

Message #22

Joshua 11:16-23

If you are like me, for the most part you would like a peaceful existence; one that is free from any conflict or hardship. But it doesn't take us long to realize that life is full of conflict, full of hassle and at times full of anxiety. This is true for the most faithful of believers.

If we objectively think about this, we must conclude that God must have some reasons for wanting us to have conflict. If all things work together for good to those who love God, then there must be some reasons why life is not smooth-sailing that can actually work out for our good.

God is a sovereign and powerful God. That is clear from this book of Joshua. We have seen God part the river; we have seen God make walls of Jericho fall down; we have seen God make the sun and the moon stand still in the sky. So God is a sovereign God.

We must assume that if God wanted us immune to conflict or problems, He is certainly powerful enough to accomplish it. What we must realize is that God apparently wants us to have some conflict for some purpose and He wants to accomplish some things in the warfare. **One of the things that we experience when in warfare is victory wrought by God.** To have victory, we must go to war for going to war is what permits us to have victory. There is nothing so wonderful than to experience the peace that comes after God has given victory.

That is a lesson we see from this text:

GOD SOVEREIGNLY LED ISRAEL INTO ONE WAR AFTER ANOTHER AND HE GAVE TO ISRAEL ONE VICTORY AFTER ANOTHER AND WHEN HIS NATION FAITHFULLY ACCOMPLISHED ALL GOD WANTED HER TO ACCOMPLISH, THE CONFLICT CEASED AND SHE HAD REST.

Now the truth is we will never be at total rest and peace until we are with the Lord. The Apostle Paul was a man in conflict right up until the moment he was killed. In fact, when he writes II Timothy, which is his last letter, he is still naming people who have wronged him and still warning people to be on guard against some of those people (i.e. II Tim. 4:14-15).

God could rapture us the moment He saves us; but He does not do it. Why? Because God wants to develop us and use us in this world. Conflict is part of living in this world. We are in war but when we remain faithful, we will also experience His supernatural peace.

There are six main historical facts we want to observe:

HISTORICAL FACT #1 – God gave Joshua victory over all the land. 11:16-17a

Once Israel was focused on complete obedience to God, it meant complete conquering of all the land. The geographical description of land taken in these verses indicates Joshua and Israel had taken all of the Promised Land from the far south to the far north.

The “hill country,” the “Negev,” “all that land of Goshen,” the “lowland,” “the Arabah” and the “hill country of Israel and its lowland,” refer to all of the Promised Land in the central and southern portions (i.e. Josh. 10:40).

The “Negev” is the far southwestern part of the Promised Land that connects to the Sinai Peninsula, which connects to Egypt. The “Arabah” is the far southeastern part of the Promised Land that connects to Arabia. This is the valley in which the Jordan River and Dead Sea are found. The “lowland” and “Goshen” cover the land toward the Mediterranean Sea and “Mount Halak” toward “Seir” as far as the valley of “Lebanon” at the foot of “Mount Hermon” covers the extreme south to the extreme north. In other words, all of the land was taken.

This was an incredible accomplishment considering that this was not some trained military like many of those they fought. **This was a group of people who were simply willing to obey God’s Word and through their faithful obedience enemies fell one by one.**

Take a small group of people in a church who are dedicated to understanding and obeying God’s Word and you will see enemies fall one by one. God does not need big numbers. God does not need academic geniuses. God does not need those who are successful. What God looks for are those who are obedient to Him and His Word. Get a group of people with that focus, and there will be great victories.

HISTORICAL FACT #2 – God gave Joshua victory over all the kings. 11:17b

Moses had specifically said that if Israel were faithful to God and His Word, He would deliver the kings into their hands (Deut. 7:24). God was true to His Word and He did just that.

All of the kings of the cities were captured, defeated and destroyed. God was not interested in appeasing leaders of enemies; He took them out. **The total number of kings that were killed was 31 (Josh. 12:24) and the names of those kings are given in Joshua 12:9-24.**

When we read that list of names in Joshua 12, it is very evident that political leaders are personally known to God and those who have mocked Him and His Word will eventually be destroyed by God. He knows them; He names them and He destroys them.

Here is an important observation. If we are faithful to God, we will discover there will be some who will turn against us. There will be those who will cause some to turn against us. When all is said and done and the final script has been written, those who did that will reap what they sow.

God knows each one by name and He will track each one down and they will pay for what they have done. God will not rest until those who led the cause against the righteous are put down. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled by Almighty God.

HISTORICAL FACT #3 – God gave Joshua victory over a long period of time. **11:18**

God specifically revealed to His people how He works in giving victory. He does not do it all at once; He does it little by little over time (Ex. 23:29-30).

