

Notes on Joshua 11

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Northern conquest – Joshua 11

Verses 1-3

1. What kings led the people of the land in this battle?
2. From what areas did people come? What nationalities were involved? See MAP.

The alliance formed

The southern alliance against Israel had failed. The inhabitants living in the north surely knew they were next. They had only three choices: (1) they could attempt to make peace with Israel, which would not work because God had forbidden it; (2) they could wait for Israel to attack them one by one; or (3) they could join an alliance so Israel would have to fight them together. They chose the latter approach as the only sensible one.

This alliance was initiated by Jabin king of Hazor. He sought to form an alliance with Jobab king of Madon, the king of Shimron, and the king of Achshaph. See a MAP for the location of these cities. Hazor is located in the far north near the Jordan River north of the Sea of Galilee (Chinneroth). Madon is thought to have been located just west of the Sea of Galilee. Achshaph was probably further west from Madon, considerably closer to the Mediterranean, and Shimron was south from Achshaph.

Also invited to the alliance were other kings from the north, in the mountains, in the plain south of the Sea of Chinneroth (Galilee), in the lowland, and in the heights of Dor. Dor was located on the Mediterranean west of the lower end of the Sea of Galilee.

Also included were Canaanites in the east and in the west, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite in the mountains, and the Hivite below Hermon in the land of Mizpah. Hermon was a great mountain at the extreme north of the land where the Jordan River began. Mizpah sounds to be an area near Hermon, but I am unable to determine its exact location.

This was a huge alliance including great numbers of soldiers from many different lands. One would think the Israelites were clearly outnumbered.

Verses 4,5

3. How strong an army did they form? Where did they assemble? See MAP.

The alliance gathers

All these inhabitants from all these areas met to fight against Israel. Their number was so great that they were like sand by the seashore – in other words, they could not be counted. They had many horses and chariots. These would be a great advantage in strength and mobility in fighting in those days. We have no indication that Israel had either horses or chariots.

It would appear that Israel was so greatly outnumbered that their defeat would be inevitable. But such large aggregates of armies often have difficulty working together. They may be numerous, but are hard to coordinate into a working unit. More important, Israel had God on their side.

These kings and their armies assembled at the waters of Merom to make a camp in preparation for the battle against Israel. Merom was just southwest of Hazor, still considerably north of the Sea of Galilee. Meeting here would have required a long march for Israel.

Verses 6-9

4. What promise did God give Joshua? (Think: Why would Joshua need this promise?)

5. Describe the battle and the outcome.

The battle

God again assured Joshua that Israel would be victorious. Despite the incredibly large number of enemies and their horses, God assured Joshua not to be afraid. God said the enemy would all be slain before Israel the next day. Israel should hamstring their horses and burn their chariots. To hamstring a horse was to partially disable it, making it unsuitable for use in warfare but still suitable for use in farming.

So at God's assurance, Joshua led Israel to attack the next day suddenly, when apparently the enemy was not prepared. Few details are given of this battle, but Israel was completely victorious. The enemy fled to Greater Sidon, to the Brook Misrephoth, and to the Valley of Mizpah eastward. All of the enemy were killed, and Israel hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots as God had said.

Sidon was an ancient city far up the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Greater Sidon may mean the general area around that city. The Brook Misrephoth refers to an area on the Mediterranean almost due west for Merom. Again Misphah is unknown.

Verses 10-15

6. What was done to the king, the city, and the people of Hazor?

7. What was done to other cities? What was done to the people? What happened to the spoils?

Capture of Hazor and surrounding cities

Having defeated the coalition of armies, Israel then proceeded to take the cities of the area as they had in the south. They began with Hazor, the city of king Jabin who had led the alliance against Israel. They killed the king and all the people of the city, leaving no survivors, and burned the city. Hazor was later rebuilt (see Judges 4:2; 1 Kings 9:15).

