



# THE DAY THE SUN STOOD STILL

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

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Joshua 10:1-27

13th Message

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One of the most critically-acclaimed movies of last year was *Saving Private Ryan*, a story set during World War II. As anyone who saw that film would agree, war is brutal and bloody, chaotic and confusing. War is the cause of great fear and emotional turmoil to many. But, as much as we would like to deny it, war is part of the world we live in, and that will not change until the day when the new heavens and new earth are revealed.

Today, we are fortunate to live in a period of relative peace. Our generation has little comprehension of war, although some of my own generation became acquainted with conflict in Vietnam, fighting the war that no one wanted. Yet, according to the Bible, we are all involved in battle, every day of our lives. On the day we were born we became part of a great cosmic war—the conflict between good and evil, darkness and light, heaven and hell, and God and Satan.

Then, on the day when we came to Christ we became a soldier in the army of God. We began to face resistance from enemies which united together to fight against the kingdom of God and the souls of men and women. The ultimate outcome of this war has already been decided, yet the enemy continues to attack, trying to root out hope, goodness, mercy, salvation, love, contentment, obedience, and trust in God. This is the battle we face every day. No matter how much we try to escape into prosperity and pleasure, in reality, life is a war.

As God's people we must be prepared to fight in this war. We must learn how to withstand powerful enemies and overwhelming forces. This is what we are learning in the book of Joshua—how to engage in holy war. As we have seen, Joshua recounts the conquest of the land of Canaan. In chapters 1-9, we had the accounts of the defeat of Jericho and Ai. In chapters 10-12, the pace quickens. Chapter 10 deals with the war in the south, chapter 11 with the war in the north. In both cases we read the story of a particular battle, followed by a summary. Finally, the entire campaign is summarized, in chapter 12. The text is laid out very systematically.

This morning I want to focus on the battle at Gibeon, found in the first half of chapter 10. The story is recounted in five scenes. Joshua 10:1-5:

**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, 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. Therefore Adoni-zedek 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, "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." 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. (NASB)**

In this opening scene, the king of Jerusalem, Adoni-zedek, is living in fear because of what he has heard about Joshua and the Israelites and the conquests at Jericho and Ai. And his anxiety grows when he learns that Gibeon, a great city in the Jerusalem empire, a much greater city than Ai, has made peace with Israel.

The name Adoni-zedek means "my Lord is righteous." But this man doesn't go to the Lord for help; instead, he resorts to his fellow Amorite kings. His appeal to them is, "Come up to me and help me." The kings and their cities are listed quite deliberately. Hebron was 19 miles SSW of Jerusalem; Jarmuth, which has a view of the coastal plain, was 16 miles west of Jerusalem; Lachish was the provincial capital of the Egyptian empire; Eglon was a great fortified city. City-states in Israel's world often joined forces to repel an enemy. The locations listed are mentioned twice, indicating they were great cities. This is the first serious attempt at resistance by the Canaanite kings. Unlike the Gibeonites, who had already heard of the fame of the Lord (9:9-10), Adoni-zedek had heard about Joshua's reputation (10:1). He felt he could match strength against strength, army against army. For him, it was only a matter of numbers.

In scene 2, the alliance attacks Gibeon. Verses 6-11:

**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." So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him and all the valiant warriors. And 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." So Joshua came upon them suddenly by marching all night from Gilgal. 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. And it came about as they fled from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, that 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.**

The alliance of five kings goes up to Gibeon to wage war. In response, Gibeon sends word to Joshua at his camp in Gilgal, in much the same manner as Adoni-zedek sent to the Amorite kings, saying, "Come up to us quickly and save us and help us." The word "save" is included to counter the word "attack" of verse 4. In our last study we looked at the covenant between Joshua and the Hivites (chapter 9). Now Joshua is being asked to fulfill his word to preserve the lives of the Gibeonites. He probably should not have made this treaty, yet God will use it for his purpose. What an encouraging word for us when we find ourselves in situations we shouldn't be in! Don't worry about it. Press on. God will use it. Let your yes be yes and your no, no.

The Lord repeats familiar words of encouragement to Joshua: "Do not fear for I have given them into your hands; not one of them shall stand before you." Note the interesting progression: Adoni-zedek sends to his allies; the Gibeonites send to Joshua; Joshua goes before the Lord.