I am totally convinced that God put this verse right here to teach us a very important lesson: victory does not come instantly, easily or quickly; it comes after many confrontations and many conflicts and consistent faithfulness to God and His Word over a period of time.

This is the process God uses for victory. It is not known for sure how long it actually took Joshua to take all of this land. Most Rabbis say it took seven years and Josephus says the intense fighting was for 5 years.

We know from Joshua 14:7 that Caleb was 40-years-old when Moses sent out Joshua to spy out the land and we know from Joshua 14:10 that the land had been taken by the time he was 85-years-old. So if the land was not entered for 38 years, Joshua would have been 78 when the process began and if we add seven years to 78 we come up with 85, which is a difference of seven years.

So this taking of the land took about seven years. The point to see is this did not happen overnight. Successful victory takes time. Accomplishing great things is not instant. We go to war, we face enemies, we experience setbacks; but we stay focused on knowing and obeying God's Word and that leads to victory.

HISTORICAL FACT #4 – God did not allow enemies to make peace with Israel. **11:19-20**

Here is a critical point for God's people to see that most people do not understand. God is a sovereign God and He can turn the minds and hearts of even our worst enemies any way He wants. Most people hate the doctrine of the sovereignty of God; but when you honestly read the Scriptures you cannot help but see it.

Proverbs 16:4 says, "The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil."

Proverbs 16:7 says, "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

Proverbs 16:9 says, "The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps."

These two verses in Joshua are some of the most profound verses concerning the sovereignty of God.

Israel was winning one battle after another and yet most of the enemies in the land were not willing to try and negotiate some peace agreement with Israel. The only group interested in making peace with Israel was the Gibeonites.

Other than that, one by one every city fell and the people and the kings were destroyed. Why? Look at **verse 20**, because God hardened their hearts so He could completely destroy them. These Canaanites were vile and evil and God was not interested in saving them; He destroyed them.

This is a very sober point to see. If God wants enemies to be at peace with us, He can cause it to happen. If God does not want enemies to be at peace with us, He can cause that to happen and one purpose may be so He can destroy them right before our eyes. Our responsibility is to be faithful to God and His Word regardless of what He is doing with our enemies.

Do not ever minimize the sovereignty of God. God is sovereign over minds and hearts. He can turn a mind and heart to salvation or He can harden a heart so the person will never be saved. Don't you for one moment take credit for your salvation. If you have believed on Jesus Christ, then give all the glory to which it deserves, God. He saved us. We did not save ourselves and we did not even choose to be saved. God did it.

Paul is very clear to point out that God does have vessels of wrath fitted for destruction according to His sovereign purposes. Now how does one get into a position where God hardens their heart so that He might totally destroy them? Frankly, I do not know. But I do know God is sovereign and we had better submit ourselves to this fact.

God can use the same act of Providence to soften a heart or harden a heart. Rahab is a good example. All heard of the sovereign work of God at the Red Sea; Rahab had a heart that believed and the rest of Jericho did not (Josh. 2:9-12).

Now we assume that this taking of the land took seven years. Stay faithful for seven years and watch what God does to your enemies. See what happens to them. See if God will bring them to a point of being at peace with you or whether He will destroy them.

HISTORICAL FACT #5 – God gave Joshua victory over Anakim. 11:21-22

The Anakim were the feared giants. It was this very group that so troubled Israel when Moses was alive and the spies reported back to him (i.e. Num. 13:28). It is fitting that the account of taking the land ends with the giants of the land going down. They did not go down first, but when all was said and done, they went down like all the rest.

Along life's path we will face enemies that appear to be gigantic. Some of our enemies will appear to be insurmountable. They are strong, powerful, prosperous and prestigious. Don't let them faze you. They are nothing compared to your God and when the time is right, they will go down just like all the rest.

HISTORICAL FACT #6 – God gave Joshua all the land and rest in all the land. **11:23**

What a wonderful verse and postscript. God had perfectly fulfilled His Word and given Israel all the land. It had not been an easy road to victory, but it was a complete victory. The whole land had rest from war.

God had a purpose for war. It caused His people to trust Him for victory for one battle after another. They learned to pray and they learned to obey God's Word and over time, one by one, the enemies were destroyed.

PRACTICAL LESSONS:

- 1. God wants us to have total and complete victory, not partial victory.**
- 2. Total victory takes time. It is a process in which we stay faithful to God and His Word over time and ultimately we get victory.**
- 3. If we do not have conflict, we cannot experience God's deliverance and peace.**
- 4. No matter what is happening in our lives, God is always sovereign. This is true when we face enemies and this is true when we are at peace.**