

Notes on Joshua 10

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Southern conquest – Joshua 10

A. Defeat of the Alliance of Five Kings – 10:1-27

Verses 1-4

1. Give the names and cities of the 5 kings who formed an alliance. Locate the cities on a map.
2. Who initiated the alliance? What did they intend to do? (Think: Why would they do this?)

The alliance of southern kings

The king of Jerusalem was named Adoni-Zedek. He heard how Israel had defeated Jericho and Ai, then Gibeon had made peace with Israel. This caused him great fear. Not only had Jericho and Ai been defeated, but Gibeon was a great city, greater than Ai, having many valiant soldiers. Yet they had surrendered without a fight. Jerusalem was sure to be one of the next cities Israel attacked (see MAP).

So Adoni-Zedek sought to make an alliance with the kings of other cities near him: Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish, and Debir king of Eglon (see MAP). Hebron was due south of Jerusalem, and Jarmuth was southwest but fairly close. Lachish and Eglon were further away to the west and southwest. This would make an alliance of five kings. This plan of making alliances had been decided on according to 9:1,2.

Since each of these cities had a king, it is clear that these kings were not rulers of great nations as we might think of kings today. The cities were apparently independent from one another, but each had its own king. They might usually act separately, but when faced with a common foe they would join forces for mutual protection as in this case.

The plan of this alliance, however, was not to attack Israel but to attack Gibeon for having made a treaty with Israel! We are not told their reasoning behind this idea. On the one hand it would appear to be a mistake, since they would be turning their forces against other Canaanites instead of fighting Israel. Why waste their resources fighting those who were not the invaders? Perhaps they did not expect Israel to defend Gibeon. Perhaps they reasoned that attacking Gibeon would force them to break their treaty and join the Canaanites in fighting Israel. Or at least it might prevent other cities from making peace with Israel.

Verses 5-8

3. What appeal did the Gibeonites make, and what was Joshua's decision?
4. What promise did God make to Israel regarding the battle?

Israel agrees to protect Gibeon

So as agreed, these five kings brought their armies to fight against Gibeon. But the men of Gibeon explained to Joshua what was happening and appealed to him to protect them. Joshua brought his army from Gilgal to fight.

One wonders why Joshua would do this. He had agreed not to kill the Gibeonites, but if the Canaanites killed them that would eliminate the Gibeonites. The oath had been made under circumstances of deceit and lying by Gibeon, so why were the Israelites bound to defend them? Perhaps that was part of the agreement. Perhaps they had agreed, not just to not harm them themselves, but to protect them from others. Yet I wonder why they would make such an agreement regarding people whom they believed to be far away from them.

On the other hand, perhaps Joshua went because he thought this would be a good time to attack the Canaanite kings. He may have correctly concluded that they would not be expecting Is-

rael to attack. They would be fighting with Gibeon and would not be prepared for an attack at the same time from Israel. In any case this is what Joshua decided to do.

And apparently God agreed with this plan, for He offered His blessing on it. He promised Joshua that Israel would be able to defeat this army. It could not stand before them, but God had delivered them to Israel. Note that in this case Joshua apparently did consult God before attacking.

Verses 9-11

5. How did Joshua surprise the enemy? How did God kill many of them?

The kings flee before Israel

Joshua added another element of surprise. He marched Israel all night in order to arrive at the battle before the kings were expecting them. They were able to take the Canaanite armies by surprise.

The result was a great slaughter of the Canaanites at Gibeon, so the Canaanite armies fled. Israel chased them down the road to Beth Horon as far as Azekah and Makkedah (see MAP). A town named Beth Horon is located west and a little north not far from Gibeon. Azekah and Makkedah are southwest and some distance from Gibeon. Perhaps there is another Beth Horon southwest of Gibeon. Or perhaps the road to Beth Horon leads west down the hillsides then splits or joins another road. So the Canaanites began fleeing west down the road to Beth Horon then turn and fled south. Or perhaps the armies simply separated and went separate directions.

