshua to defend Gibeon. And they did so with the assurance of the Lord. God encouraged Joshua with the promise, "do not fear them, for I have handed them over to you; not one of them will stand against you" (v. 8).

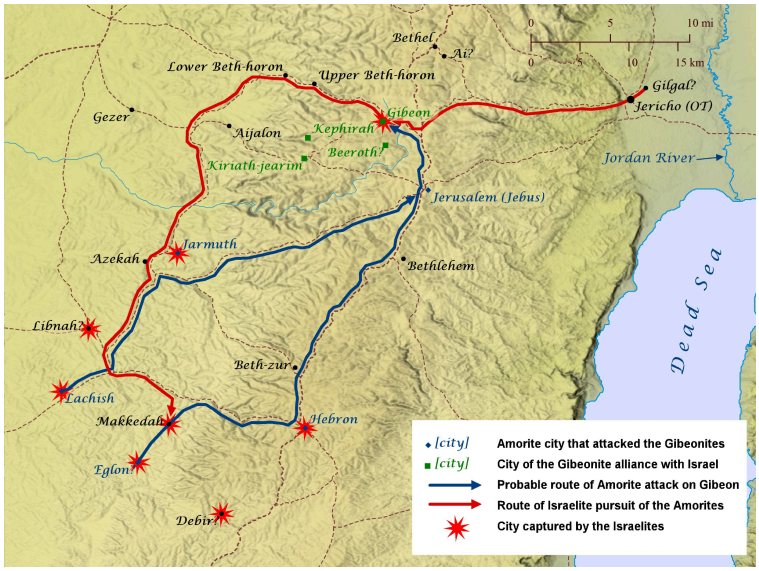
That language is familiar. God reassured Joshua not with a new truth but rather with an affirmation of an old promise. It is worth considering that this is often exactly what we need. When faced with difficulties, when the time comes to act on faith, we usually do not need to gain some new insight or find some new truth. We need only remember what we already know. God is faithful. God will provide. God will give us all the grace we need. God was reminding Joshua that this was always God's war. Every battle was His. His sovereign will would ensure the victory.

But it is equally true that God's reassurance ought not to stifle human creativity. There was still something for Joshua and the Israelites to do. They could not defend Gibeon from Gilgal. They would have to leave the safety of their encampment and journey to the scene of battle. And so they did.

And as with the attack on Jericho, the strategy Joshua employed does not seem wise at first glance. To march all night from Gilgal to Gibeon meant that the Israelite army had to endure an eighteen-mile trek that included a 3,500 foot gain of elevation. One would think that such a forced march would only leave the army little more than exhausted and hungry when they arrived for battle.

Yet, to attack at dawn was a common strategy in the Near East at the time. The idea was to force a battle and instill fear and panic into the enemy before the opposing army could be organized. In the ensuing melee, the attacking army, though perhaps more tired, would possess the advantage. Be that as it may, the point of Scripture is not to dwell on the strategy of Joshua, but to see the Lord at work. It was always the Lord Who gave the victory.

With the Lord fighting for them, the battle at Gibeon was, naturally, one-sided. Scripture is clear that this was because it was the Lord's work. The Lord "brought them into confusion" (v. 10). The Lord "struck them down in a great defeat" (v. 10). With God's help, the Israelites drove the alliance of the Amorite kings away from Gibeon and west toward Beth-Horon, a major pass through the hill country that provided access from the hill country to the western plains of Canaan.



From there, the Israelites army pursued the fleeing Amorites southward through the Shephelah (rolling hills between the higher hill country and the coastal plain) to the village of Azekah. This was near Jarmuth where, no doubt, the Amorites had hoped to regroup. Makkedah lies about halfway between Lachish, Eglon, and Hebron and, it seems, some of the retreating army made their way as far as that.

The pursuit covered a distance of twenty miles. And as the retreating Amorites tried to make their way to cities of safety, they encountered another problem. As if the overwhelming power of the Israelite army was not enough, the Israelites were assisted in their pursuit by a shower of hailstones. These hailstones, "large stones from heaven" (v. 11) appeared and fell from the sky. Miraculously, these missiles from heaven landed only on the Amorite army. The Israelites were entirely unharmed by this extraordinary weather phenomena. Science may try to explain this away, but again it is clear that the Lord was at work, ever present, ever faithful, winning the battle for His people.

The Miracle

But the appearance of these astonishing hailstones, that were able to single out only the Amorite soldiers as they fell from the sky, was not the only miracle of the day.

"[12]Then Joshua spoke to the LORD on the day when the LORD turned the Amorites over to the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel,

'Sun, stand still at Gibeon,
And moon, at the Valley of Aijalon!'
[13] So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped,
Until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies.

Is it not written in the Book of Jashar? And the sun stopped in the middle of the sky and did not hurry to go down for about a whole day. [14]There was no day like that before it or after it, when the LORD listened to the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel. [15]Then Joshua and all Israel with him returned to the camp at Gilgal" (v. 12-15).

From a literary standpoint, we must recognize that this is a parallel account with the previous narrative, not something that happened later. As we have seen before in this book, the human author was inspired to layer the narrative, going back over certain sections in further detail. And that style of writing is what we have here.

This is a passage that can teach us many things, but let's begin by appreciating the power of prayer. As the battle raged, Joshua at some point cried out to God. We have no details about when during the battle this prayer occurred (though it was probably in the morning as we will discuss in a moment), nor exactly where it occurred. Our only clue is that Joshua, in a commanding tone, asked for the sun to stand still at Gibeon and the moon to stand still in the valley of Aijalon. Since Gibeon was to the east, and the valley of Aijaon was to the west, this meant that this was a time of day when both the sun and moon were visible in the sky at the same time.

Quite naturally, there are many views, even among believers, as to the precise nature of this miracle. Since the sun was in the east, that is rising, some have wondered why did Joshua think he would need more time since the day was just beginning? We will not go into all of these theories here, but we can acknowledge some of the major ideas concerning this miracle that have been voiced through recent years.

The first view of the text is that this was not intended to be a literal statement of fact but rather a poetic interlude into the narrative. In other words, this event was not to be taken literally. What occurred was a bad omen from Neo-Assyrian astrology, since the sun and moon were visible at the same time. It was the astrological sign, not the literal description that was the point of the author. This view, however, requires the author to insert non-literal poetic imagery into an otherwise very detailed, literal, historical, military narrative which seems unlikely.

A second view is that the phrase "stood still" should be translated to cease or be silent. In other words, it was the heat of the sun that ceased. This allowed the Israelites to fight in cooler weather and continue their pursuit of the retreating Amorites without growing fatigued. A third view is that the hailstorm was the answer to the prayer. This view suggests that the storm clouded the sky for the entire day. Both of these arguments, however, simply do not honor the plain meaning of the words in the passage.

A final set of arguments is that the sun did not actually stop but only appeared to stop. In other words, the sun slowed down so the rotation required forty-eight hours instead of twenty-four. To me, it seems as if this is saying the same thing as that God caused the sun to stop, without giving credit to God for performing the miracle.

The plain reading of the text is that the sun and moon stayed where they were until the battle had been concluded. God sent the hailstones. God caused the earth to stop revolving, God sent terror into the hearts of Israel's enemies. The point of the passage is best summarized in the statement that "the LORD fought for Israel" (v. 14). God gave the victory.

There are a few other details to note. First, the Book of Jashar is also referenced in 2 Samuel 1:18 and 1 Kings 8:13. It is similar to the annals of the king of Israel and the annals of the kings of Judah that are mentioned on occasion in the historical biblical narrative. It is simply another historical record, available to those at the time of the writing which, because it is not inspired Scripture, is no longer extant.

Second, the comment that "there was no day like that before it or after it, when the LORD listened to the voice of a man" (v.14) seems puzzling since God had often, and still does, hear our prayers. There were many times when Abraham, Moses, and others had called upon the Lord, and He had heard them. Therefore, this cannot mean that God had never heard and answered prayer before. Rather the phrase seems to point to the fact that Joshua's request for such an extraordinary phenomenon was exceptional.

Finally, that Joshua returned with all Israel implies that there was no loss of life in the battle. This was a complete victory for the people of Israel, who had responded in obedience by honoring their unwitting alliance with the Gibeonites.

Fate of the Five Kings

As the battle continued, Joshua was compelled to turn his attention to the Amorite leaders who had instigated the attack on Gibeon.

"[16]Now these five kings had fled and hidden themselves in the cave at Makkedah. [17]And it was told to Joshua, saying, 'The five kings have been found hidden in the cave at Makkedah.' [18]So Joshua said, 'Roll large stones against the mouth of the cave, and post men by it to guard them, [19]but do not stay there yourselves; pursue your enemies and attack them from behind. Do not allow them to enter their cities, for the LORD your God has handed them over to you.' [20]It came about when Joshua and the sons of Israel had finished striking them down in a very great defeat, until they were destroyed, and the survivors of them who escaped had entered the fortified cities, [21]that all the people returned to the camp, to Joshua at Makkedah in peace. No one uttered a word against any of the sons of Israel.

