

Not
one
Failed
Promise.

Life Group Study Series

Joshua: Week Eight

5th March 2017

Bible

Joshua 10:1-15 (NIV)

The Sun Stands Still

1 Now Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had taken Ai and totally destroyed it, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and that the people of Gibeon had made a treaty of peace with Israel and had become their allies. **2** He and his people were very much alarmed at this, because Gibeon was an important city, like one of the royal cities; it was larger than Ai, and all its men were good fighters. **3** So Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem appealed to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish and Debir king of Eglon. **4** “Come up and help me attack Gibeon,” he said, “because it has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites.”

5 Then the five kings of the Amorites—the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon—joined forces. They moved up with all their troops and took up positions against Gibeon and attacked it.

6 The Gibeonites then sent word to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal: “Do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us! Help us, because all the Amorite kings from the hill country have joined forces against us.”

7 So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men. **8** The Lord said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you.”

9 After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise. **10** The Lord threw them into confusion before Israel, so Joshua and the Israelites defeated them completely at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makkedah. **11** As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the Lord hurled large hailstones down on them, and more of them died from the hail than were killed by the swords of the Israelites.

12 On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel:

“Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and you, moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.”

13 So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of

Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. 14 There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a human being. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel!

15 Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal.

Sermon Summary

The conquest section of Joshua (chs. 9-12) continues with a major battle that is sparked by the treaty between the Gibeonites and Israel that was narrated in Joshua 9. The king of Jerusalem calls his allies and attacks Gibeon – an important city (in part because it controlled the cross roads through the hill country from the Jordan Valley to the Mediterranean) and its men were all good fighters. The Gibeonites call on their new ally and Joshua immediately marches out.

From this point the narrative is not what we might expect of a conquest account. There are no details about the size of the armies or the technology they may or may not have possessed (e.g., chariots). As strange as it might seem to us, it would have made perfect sense to those in the ancient world. K. Lawson Younger has done extensive study of ancient near eastern conquest literature and drawn parallels with Joshua 9-12. There are several aspects of the narrative in Joshua 10:1-15 that would have been expected by an ancient reader.

First, the interest in the activity of the gods in the success of the campaign. This is clearly evident in Joshua 10:1-15. Joshua marches through the night and surprises the Jerusalem alliance but the Lord throws them into confusion. Joshua and the Israelites chase them down the road, but the Lord hurls hailstones down on them killing more than the Israelite swords do. Joshua speaks and the Lord extends the day until the battle is finished.

Second, it was common for ancient near eastern conquest literature to employ figurative language in their descriptions. This has implications for how we understand the confusion of the Lord, the hailstorm and the long day. A closer look at the long day illustrates this for us. The narrator says that Joshua speaks to the Lord but then cites a poetic quote from the Book of Jashar that is actually addressed to the sun and moon and includes the outcome of Joshua’s statement. There are several suggestions about what this long day may have been ranging from a simply astronomical event (e.g., a comet or eclipse) to a religious event (e.g., Joshua is calling on the oft-worshiped sun and moon to ‘be still and know that the Lord is God’) to a literal event in which God stopped the world spinning for a full day. None of these suggestions are totally satisfying and, to tell the truth, the narrator doesn’t appear to be interested in the nature of the event as much as in the significance of the event.

This leads to the third feature of conquest accounts which is hyperbole; purposeful exaggeration to make a point. We seem to have an example in 10:14 when the narrator

affirms there has never been a day like it. If he had said that it was unique because it was twice as long, we'd have to go along with it, but his reasons are that God listened to a human being; surely God was fighting for Israel!

This is not actually all that amazing. God is routinely described as hearing his people and fighting for them! So what is the narrator getting at here? If this is hyperbole, what is the point? For at one level there is nothing amazing about the fact that God listens or acts on behalf of his people. On another level, it is totally amazing! I wonder if the narrator isn't wanting to draw our attention to things God always does to increase his people's confidence (the Israelites and us) in approaching him.

While the Lord doesn't fight for us like he does in Joshua, we are told in the New Testament that we are still in a battle and that the Lord will protect us and that we ought to cast all our anxieties on the Lord because he cares. What we have, then, is an encouragement to boldly approach the throne of grace knowing the Lord hears and acts on our behalf.

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a LifeGroup discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: When we grow accustomed to something good in our lives, it can become easy to take it for granted, or forget its significance or blessing. Reflect on some of the best parts of your life now, and share those with the group. (These may be special moments you regularly get to spend with someone, a family member who often cooks for you, the privilege of living where you do, etc...)
2. Take some time to read Joshua 10. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging, allowing God to show you something new from a text that might be familiar). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
3. We often give greater responsibility to those in whom we have confidence, or deep trust. What does this mean for the confidence we have in God?
4. Share a time when you felt that God heard you and acted on your behalf. How did that increase your confidence in the Lord?
5. Psalm 113 speaks of God's greatness, whilst also revealing His willingness to act in the simple areas of our lives. What is your response to the truth this psalm reflects?
6. Why do you think the Israelites in Joshua need to be reminded of God's willingness to hear and act on their behalf? Why do we need to be reminded of this?
7. This passage invites us to '*re-member*' that God is *for* us, renewing our confidence in Him. For what could we more boldly be approaching the throne of God (Heb. 4:16)?

Prayer

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 7, then join together in prayer, boldly, confidently seeking God to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine.