

Joshua's Long Day

Makes Sense

Science In Light Of Scripture Series

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Josh10:14 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.

When you read about a miracle in Scripture, do you automatically pause and wonder how such a thing could happen? I'll bet your conclusion is something like "I have no clue but God knows". This is the only possible answer for explaining miracles because Webster says that miracles "contradict known scientific laws". This is why every public school science textbook ignores them. Without a scientific law to apply, science typically takes the stand that they never happened. Nevertheless as believers, Biblical miracles immediately grab our attention as unexpected, or unusual, and always different from the norm.

The Bible Teacher's Commentary summarizes some different interpretations of standing still:

Some have suggested that what happened here was a miracle involving refraction of light. The day was apparently lengthened. Others have argued that the request really was for the sun to "be silent"; that is, to stop shining so strongly that its heat would sap the strength of the pursuing Israelites. However, the language of the text, and particularly the statement that this day was unique and twice the normal length between noon and sunset, seems to indicate that the day was miraculously prolonged.

Hard Sayings of the Bible also takes the silent sun position and adds that clouds blocked the sun (consistent with thunderstorms producing the hail) helped the exhausted Israelite army to keep fighting.

Why Did Joshua Want The Sun and Moon To Stop?

Now when we answer the different question "why" instead of "how" we have more to go on and some very reasonable conclusions emerge. Notice how God's Word explains the greater purpose of parting the Red Sea and the Jordan River: to demonstrate that God is mighty and therefore to be feared by everyone (**bold**, below).

Josh 4:23 *"For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the LORD your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed; 24 **that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, so that you may fear the LORD your God forever.**"*

We will see that the miracle of the stationary Sun and Moon demonstrated the same purpose of glorifying God.

Joshua 10:1-15

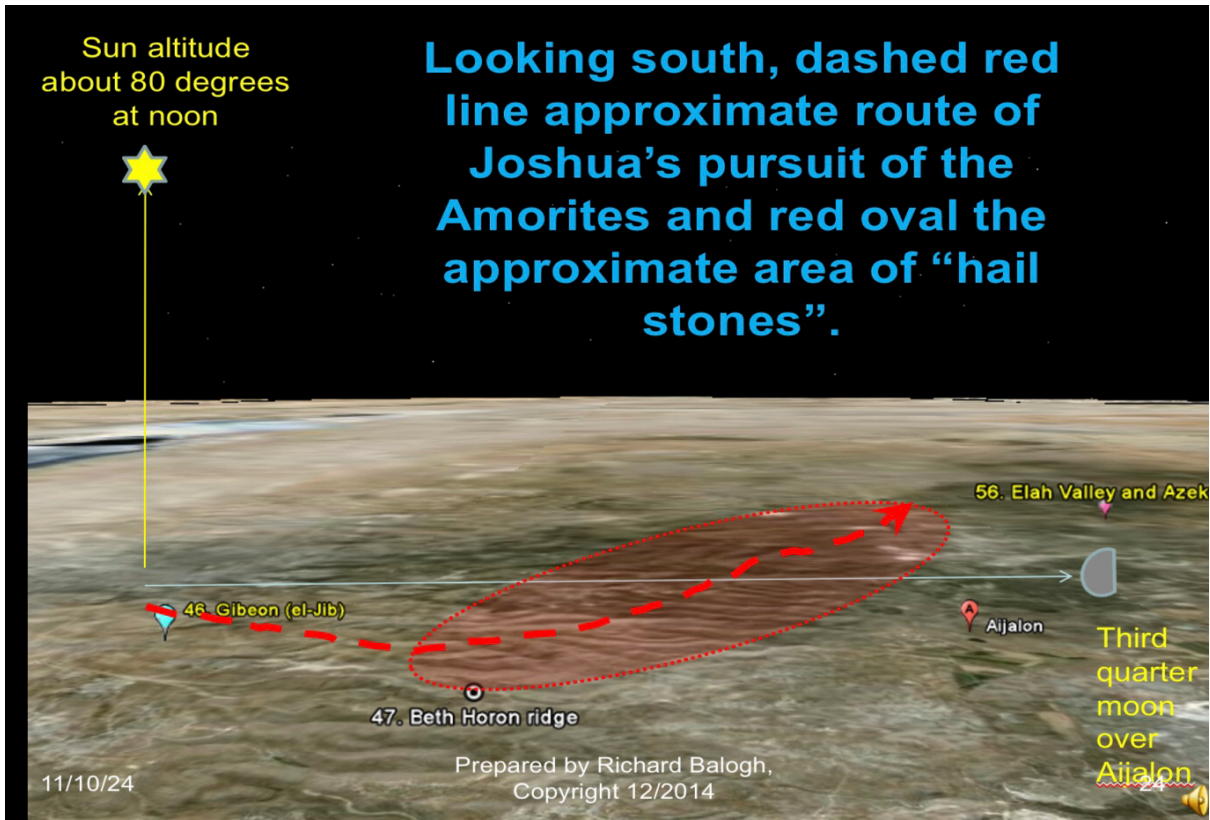
Jos 10:1-9 *“Now it came about when Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had captured Ai, and had utterly destroyed it (just as he had done to Jericho and its king, so he had done to Ai and its king), and that the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were within their land, 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 and to Piram king of Jarmuth and to Japhia king of Lachish and to Debir king of Eglon, saying, 4 “Come up to me and help me, and let us 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. 6 Then the men of Gibeon sent word to Joshua to 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 The LORD said to Joshua, “Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands; not one of them shall stand before you.” 9 So Joshua came upon them suddenly by marching all night from Gilgal.”*