God also worked with the Israelite armies. He caused great hailstones to fall on the Canaanites, so that more of them died from the hailstones than from Israel's soldiers.

Verses 12-14

6. What request did Joshua make of God during the battle? Why?

7. What happened as a result? How do we know this was a miracle? (Think: What is known of the book of Jasher?)

The sun and moon stand still.

As Israel was victorious, Joshua did not want their enemies to escape. If night came, the enemies might successfully scatter and find hiding places. So Joshua called upon God to stop the progress of time. He prayed for the sun to stand still over Gibeon as at high noon, and the moon to stand still in the valley of Aijalon. The Aijalon was a valley extending from Gibeon west and north to the plain of Sharon.

The point is that the earth would in effect stop spinning on its axis. This would stop the progress of time. The account says that this continued for a whole day. The sun stood still in the heavens and did not go down. In other words, the one day was lengthened till it took the duration of an additional day – two days' time, but the sun and moon moved only as much as in one day. This enabled Israel to take vengeance on the Canaanites.

Clearly this was miraculous. The account says nothing like it ever happened before or since. The Lord heeded Joshua's request, because He fought for Israel. This was impossible by natural law, yet it happened by the supernatural power of God. If the earth spun on its axis, then the day would not be extended. But if it did not spin, many other things would go wrong. Clearly God suspended natural law to produce the needed result.

This event appears to be referred to also in Habakkuk 3:11. It is also said to be recorded in the book of Jasher. This book is also referred to in 2 Samuel 1:18. We are not told exactly what book this is. It is apparently not included in the Bible, therefore God saw fit not to have it preserved for us today. Like other books sometimes referred to, it may have been an uninspired record which simply confirms the Bible record. Or it may have been inspired but was not needed since it simply duplicated what is contained in these other inspired books. In any case, whatever it contained, it is not necessary to our salvation. If it was necessary, God would have seen to it

that it was preserved. See Psalm 119:152,160; Isaiah 40:8; 30:8; John 12:48; 2 John 2; 1 Peter 1:23-25; 2 Peter 1:12-15; 2 Timothy 3:16,17.

Verses 15-20

8. Where did the 5 kings hide, and what was at first done about it? Why?

The victory completed

Joshua and Israel returned to their camp at Gilgal. But the kings of the five cities hid themselves in a cave near Makkedah (see MAP and notes above). This was told to Joshua, but he did not want to take the time to deal with these kings yet. He told his soldiers to simply place large stones over the cave opening and place guards there, so the kings could not escape. Then his men were to continue pursuing the Canaanite armies to destroy as many as they could before the enemy escaped to fortified cities.

(I'm not quite sure the significance of Israel's return to Gilgal. They had left it suddenly when they heard of the attack on Gibeon. Perhaps they returned for supplies or for the rest of the people or perhaps even for a brief rest after their all night march and two days worth of fighting. In any case they did not stay long but continued the pursuit of the fleeing armies. We next find Israel camped at Makkedah – v21.)

The result was a great victory for Israel. A great number of Canaanites were slaughtered, till finally some escaped to enter fortified cities. Apparently the meaning here is that Joshua knew they would seek to return to fortified cities, and some finally managed to do so. But he wanted as many killed as possible before they escaped.

Verses 21-27

9. After the battle and before the death of the kings, what symbolic act did Joshua have the captains of Israel do? What was the point?

10. Describe the death of the kings.

The death of the five kings

Israel then camped at Makkedah, where the five kings had hidden in the cave. Israel arrived there safely. Their enemies had been so defeated and scattered that no one attacked Israel or attempted to hinder their movement.

At Makkedah the people went to the cave where the kings were hiding and brought them out. Joshua then called the leaders of the Israelite army to place their feet on the necks of these kings. This represented the complete defeat of these kings and their subjugation to Israel. Joshua said that the Israelites should be strong and courageous in the continued battles ahead, because God would give them victory over all their other enemies, just as he had with these five kings.

