

Dr. David Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 15, Joshua 10 Gibeon

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This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on the books of Joshua through Ruth. This is session number 15, Joshua 10, Southern Campaign.

In this segment, we're going to talk about Joshua chapter 10 and so please open your Bibles to that.

And actually, as we've mentioned earlier chapters 9 to 11 kind of go together as a place where you have coalitions of Canaanite kings gathered against Israel. Chapter 9 verse 1, 10 verse 1, and chapter 11 verse 1 all mention those things. Chapters 10 and 11 also fit together even more closely.

Chapter 10 tells of the campaign against the Southern Coalition of kings. Chapter 11 tells the story of a northern coalition of kings. So, if you want to think about trying to get a handle on the battles in Canaan, it might help to remember that they came in, Israelites came in first to Jericho and Ai.

So, we have, and they pursued, well that was the battles here in sort of central Canaan. Chapter 10, there's a coalition of southern kings and they pursued the southern kings at the end of the chapter and then they went to the north and against the king of Hazor and other coalition of kings up there. So, there's a kind of a threefold thrust of the Israelite battles in Canaan.

First in the central hill country of the country and then to the south and then to the north. That's the overall big picture that we see here. So, chapter 10, we actually, it's not a, the attack in chapter 10, interestingly enough and ironically enough, is not an attack against Israel.

We have the king's hearing about this. So, we see in verse one, as soon as Adonai Zedek, king of Jerusalem heard how Joshua had captured Ai and devoted it to destruction and so on. And the middle of verse one, toward the end, how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel were among them.

He feared greatly because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities and it was greater than Ai and all its men were warriors. So, Adonai Zedek gets the coalition of kings to come and verse four, come let us help me and let us strike Gibeon. So, the attack is not against Israel.

It's against their fellow Canaanites from the city of Gibeon, which is in the central hill country as well. So, they all gathered together and encamped against Gibeon end of

verse five and made a war against it. But Israel gets sucked into the battle because of the treaty that they had made with Israel in chapter nine.

And so, in verse six, chapter 10, the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal saying, and then there's a kind of a quick staccato references of four or five verbs together. Do not relax your hand from your servants. Come up against us quickly, save us, help us.

So, bang, bang, bang, bang. The way that the text is even written kind of gives us a sense of the panic on the part of the Gibeonites. They are now at the mercy of this vast coalition of five kings and their peoples against them, one city.

And so, they're saying, you need to help us because of this treaty that we have made. So that is what drags the Israelites into this battle. So, in verse seven, Joshua goes from Gilgal, he and the people, and God says to Joshua, verse eight, don't be afraid.

I've given them into your hands. Not a man of them shall stand before you. Again, an echo of what God said in chapter one.

Don't be afraid. No man will be able to withstand you. So, Joshua comes to them suddenly.

He marches all night from Gilgal in verse nine. And then God does another great miracle. We've seen the great miracle of the crossing of the waters, in chapter three.

We've seen the great miracle of the destruction of Jericho and the falling of the walls, the helping in Ai. So, the book of Joshua is full of miracles that God did and how God fought the battles on behalf of Israel. We've talked about how that's the model, how God wanted things to do.

And Israel was not to be relying on their great warrior or king like the nations, but rather God had to do this. And here he does so again in verse 10. And there's again a staccato series of verbs, about seven of them now in the next couple of verses.

So, verse 10, says, the Lord, number one, threw them into a panic before Israel. Number two, Israel struck them with a great blow. Israel chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth Horon.

And Israel struck them as far as Azekah and Makedah. Verse 11, as they fled before Israel, while they were going down by the ascent of the Beth Horon, the Lord himself threw down large hailstones from heaven. As far as Azekah, they died.

And there were more who died because of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword. So, this is an amazing and very impressive victory that Israel won. And it's God who's done the work here for them.

God throws them into a panic. Verse 10, they are at the mercy of the Israelites who struck them with a great blow at Gibeon. Verse 10, chased them away, and struck them down.