❖ The Israelites used the advantage of surprise to cause their enemy to run from Gibeon

The journey from Gilgal to Gibeon is a bit over 16 miles, climbing from well below sea level (Gilgal) to over 2000 feet in altitude (Gibeon), almost 4000 feet of climbing. This doesn't sound like an easy thing to ask your army to do, especially if you're going to fight at the end of this long upward hike! It was a journey that usually would have taken an army 3 days.

❖ The Lord directly participated by confusing the enemy when Joshua arrived at Gibeon and also by throwing large hailstones at them. By the way, the largest hailstone ever measured by a United States official weather observer measured more than one foot across.

Jos 10:10-14 “And the LORD confounded them before Israel, and He slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and pursued them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. 11 As they fled from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw 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.



12 Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel,

“O sun, stand still at Gibeon,

And O moon in the valley of Aijalon.”

13 So the sun stood still H1826, and the moon stopped H5975

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 hasten 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.

Notice there are different words to describe the Sun (“stood still” H1826) and the Moon (“stopped”) H5975. Vines says that both words mean to “stand still” but the term for the Moon, also means to “gain a victory” in a military context. What a great example of a “sign” describing the purpose of the Moon in Genesis 1.

15 Then Joshua and all Israel with him returned to the camp to Gilgal.”

On verse 15 Studylight.org says (emphasis mine)

*Many have been puzzled by what appears to be the erratic misplacement of Joshua 10:15, because, **certainly, it may not be supposed that Joshua and all Israel precisely on that victorious day returned to Gilgal.** Some have supposed that a scribal error copied it by accident here from Joshua 10:43; and others have considered it a prolepsis, referring parenthetically to the successful conclusion of the campaign and Joshua's return to Gilgal. We do not know what the true answer may be. Several other facts should be noted. John Rea pointed out that Joshua 10:12-14 did not occur after the big hail, but concurrently with it. John Rea, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Joshua (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 217. Adam Clarke solved the problem of Joshua 10:15 by pointing out that, "It is missing from the Septuagint (LXX) and from the Anglo-Saxon; and that it probably should be omitted here." Adam Clarke, Commentary on the Whole Bible, Joshua (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1837), p. 49. In our view, this could do no harm at all, for the verse occurs almost verbatim again in Joshua 10:43.*

of Israel slew with the sword in the battle. 12 13 10 Then Joshua spoke to the Lord, in the day in which the Lord delivered the Amorite into the power of Israel, when he destroyed them in Gabaon, and they were destroyed from before the children of Israel: and Joshua said, Let the sun stand over against Gabaon, and the moon over against the valley of Ælon. And the sun and the moon stood still, until God executed vengeance on their enemies; and the sun stood still in the midst of heaven; it did not proceed to set till the end of one day. 14 And there was not such a day either before or after, so that God should hearken to a man, because the Lord fought on the side of Israel. 15 16 17 And these five kings fled, and hid themselves in a cave that is in Makeda. And it was told Joshua, saying, The five kings have been found hid in the cave that is in Makeda. And Joshua said, Roll stones to the mouth of the cave, and set men to watch over them. But do not ye stand, but pursue after your enemies, and attack the rear of them, and do not suffer them to enter into their cities; for the Lord our God has delivered them into our hands. And it came to pass when Joshua and all Israel ceased destroying them utterly with a very great slaughter, that they that escaped took refuge in the strong cities. 18 19 20 21 And all the people returned safe to Joshua to Makeda; and no one of the children of Israel murmured with his tongue.