[22]Then Joshua said, 'Open the mouth of the cave and bring these five kings out to me from the cave.' [23]They did so, and brought these 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. [24]When they brought these kings out to Joshua, Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said to the leaders of the men of war who had gone with him, 'Come forward, put your feet on the necks of these kings.' So they came forward and put their feet on their necks. [25]Joshua then said to them, 'Do not fear or be dismayed! Be strong and courageous, for the LORD will do this to all your enemies with whom you fight.' [26]So afterward Joshua struck them and put them to death, and he hanged them on five trees; and they were hung on the trees until evening. [27]Then it came about at sunset that Joshua gave the command, and they took them down from the trees and threw them into the cave where they had hidden themselves, and put large stones over the mouth of the cave, to this very day.

[28]Now Joshua captured Makkedah on that day, and struck it and its king with the edge of the sword; he utterly destroyed it and every person who was in it. He left no survivor. So he did to the king of Makkedah just as he had done to the king of Jericho" (v. 16-28).

We resume the narrative with the five leaders/kings/commanders of the Amorite alliance in full retreat. The Hebrew word can mean any of those, though at the time such city-state kingdoms were often ruled by a king who was also the commander of the army. Think of Joshua for example.

These men had fled their armies, leaving them to fend for themselves as best they could against the combination of the hailstones and the Israelites, and found refuge, so they hoped, in a cave.

The report of their location was brought to Joshua. He knew what to do. There was not time to focus on these retreating leaders while the battle still raged. These men were in a cave. Very well, keep them there. He told his soldiers to "roll large stones against the mouth of the cave, and post men by it to guard them" (v. 18).

We can appreciate that there is a sense of urgency in Joshua's commands. The sun has stood still, but that miracle must be taken advantage of. Hear Joshua's commands, "do not stay there yourselves; pursue your enemies and attack them from behind. Do not allow them to enter their cities" (v. 19). The Israelite army must not concern itself with the leaders only. The rest of the Amorite army must be destroyed.

No doubt the battle must have continued for some time. As the enemy fled, detachments of Israelite soldiers were sent to hunt them down. And Scripture is clear that this was "a very great defeat," "they were destroyed" (v. 19). The language is that of total victory for the Israelites. Yet some survivors escaped to their cities. Not every Amorite soldier died that day. This battle was a victory, but the conquest was not yet complete. And it must have taken all the extra time of daylight God provided.

After the battle, the Israelite army returned to Makkedah rather than Gilgal. It would not have been prudent to return all the way to the central hill country now that the battle was in southern Canaan. Notice also that there was no dissension as there had been with the original treaty with Gibeon. The people, in their exultation of victory, had forgiven the Israelite leaders for the ill-advised treaty that had brought them into this battle in the first place.

With the battle concluded, though there still must have been skirmishes in the distance, Joshua had time to deal with the leaders of the attack on Gibeon. He gathered his soldiers that were not otherwise engaged in the fighting, and brought them to the cave. Without fear he commanded his men to open the cave and bring the kings out to him. No doubt those kings already knew their fate. Those who began the war were those who were going to be killed. They were going to be an example to all of what it meant to resist the armies of the Lord, the God of Israel.

The list we have repeats the names of the kings. There was complete obedience to Joshua's commands. Joshau did not hesitate, and neither did those to whom he spoke. As the five kings stood before him, Joshua made a speech to those around. This was to be a symbolic moment; a symbolic action to inspire confidence. It also served as a reminder of the end of the king of Ai. Joshua called to his men to "come forward, put your feet on the necks of these kings" (v. 24). The men did so and Joshua exhorted them, "do not fear or be dismayed! Be strong and courageous, for the LORD will do this to all your enemies with whom you fight" (v. 25).

Be strong and courageous. The watchwords for the conquest. Not in battle, but in obedience. The Lord had been on the side of Israel and had done miraculous works to give His people the victory. The alliance with the Gibeonite confederation was good, but having the Lord fight your battles was something else entirely.

The kings were then struck down, probably beheaded, and then hanged on trees as a further reminder to all who passed by of the fate of those who opposed the Lord. In accordance with the Law, they were removed from the trees and interred in the very cave into which they had fed.

The Conquest of Southern Canaan

The remainder of the conquest of southern Canaan is given in the rest of the passage.

"[29]Then Joshua and all Israel with him passed on from Makkedah to Libnah, and fought against Libnah. [30]And the LORD also handed it over to Israel, with its king, and he struck it and every person who was in it with the edge of the sword. He left no survivor in it. So he did to its king just as he had done to the king of Jericho.

[31]And Joshua and all Israel with him passed on from Libnah to Lachish, and they camped by it and fought against it. [32]And the LORD handed Lachish over to Israel; and he captured it on the second day, and struck it and every person who was in it with the edge of the sword, according to all that he had done to Libnah.