But as they're fleeing, God strikes them with the hailstorms. And the result is that the Canaanites are dying from two different sources. One, the Israelite swords, but also from the hailstorms.

And the hailstorms cause more damage than the Israelite swords do. So, there's no question there's a great miracle here in this chapter. And my view is that this is the miracle that the chapter is really focusing on.

Now, the next part of the chapter, starting in verse 12, leads us into something new. It says, oh, at the same time that this is happening, Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel, those Canaanites. And he said in the sight of Israel, the sun stands still at Gibeon, moon in the valley of Aijalon.

And the sun stood still, the moon stopped, till the nation took vengeance upon their enemies. And I'm guessing that in most of your Bibles, this is printed in a way that it makes it look like a little poem. Most modern Bibles in English now show poetry typographically listed on your page looking like poetry.

And that's what we have here, is a little poem. Now, there's a lot of debate as to what actually happened here in this passage. The next verse, the end of verse 13 says, is this not written in the book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the middle of heaven, and did not hurry to set down for about a whole day.

There's never been a day like it before or since when the Lord, heeded the voice of a man for the Lord fought for Israel. Now there are many attempts to understand this passage and I'm not going to go through all of them here. You can look at, you can look on the internet, you can look at commentaries.

I wrote a commentary on Joshua that I've dealt with this in about 12 pages, all different options. But I will say one thing. Traditionally, of course, the view has been that what happened here was a massive miracle that from the scientific perspective now, the earth stopped spinning and the sun then appeared to stand still in the sky.

The moon didn't. And the reason for this would be that Joshua felt like he needed more time to complete the battle. And so, he asked God to make the day last longer and there they were able to finish the battle.

In modern times, there have been further explanations to try to justify this or to sort of help prove this. There's one version of it. There's an interesting story that comes out in the 19th century that comes out of England where it is claimed that astronomers in the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, England, were doing calculations and they somehow were able to discover that there was, in history, there was a day missing.

And this was traced down to the Book of Joshua, Chapter 10. But the calculations showed that really it was only 23 hours and 20 minutes. And so, there's 40 minutes missing.

And then it was remembered that in the days later Hezekiah, the sundial goes backward, and that accounts for the 40 minutes. So, this has been seen as a marvelous and miraculous extra-biblical scientific confirmation of the biblical story here that there's a missing day. My view is that that is a well-intentioned attempt to support the biblical story, but it's misguided.

If you'd Google Joshua's Long Day, you'll see all kinds of websites that come up, some supporting it, some debunking it. But another famous version of that same story comes about 100 years later in which it's claimed that in 1964, the early 60s, NASA scientists at a NASA facility in Greenbelt, Maryland, were doing calculations for space journeys in the future and kind of trying to account for time all the way in the future and the past. And their computers kind of came grinding to a halt way back in history.

And it was discovered that there was, again, a missing day. And then someone remembered the Joshua story and they got a Bible and they went and found this and so they recalculated and the computer started up. But they ground to a halt again because there were 40 minutes missing and then they remembered the story of Hezekiah and everything worked out.

So, I find it fascinating that you find exactly the same story in a version from Greenwich, England in the 19th century and then a version in the 20th century. And you probably can find other versions of that if you search long enough on the internet. So, to me, that really, again, is very well-intentioned and many Christians hold this to sort of see how science helps support or prove the Bible.

But I'm not convinced. It seems to me it's more the nature of an urban legend that's kind of repeated over and over again. So, did the sun actually stand still? Did the world stop turning? I think it's possible.

Obviously, God could do anything and he could do it in a way that the day would not show up in astronomical calculations. As a matter of fact, I'm told by physicists, and friends, you can't find a missing day like that anyway going in the past. So not being a physicist, I'll leave it at that.

But did God cause a miracle like this to happen? Was this a second miracle? The first miracle is the hailstorms. The second is... I'm not convinced. It seems to me that the story is complete by the end of verse 11.

The battle is complete. The damage has been done. The Israelites have killed many of the enemy and the hailstorms have done that.