❖ Joshua had a very good reason to want the Sun to cease moving in the sky. He probably made his command at noon with only 8 hours of daylight (about two hours after sunset) to finish the battle before nightfall. Without light to see from 8pm to midnight, the Amorites could very well escape from the Israelites after dark. Perhaps Joshua made the command after engaging the Amorites for a time, or perhaps right when they arrived

at Gibeon, but we know that the time when the sun stopped was noon from Josh 10:13. The Amorites were probably thinking something like “all we need to do is to keep ahead of them until night falls then we can reach the safety of our fortified cities under the cloak of darkness. Some of them did reach the safety of their cities (Josh 10:20). But, imagine their amazement and concern when two of their gods in the sky failed to do what was normal? They both stopped moving. This could not have been more discouraging for them! Perhaps the God of the Israelites is mightier than their gods.

❖ There is more to discover about how dark the sky was going to get...would there be any moonlight to see by? **The answer is not until midnight because...**

Everyone knew from experience that a third-quarter phase moon does not rise until midnight. Therefore the battle could last only until about 8pm when it would become too dark to fight until the moon rises. Without a miracle Israel runs the risk of not finishing the battle allowing the very real possibility of some of the enemy escaping with their lives. But with the God of the universe granting Joshua’s command, the battle that began about noon suddenly had more time to fight for the victory! In the process, everyone gained more respect for God and also for Joshua who gave the command “in sight of Israel” (v.12) Recall that God has been preparing the Israelites to place their confidence in Joshua’s leadership since he was replacing Moses.

[7] Now the LORD said to Joshua, “**This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel,** that they may know that just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you. Joshua 3:7 (NASB1995)

He knew that to keep his military advantage, to keep pressing the enemy to run and not rest or regroup, more daylight was needed. So, the astronomical positions of the Sun and Moon lead us to a perfectly reasonable answer for why Joshua commanded the Sun and Moon to stop.

12 Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel,

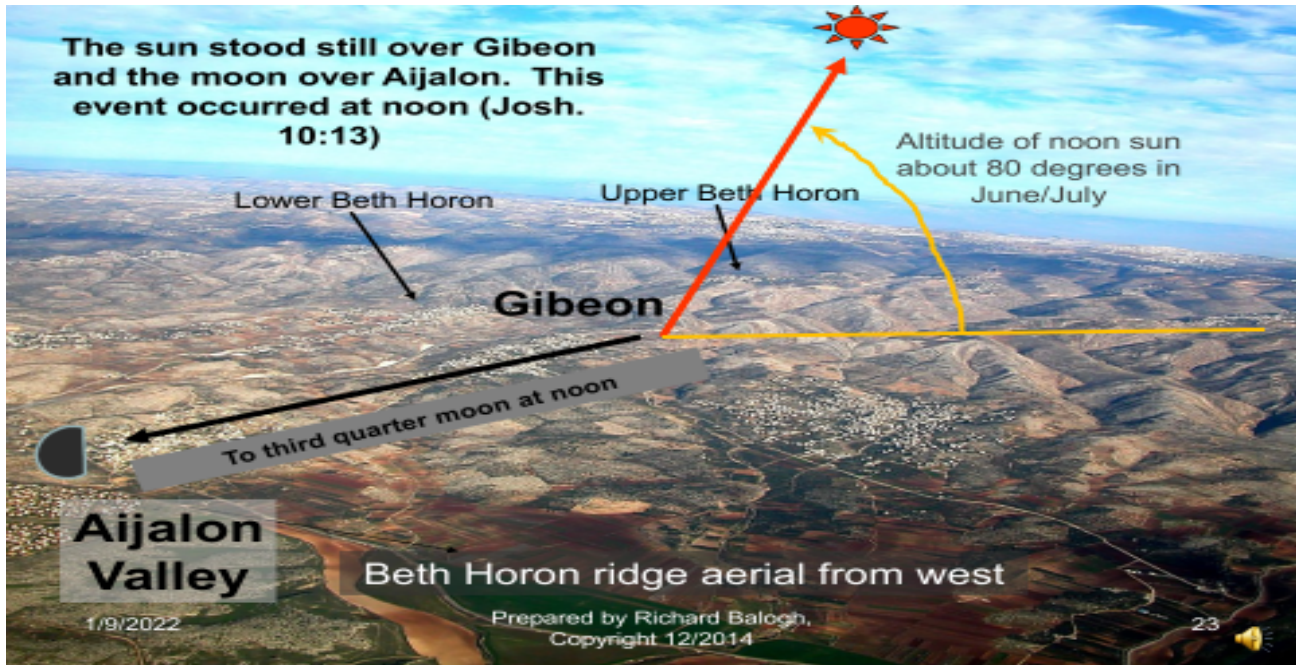
“O sun, stand still at Gibeon,

And O moon in the valley of Aijalon.”