So Joshua and his warriors come to the aid of Gibeon. Following a strenuous all-night march from Gilgal, an uphill journey of 35 kilometers, they came upon the Amorites suddenly. The Amorites try to retreat to the west, through the pass at Beth-horon, which leads to the coastal plain, but the Lord confounds them by showering upon them large stones (hailstones, actually), causing them to panic. The word "confounded" is used of various meteorological phenomena put into service by God, such things as thunder, lightning, and torrential rain (Exod. 14:24; Judg. 4:15; 1 Sam. 7:10; 2 Sam. 22:15; Ps. 18:15; 77:17-19; 144:6). Hail, too, is an instrument of God's judgment. Of the 29 occurrences of this word in the OT, 20 refer to hail as God's weapon wielded against the Egyptians at the time of the exodus. Israel smote the Amorites with a great slaughter, yes, but it was the Lord who pulled off the heroics. The number that died by being struck by hailstones exceeded those killed with the sword.

Scene 3 recalls the most fascinating part of the battle account, when the sun stands still. Verses 12-15:

**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."  
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 hasten to go down for about a whole day. And 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. Then Joshua and all Israel with him returned to the camp to Gilgal.**

This, the center-scene of the story, is a flashback highlighting the most spectacular occurrence in the battle. Joshua and his warriors arrive at Gibeon from the east, following the all-night march. The Amorites, holding the higher ground, have a definite advantage. But, because they are advancing from the west they have to look into a blinding sun. To retain this advantage over the Amorites, Joshua prays to the Lord in the sight of all Israel, commanding the

sun and the moon to stand still. Amazingly, the Lord submitted his heavenly attendants to a man's command on earth's stage. The sun was probably the principle deity at Gibeon, as the moon was at Jericho.

Some scholars offer the scientific explanation of a solar eclipse for this phenomenon. They say the text should read, "the sun stopped shining." But the reference here that the "sun stopped in the middle of the sky" favors the traditional interpretation. This is the third and final act of the Lord's amazing interventions on Israel's behalf in this book (together with the crossing of the Jordan and the battle of Jericho). This story is recorded in the book of Jashar (cf. 2 Sam. 1:18), an early poetic account or collection of national war songs. So there was a day in the history of the world when the sun stood still. "And there was no day like that before it or after it."

In scene 4, the slaughter continues. Verses 16-21:

**Now these five kings had fled and hidden themselves in the cave at Makkedah. And it was told Joshua, saying, "The five kings have been found hidden in the cave at Makkedah." And Joshua said, "Roll large stones against the mouth of the cave, and assign men by it to guard them, but do not stay there yourselves; pursue your enemies and attack them in the rear. Do not allow them to enter their cities, for the LORD your God has delivered them into your hand." And it came about when Joshua and the sons of Israel had finished slaying them with a very great slaughter, until they were destroyed, and the survivors who remained of them had entered the fortified cities, 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.**

The five kings are locked up in a cave while Israel pursues the Amorites and slays them, until their survivors reach their fortified cities. The word "slaughter," in verse 20, is matched with the same word in verse 10. The words for "large stones," in verse 18, are matched with the same words in verse 11. Thus, scene 4 corresponds to scene 2. The troops return in peace and no one speaks against the warriors of Israel. Not one word of criticism is heard—in contrast to the grumbling of the people in chapter 9, when they heard about the peace treaty with the Gibeonites.

Scene 5 records the death of the five kings. Verses 22-27:

**Then Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave and bring these five kings out to me from the cave." And 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. And it came about when they brought these kings out to Joshua, that Joshua called for 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 on the necks of these kings." So they came near and put their feet on their necks. Joshua then said to them, "Do not fear or be dismayed! Be strong and courageous, for thus the LORD will do to all your enemies with whom you fight." 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. And it came about at sunset that Joshua commanded, 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.**

The five kings fled and hid themselves in the cave at Makkedah, but the hoped-for place of refuge became a prison, and finally a tomb, in contrast to David, who found the Lord's protection from Saul in a cave.

Following the rout of the enemy, the stones are rolled away and the kings are brought forth from the cave. Then, following the ancient custom, the chiefs of the men of war put their feet on the necks of the captives. Joshua commands Israel not to fear or be dismayed, and encourages them to be strong and courageous. These five kings were an earnest of God's future victories.