Joshua then led Israel to capture the other cities in the area, killing their kings and all their inhabitants. They took the spoils for themselves, including the livestock, but they killed all the people. In doing this, they obeyed God's command to them through Moses, exactly as God wanted, leaving nothing undone.

We are told that, except for Hazor, they did not burn the cities that stood on mounds. Cities in that day were often built on mounds, so they were harder for defenders to attack. Also as centuries passed, people tended to build their cities higher and higher.

It seems that Israel burned only the most offending of cities, leaving the others for their own future occupation. This had the disadvantage, however of leaving the cities temporarily uninhabited. Perhaps this explains why some of them had to be recaptured later, as inhabitants from surrounding areas moved back in after Israel had left.

Verses 16-20

8. What territory had Israel captured? See MAP.

9. How long did this take?

10. Why did all the people fight against Israel?

Completion of the capture of the land

This was the end of the major battles Israel needed to fight. They had overcome the greatest armies from the greatest cities. This was followed by a long period of war against the surrounding cities and their kings. We are told few specifics, since apparently the ensuing battles were not sufficiently important for us to be given details.

We are also not told exactly how long this took. Calculations based on Joshua 14:7-10 would imply that in all the capture of the land took six or seven years.

The result was that Israel captured and killed all the kings of the area, the mountain country, all the South, all the land of Goshen, the lowland, and the Jordan plain, the mountains of Israel and its lowlands. This included from Mount Halak and the ascent to Seir, even as far as Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon.

Many of these are general areas. The Waldrons say Goshen was an area in southern Judah. Hymel says Mt. Halak was south of Beersheeba, and Baal-Gad was at the foot of Mt. Hermon. Seir was Edom to the south of the Dead Sea and Mt. Hermon was a mountain far north of the Sea of Galilee. The point is that this is a very broad area including essentially all of the land of Canaan. This would take a long time.

Of all the cities and people in the land, the only one that made a covenant with Israel was Gibeon, and they had done so by deceit. All the other people fought against Israel and were destroyed. The account says they fought because God moved them to fight. He had determined to destroy them as He had commanded Moses, so He moved them to fight against Israel. Again, this was not cruelty on God's part but justice. These people were so abominably corrupt that they deserved destruction.

Verses 21-23

11. Who were the Anakim? Where did they live?
12. Where else does the Bible mention them?
13. What did Israel do to them? How many survived?
14. What territory did Israel now control?

Destruction of the Anakim

The account ends with the destruction of the Anakim. These were fierce fighters, many of them giants. They lived in the mountains around Hebron, Debir, Anab and the mountains of Judah and Israel. Hebron was an area captured in chap. 10, a city just west of the Dead Sea. Debir was southwest from Hebron and had also been captured in 10:38,39. Anab was a short distance south of Debir.

The account states that Anakim were scattered throughout the region, but they were all destroyed, leaving none in the land of Israel. They remained only in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod, areas where we will later see that the Philistines maintained control. They are located relatively near the Mediterranean Sea.

This seems perhaps to not necessarily mean that this was done following the war with the northern alliance, since many of these lived in areas previously captured. Rather it appears to be a summary of how the Anakim had been defeated throughout this period of war.

The Anakim were such large, fierce fighters that the sight of them had unnerved the ten tribes the first time Israel had approached Canaan to capture it (Num. 13:28,33; Deut. 1:28; 2:10,11,21). Perhaps this is why here we are told that Israel successfully overwhelmed and defeated them. We will read more about them in Joshua chaps. 14,15. One wonders if Goliath and similar giants later were descendants of these people, since they came from the areas of the Philistines where the Anakim were left.

Note that, as early as the writings of Joshua, a distinction is made between Judah and Israel (v21). They were not separate nations by any means, but they identified different regions which finally resulted in different nations many years later in the reign of the kings.

The account of battles ends by telling us that Israel had completed their task of taking the land. They captured it all as God had commanded them through Moses. Joshua gave it to the tribes for their inheritance, and the land had peace from war. This is a summary statement, since the land had not yet been divided to the tribes.

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