13 So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, **Until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies. (emphasis mine)** Is it not written in the book of Jashar? And the sun stopped in the middle of the sky [noon] and did not hasten 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.** Jos 10:9-14

❖ His request allowed for more daylight to finish the battle.

13 So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, **Until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies.**



Consider this. Since both God and Joshua wanted victory, nothing could stop that result, not even the 8pm to midnight darkness window.. Since the Sun sets at 6pm with dusk ending at about 8pm and the third quarter moon not rising until midnight, there would be 4 hours when the enemy could escape under the cover of total darkness. So the daylight hours was lengthened so that sunset would not occur for 18 hours after noon instead of the normal 6 hours, so the battle could finish before nightfall.

More Evidence

Now let's see how reasonable their speed would be if all this happened in 6 hours. After marching all night for 10 miles uphill to Gibeon they left Gibeon at noon pursuing the enemies. From Gibeon to Azekah 18 miles and from Azekah to Makkedah 12miles

They were at Makkedah at sunset, according to Jos 10:26-27



26 So afterward Joshua struck them and put them to death, and he hanged them on five trees; and they hung on the trees until evening.

27 It came about at sunset that Joshua gave a 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.

So sunlight lasted 12h while the sun was stopped at noon, then 6 more hours from noon to sunset = 18 hours of total sunlight from noon to sunset on that day. In that time they traveled 30 miles (18+12) so average speed $30 \div 18 = 1.7$ miles/hour. But they must have faster because they spent time taking the five kings out of the cave, placing feet on their necks, killing them, hanging them on trees until sunset and sealing the cave with their bodies inside. (Jos 10:21-27). **The question remains could all this have been done in 6 hours if the Sun had not stopped?** Consider 30 miles on foot in 6 hours gives an average speed of 5 miles/hour and probably faster than that considering some of the 6 hours was spent dealing with

- the five Canaanite kings
- taking Makkedah

Assuming conservatively one hour was spent dealing with the five kings, this leaves 5 hours for traveling 30 miles so their speed would then be $30 \div 5 = 6$ miles/hour. Fighting as they went, this speed of 5-6 miles per hour seems too fast - Compare with the average walking speed of a human at 3-4 miles/hour. Also consider that they were fighting the enemy while traveling those 30 miles which would cause a reduction in speed. **Therefore, the more reasonable speed to cover the 30 mile distance is 1.7-1.8 miles/hour when 12 additional hours of daylight hours is added to 6 hours and 5 hours, respectively.**

More Evidence

Apologist Bill Cooper, in his book *The Authenticity of the Book of Joshua*, writes

“Now, where should we begin if not with Babylonia? Here we receive the testimony of a Babylonian scholar named Nabu-iqisha of Borsippa. Nabu-iqisha was a Chaldean astronomer, and like all astronomers of Chaldea, he did not just note and study the motions of the sun, stars and planets. He also wrote down prognostications of what will happen on earth when certain astronomical phenomena occur – conjunctions of the planets and so forth. Ironically, these prognostications (foretelling the future) are all of them based on known historical events which the astronomers harked back to. For example, if at some time in the past a king had been assassinated on a day when Saturn appeared near Jupiter, then thereafter such a conjunction will be held to be ‘unlucky’ or dangerous for the present king. Though these prognostications are in themselves just stuff and nonsense, it is important to remember that they are all of them based upon previous and known historical events. With that fact firmly in mind, it

*is interesting to see what Nabu-iqisha wrote concerning what would happen if the sun and moon were to stand still: “When the Moon stops in its course.... brigands will be rampant, and there will be much robbery in the land.... When the Moon and Sun are seen with one another out of their expected time, a strong enemy will overcome the land....”*¹ This stands as a very clear reference to the Long Day and its consequences recorded in the Book of Joshua. What is important to note is not just the phenomenon of the sun and moon standing still (as unusual an event in Nabu-iqisha’s day as it would be in ours), but the things that will surely happen if they do. A “strong enemy will overcome the land.” Nabu-iqisha was able to ‘foretell’ what would happen in such an event because that is exactly what did happen to Canaan the last time that the sun and moon had stood still. **He was basing his ‘prognostication’ – as he based all his prognostications – on a known historical event. The conquest of Canaan had occurred when the sun and the moon stood still, and so if the sun and the moon were ever to stand still again, then another conquest would be bound to occur. Such, at least, has always been the ‘logic’ of astrology.”**

Elsewhere he makes this logical argument:

*“It stands to reason that if the miracle of the Long Day never happened, then the historical records of other nations are not going to testify that it did. We will find nothing in those records of that nature. **The sun and moon are bodies which do not govern merely the skies above Israel. They govern the entire earth, and if anything happens to disrupt their natural cycle, than that disruption will be noticed around the earth, and not just in Israel. Hence we may expect the records of other nations to have noticed such disruption – if it ever occurred. They will not have recorded the event in the same terms as those expressed in the Book of Joshua. They will have known nothing of Joshua, Canaan, the God of Israel, or anything else mentioned in that Book. But they will have known that something had happened to alter either the length of that day, or the length of its corresponding night, depending where on the earth’s surface they lived.** Our task is therefore simple. We are merely to see if the event occurred at all by considering the records of ancient nations around the globe which testify to its reality. If they do so testify, then is the case proven. The Book of Joshua will be seen to have stated the truth...But it gets even better. In another part of the world altogether, we find an account of an unnaturally long night. But we will let the Maya of South America tell their own story. It is worth quoting at length, and is again a distant folk memory of a strange event involving a prolonged hesitating of the sunrise, one which caused great fear and consternation among the people and their priesthood. We must remember that when it is morning in Israel, it is still night time in South America: “... all the small tribes, and the large tribes. Together they stayed, awaiting the coming of the dawn and the rising of the large star called Icoquih, which rises just before the sun, when it dawns, according to the legend. There they were together, then, Balam-Quitze, Balam-Acab, Mahucutah, and Iqui-Balam. They did not sleep; they remained standing and great was the anxiety of their hearts and their stomachs for the coming of dawn and the day. There, too, they felt shame; they were overcome with great sorrow, great suffering, and they were oppressed*

with pain. They had come that far. ‘Oh, we have come without joy! If only we could see the rising of the sun! What shall we do now? If we lived in harmony in our country, why did we leave it?’ they said to each other, in the midst of their sadness and affliction, and with mournful voices. They talked, but they could not calm their hearts which were anxious for the coming of the dawn. Here, then, is the dawn, and the coming of the sun, the moon, and the stars. Balam-Quitze, Balam-Acab, Mahucutah, and Iqui-Balam were very happy when they saw the Morning Star. It rose first, with shining face, when it came ahead of the sun.... They wept for joy as they danced and burned their incense, their precious incense. Then they wept because they did not yet behold nor see the sunrise. But, then, the sun came up. The small and large animals were happy; and arose from the banks of the river, in the ravines, and on the tops of the mountains, and all turned their eyes to where the sun was rising.... then the sun rose, and came up like a man. And its heat was unbearable. It showed itself when it was born and remained fixed [in the sky] like a mirror. Certainly it was not the same sun which we see, it is said in their old tales.”

4 This is a remarkably graphic memory of a night when the sun was long delayed in its rising. Had the Maya been told the story of Joshua’s Long Day by Spanish missionaries, and then distorted the tale and wove it into their own mythology, then they would have spoken of a time when the setting of the sun was unnaturally delayed, and not its rising. Theirs would have been an account of a daytime phenomenon. But instead, theirs is the account of a prolonged night, not day, which is what they would have experienced had the day been prolonged in Israel.”

He concludes with several more examples from different cultures and geographic locations.

Six Ways That Joshua’s Long Day Makes Sense

1. God is the only One able to stop the Sun and Moon since He is not bound by time as we are (2 Pet 3:8, Ps 90:4) and who also benefits from this and all other miracles by displaying His might (Josh 4:23-24). No ones else has the ability and the motive needed to produce this miracle.
2. Because God wanted to exalt Joshua in the sight of all Israel as their new leader after Moses (Josh 3:7).
3. Because of the 3rd quarter Moon that day (inferred from Josh 10:13) there would have been 4 hours of complete darkness allowing for the enemy to escape if the Sun was not delayed in setting allowing Israel to be victorious.
4. Because Israelite soldiers traveling 30 miles on foot from Gibeon at noon to Makkedah at sunset for about 18 total hours (longer day) gives a more reasonable average speed of about 2 miles per hour compared to an unrealistic 5 miles per hour if only 6 hours of a normal day was allowed for marching and fighting as they went for those 30 miles. Even more convincing when

considering extra time taken to execute and display the Canaanite kings (Josh 10:21-27) and capturing Makkeday before sunset that day.

5. Because of this Chaldean prognostication “... when the Moon and Sun are seen with one another out of their expected time, a strong enemy will overcome the land...” All prognostications are based on at least one true observation.

6. Because of legends that describe the Sun as rising “unnaturally delayed” (that is, the night was “unnaturally long”) in cultures located on the opposite side of the Earth, as would be expected if the day had been prolonged in Israel.