The kings are then put to death and impaled upon a tree until evening. This was the same fate as befell the king of Ai—an indicator that they were accursed, they were under the herem. At sunset they are buried in the cave. Large stones are rolled in front of the opening and they stand there until this day as a memorial to the Lord's amazing victory. In the same way, when God works in our lives we should take time to build memorials to his faithfulness.

As we have observed, Christians, too, are involved in a war. Daily we come face to face with the twin enemies of darkness and evil. But these enemies are not called Amorites; rather, they have names like lust, cancer, poverty, depression, anger, death, failure, worthlessness, greed, and pride. Their mission is to snuff out the life of God in us, make us fearful and rob us of our peace and well-being. We know the outcome of the war, that Satan is a defeated enemy, but what do we do in the meantime? For some reason it is difficult for us to grasp this truth as we dodge land mines and duck fire directed at us. Oftentimes we identify more with the Amorites than we do with Joshua. We are confused, we are easily thrown into a panic, so we live life on the run. We seek refuge, hiding in a cave.

This gives rise to a number of questions. How should we live? How do we take new ground? What are the weapons of our warfare? And how do we keep ourselves from being defeated and demoralized? Let us reflect upon three truths.

Here is the first truth: As we prepare for the battle we must remember to send to the Lord and we must listen for his voice.

This is the first rule of holy war. We must go to God and listen for his voice. The king of Jerusalem sent to get help from his allies, but they were not much help to him. Gibeon sent to get help and deliverance from Joshua. They had a covenant with Israel, and they looked to him for their salvation. Joshua in turn listened to the voice of God.

When we face battle, when we hear the call to arms we need help. As believers, we are in a covenant relationship with God and thus we are to send to him. But, like Joshua, what we really need is a word from the Lord. And what we will hear from him is the same word Joshua heard—a word of encouragement, one that will give us courage and strength. Throughout this book, God repeatedly speaks words of hope and encouragement to Joshua. No matter how battle-tested we are we always need to listen to the voice of God.

If we do this, we will hear from him the words, "Do not fear" (8, 25). Four times we find these words in Joshua, twice in this story (also 1:9; 8:1). We will hear the words,

"Do not be dismayed (shattered)" (25). These words are used three times in Joshua (also 1:9; 8:1). We will hear the words, "No man will stand from before you" (here in verse 8 and also in 1:5). We will hear the words, "Be strong and courageous" (this is the fifth time we find this phrase; 1:6, 7, 9, 18). We will hear the words, "I have given them into your hands" (8, 12, 19). This word occurs three times in the chapter. It is the same word translated "deliver" in verses 12 and 19. This phrase is used some 20 times in Joshua (1:2, 3, 6, 13, 14, 15; 2:14, 9, 24; 5:6; 6:2, 16; 7:7; 8:1, 7, 18; 9:24).

I have a golden retriever named Molly. Certain words have an amazing effect on her. When someone says, "Hi, Molly," she comes alive. She smiles, wags her tail, and shakes her entire body. When she hears the word "park," she starts panting, anticipating the smells and sounds of the neighborhood gathering place. When she hears the word "biscuit," she runs to the kitchen, her mouth drooling as she awaits her favorite treat. But if you say, "bad girl," she lowers her head in shame and burrows it into your lap to find love and forgiveness. That is the power of words and the power of a voice.

My words have the same effect on my children. Other people's words have that effect on me. And when I am under attack, no matter how old I get, I need to hear God's voice. Do you feel defeated and demoralized this morning? This is the word you need to hear. God is among us and he is saying, "Do not fear. I will never leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous. No one can stand before you because I am with you." In times of trial and temptation, listen to the voice of God.

Here is the second truth to reflect upon: In the midst of the battle we must remember that it is the Lord who fights for his people.

This principle is emphasized twice in chapter 10. Verse 14, "And 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." Verse 42, "And Joshua captured all these kings and their lands at one time, because the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel."

The Lord does not fight with us, he fights for us. The God who controls all of creation is on our side, and he can do amazing things to defeat our enemies. He can rain hail upon them. He can make the sun and the moon stand still. In fact, he is the sun, as the book of Psalms says, "For the LORD is a sun and shield; the LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Ps. 84:11).