[33]Then Horam king of Gezer came up to help Lachish, and Joshua defeated him and his people until he had left him no survivor.

[34]And Joshua and all Israel with him passed on from Lachish to Eglon, and they camped by it and fought against it. [35]They captured it on that day and struck it with the edge of the sword; and he utterly destroyed on that day every person who was in it, according to all that he had done to Lachish.

[36]Then Joshua and all Israel with him went up from Eglon to Hebron, and they fought against it. [37]And they captured it and struck it and its king and all its cities and all the persons who

were in it with the edge of the sword. He left no survivor, according to all that he had done to Eglon. And he utterly destroyed it and every person who was in it.

[38]Then Joshua and all Israel with him returned to Debir, and they fought against it. [39]He captured it and its king and all its cities, and they struck them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed every person who was in it. He left no survivor. Just as he had done to Hebron, so he did to Debir and its king, as he had also done to Libnah and its king.

[40]So Joshua struck all the land, the hill country and the Negev and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings. He left no survivor, but he utterly destroyed all who breathed, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded. [41]Joshua struck them from Kadesh-barnea even as far as Gaza, and all the country of Goshen even as far as Gibeon. [42]Joshua captured all these kings and their lands at one time, because the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel. [43]So Joshua and all Israel with him returned to the camp at Gilgal" (v. 29-43).

These are bare bones summaries of the battles rather than the detailed descriptions we have been given thus far. In fact, it reads like many other Ancient Near-Eastern annals. We will look at this material in a general way, rather than try to parse each of the battles themselves. That is not because they are unimportant, but for our purposes this morning, I think general principles rather than specific detail is important.

We can appreciate that the author uses a great deal of repetition in his description of the events. "He took it," "put to the sword," "everyone in it," and the comparison of the destruction of one city to another are all literary devices to create an overall impression of complete victory. Israel had consistent success and the cause of all those who resisted was hopeless.

No details are given of these battles other than the general indication that these were complete victories for the Israelites. The Israelite army proceeded from the north at Libnah, south through Lachish and Eglon, then east to Hebron, then south to Debir. While the narrative is related quickly, no doubt this was not the events of one day. This was a quick succession of battles and sieges, but still it must have taken some time to lay waste all of southern Canaan.

The Israelites even progressed as far south as Kadesh -Barnea (v. 41). Kadesh-Barnea was the boundary with the Wilderness of Sinai. Gaza was considered the first city in Cannan when traveling from Egypt. This was the extreme southern boundary. Gibeon, where the battle began, was far north in the hill country, some 130 miles away. Though the original battle lasted for the "long day" and the further battles listed may have taken only a few days or weeks, this entire passage relates events that must have taken weeks, if not months.

The mention of Gezer in the center of the narrative is interesting. It is not one of the cities listed in the original alliance, but it did send out its army to help defend Lachish (v. 33). The city-state of Gezer guarded the western entrance to the Aijalon valley and thus Jerusalem. It may have been under Egyptian control and was likely even defended by an Egyptian garrison, at least in part. Yet, though its army was defeated, the city itself was never taken (Joshua 16:10).

Scripture is clear that later battles were required. The conquest of southern Canaan was never fully complete. Joshua 11:13 informs us that, though their armies were defeated, none of these towns was destroyed, and Joshua 15:13-16 shows us that some inhabitants still remained. And this was expected.

> "[29]I will not drive them out from you in a single year, so that the land will not become desolate and the animals of the field become too numerous for you. [30]I will drive them out from you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land" (Exodus 23:29-30).

So while it is clear that, from a broad perspective, this was a sweeping victory for the Israelites, there is no inconsistency in using such hyperbolic language as the author takes the liberty of using. Think of modern times. When we say that Germany conquered France in World War 2 we do not mean that the entire country was subjugated, nor that every Frenchman became loyal to Germany, or that Germany permanently controlled the area. The point of the passage is to make it clear that this was an extraordinary, indeed God-given, victory.

<u>Takeaways</u>

This account gives us much to think about. Again we see the value of keeping our promises. Joshua and Israel honored their oath to the Gibeonites, and from that obedience God provided victories over all the main Canaanite city-states in the south.

And let us never forget that it is God Who is the hero of this narrative. All the action brings glory to Him. The success of the Israelites army, no less than the hailstones and stopped sun. God is at work on behalf of His people.

And, finally, we see the power of prayer. Perhaps Joshua had learned his lesson from the encounter with the Gibeonites. On that occasion, he did not seek the Lord before making the treaty. This time, despite the heat of battle, Joshua stopped and prayed. That is a lesson for us all.