The five kings were then hung on five trees. Their bodies were left there till sundown, then they were removed and thrown back in the cave. The opening to the cave was then covered again with rocks. The rocks and cave remained there even when this book was written. Clearly this would be another memorial to Israel's great victory.

B. Capture of All of Southern Canaan – 10:28-43

The rest of the chapter simply lists city after city in southern Canaan as Israel defeated them one by one. The pattern was consistently the same. Israel would attack a city and defeat it. The people there would be utterly destroyed, including the king (if any). Apparently the defeat of the five-king alliance so demoralized the other cities that only few and minor attempts were made to form further alliances. Israel was able to simply go from one to another capturing them.

See a MAP for the location of the various cities.

Verse 28-39

11. List the names of the cities Israel then captured. Find each on a map, if possible.

Makkedah

The five kings had been in a cave near Makkedah. Israel then proceeded to Makkedah and captured it, killing the king and all the people. Makkedah was west and somewhat south from Jerusalem.

Libnah

Libnah was a short distance southwest from Makkedah. Israel captured it and kill all its people and its king.

Lachish

Lachish had been one of the cities that had joined the five-king alliance. Their king and army had already been defeated, but here the city itself was captured and the remaining people were slain. Lachish was further south from Libnah.

Gezer

As Israel fought Lachish, Hiram king of Gezer came to help defend them. This minor attempt at an alliance was also defeated. The king of Gezer and all his people were also slain. Gezer was located a considerable distance north of Lachish, north even of Makkedah.

Eglon

The next city attacked was Eglon. This city too had joined the five-king alliance. They were attacked and that city taken and all the people slain. Eglon was west and somewhat south from Lachish.

Hebron

Next came Hebron, another city from the five-king alliance. Israel attacked it, captured it, and killed all its people and its king. Apparently by this time they had appointed another king to replace the one Israel had killed at Makkedah. Hebron was a significant distance east from Eglon.

Debir

The last city specifically named is Debir. Israel also attacked it, captured it, and killed all its people. Debir was located west and somewhat south from Hebron.

No doubt other smaller cities were captured along the way. The ones named were surely the largest and most significant ones. But in the process Israel took all the land. V37 even states that, in the capture of Hebron other cities were also captured.

Verses 40-43

12. What was the final outcome of the war in the south? What was done to the inhabitants of the cities?

Complete victory in the south

This completed Israel's defeat of the Canaanites in the southern regions. They had conquered all the mountain, lowland, and wilderness areas in the south, utterly slaying all the people. As a result, Israel had captured all the land from Kadesh Barnea to Gaza and the area of Goshen as far as Gibeon. All their kings were defeated and all their territory captured by the power of God fighting for Israel.

Kadesh Barnea was located very far south, a great distance from any city named thus far. This is the place Israel had camped many years previously when they sent the 12 spies into the land and then refused to enter (Num. 13). The great distances involved here show that other cities were also defeated, but by defeating the main cities Israel took control of the whole area.

Gaza was located at the Mediterranean Sea west from the Dead Sea. The only Goshen I know was the area in Egypt where Israel had lived during Joseph's rule. This is not likely the place referred to here; presumably it is an area in Canaan. The Waldrons say Goshen was an area in southern Judah. Gibeon, of course, was the city where this great series of battles had begun.

Having captured all this territory, Joshua and Israel returned to their camp at Gilgal.

The Waldrons point out that some of these same cities are said to be captured in Judges (1:10-12). If Israel captured them all in Joshua's day, no doubt they did not leave people to populate and defend them. The dividing of the land came later. So perhaps people from surrounding territories returned to these cities to repopulate them, so they had to be taken again later. Or the Waldrons suggest that perhaps not all these cities were actually taken at this exact point in the record but that eventually they were captured. In that case, this chapter would be a summary of the victories, but not necessarily an exact chronological record.

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