I became so engrossed in these chapters last week that I almost forgot to prepare my message for this morning. I encourage you to read them aloud, at one sitting. Here you will find a rhythm, a cadence, a repetition that is pounded out like a drum beat as each city and king is defeated: "Joshua and Israel fought. The Lord gave them into the hands of Israel. They captured. They stuck the city with the edge of the sword. They utterly destroyed. No survivor was left. Joshua did all that Moses had commanded." These verses sound like a symphony where the melody is played over and over, one time by the string section, another time by the brass section, each time with a slight variation. Read together, these chapters present a powerful image of a mighty God who fights for his people. What an

encouragement this is to soldiers of Christ!

How much do we know of the power of God? How much do we rely on the strength of his might? God's vision for us and for his church is that we might be set free from the power of sin. And his vision is not just individual but corporate, too. In this chapter the phrase, "Joshua and all Israel," is used seven times. God wants us to know individual victory, yes, but he wants us to know corporate victory, too.

God's vision is that someone could stand up right in our midst and say, "I need prayer because I am addicted to drugs"; or, "I need prayer because I am addicted to greed"; or, "I need prayer to love my family," and we could pray for the strength of God's might for that brother or sister. The enemy is strong, but God fights for us and conquers. God's vision is that this place might be a light in our community, that people would be drawn to him and find salvation because they see his power at work in you. He doesn't want us to withdraw from the world. He wants to win the world through us. As Christians, we are leading a host of captives who have been set free by the word of God. This is what God wants for us as believers and for his church.

And here is the third thing to reflect upon: When we consider the outcome of the battle, we must remember that the New Testament inverts the nature of the victory.

God did some very dramatic things for Joshua in these battles. Joshua asked God to stop the sun and God accommodated him. The bad guys who were under the curse were caught and got what was coming to them. When we come to the New Testament, however, what is striking is that "Joshua" and the "Amorite kings" trade places.

Joshua is fulfilled in the person of Jesus. He came to bring about the downfall and defeat of Satan. But the manner of Jesus' victory was exactly the opposite of how Joshua accomplished it. Jesus could have come in the same manner as Joshua, but he did not. When he was about to be killed, he could have called on his Father to stop the sun. He could have brought hail from heaven to confuse the enemy. He could have called on angelic armies to rescue him. But he didn't. Instead, the sky grew black, and he took the place of the cursed kings: He was impaled on a tree. He was taken down at sunset and buried in a cave, and a large stone was rolled across the entrance.

Jesus put himself under the curse so that we could exchange eternal death for eternal life, so that we could experience blessing. He took our place. The cross was the victory. There was a difference, however: the cave could not hold him. Jesus was resurrected from the dead. He ascended to the Father and put his foot square on Satan's neck and claimed the ultimate victory. In this, Joshua and Jesus are the same. As 1 Corinthians 15:25-27 says, "He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For He has put all things in subjection under His feet" (see 1 Ki. 5:3, Ps. 110:1).

What this means is that when we go into battle we must be careful about our expectations. Certainly, God wants to give us victory, observable victory, over enslavement to sin. He wants to free us from addictions and deliver us from the power of sin. Sometimes we experience other dramatic results, too. God miraculously heals us of physical ailments. He turns our spouses around and marriages are saved. We get a job that is beyond our expectations.

But sometimes the outcome cannot be quantified. We do not get well. Our spouse leaves. We lose a child. The job offer doesn't come through. Where then is the victory? The victory for us is the same as it was for Jesus. In the midst of suffering we experience resurrection life. In the midst of brokenness we experience the life of Christ: we find peace and grace and joy and love. So, let us not be fearful and dismayed. We have been raised with Christ, we are seated with him, and our feet rest on the necks of our enemies. No matter what happens, the enemy cannot overcome God's rule and his kingdom. The cross is God's victory, and it is our victory, too, as we take possession of our life in Christ.

I want to close by quoting a verse from one of my favorite hymns. "Be Thou My Vision" has a wonderful verse which is not usually included in our hymnals, which captures the essence of what we have been talking about:

*Be Thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight,  
Be Thou my armour and be Thou my might,  
Thou my soul shelter, and Thou my high tower,  
Raise Thou me heavenwards, oh power of my power.*

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