There's a great miracle. So, I'm not convinced that God stopped the world turning on its axis. Not because I don't believe in miracles.

I believe that miracles pervade the book of Joshua, including this one with the hailstorms. But I don't think that the earth stood still and there was not this extra-long day. What I think is more based on what I would take as a textually based approach and has to do with taking seriously the nature of this passage as poetic.

It's a short poem, but it is poetic. And hermeneutically, as we interpret texts, we intuitively, in any language, not just Hebrew, but in any language, we intuitively treat poems differently than we do prose accounts of things. Poetry tends to be more imaginative, more emotive, and more figurative.

Poetry kind of reaches into the heavenlies more, into the world of imagination. I've heard it said that poetry helps express human emotion when words sort of fail. It just takes us to a different level.

So let me give you a couple of examples of that where we see elsewhere in scripture. And the first one is a great example we find back in Exodus 15. So, if you take your Bibles and turn to Exodus 15, what we see here is the account of Israel when they've just come out of Egypt and they've crossed the Red Sea and God has given them a great victory over the Pharaoh's armies and so on.

But the prose account, the narrative account of that event is found in Exodus 14. So if you look at Exodus 14 first, we see the storyline unfolding there. We see the Israelites arriving at the Red Sea.

Pharaoh's army comes back. God puts a cloud between them. All night, the wind is blowing.

The sea opens up. Israel crosses on dry land. Pharaoh tries to follow.

The sea closes over them and defeats them. So that's the great victory. That story is told in Exodus 14, and it's a fairly long chapter, 31 verses, and that gives us the details of the storyline.

Now, you look at your Bibles in Exodus 15, and the first 18 verses are, again, a poem or a song. And it's identified that way in 15 verse 1. It says Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord. I will sing to the Lord.

He has triumphed gloriously. The horse and the rider are thrown into the sea, etc. Verse 21 tells us that Miriam and the women sang the same thing.

Sing to the Lord. He has triumphed gloriously, etc. She is mentioned in verse 20.

So how does the poem deal with those same events? And I would say what this song is, it's essentially a hymn. It's a song of thanksgiving. It's a song of victory.

And it's celebrating the great victory over the Pharaoh's army. And it tells the story from a different perspective. Now, the purpose of the poem, the purpose of the song is not to give us all the details.

We already have those in chapter 14. The purpose of the song is to reflect back in a hymnic way about the events of chapter 14. So, it's done differently.

There's more emotive language there. There's more figurative language. For example, look at chapter 15, verse 4. Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea.

His chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. How can you sink in the Red Sea if you're already on the seabed? You know, they're crossing on the bottom of the sea and the floods are covering them. How can you sink? So that right there is some sort of figurative explanation of this.

Verse 5, the floods covered them. They went down into the depths like a stone. How can you do that if you're already on the bottom of the seabed? So again, it seems to me that's a poetic, figurative way of describing the events.

Verse 10, you blew with your wind. The sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

Same thing. So, we have a very different picture. The words dry land that I've mentioned in previous contexts in Joshua chapter 3, when they crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

It's one of the specialized words, dry ground versus wet. That occurs four times in chapter 14. That occurs zero times in the poem.

So, we don't have the picture in the poem of the walls of water and the dry seabed. We have a picture in the poem of the waters covering and sinking into the Red Sea. Is that a different event? Some scholars, including one of my professors in my doctoral program, disbelieved entirely the events of chapter 14 and said there never was a parting of water.

The Israelites got to the Red Sea. They found some boats and crossed. The Egyptians were trying to cross in their boats.

A storm came up and they all sank. My view is that my professor had it just exactly wrong. He was taking more literally the poem and discarding the narrative.

My view hermeneutically is that in the narrative text is more literal and more figurative poetic language in poems. So, I think he was wrong at that point. So that's one example of a beautiful test case of how to understand poetry versus prose.

The poem here is a hymnic reflection back upon the events of chapter 14. It's thanking God for the great victory. There's no need to tell all the same details in the poem.

We have another example of that in Judges chapters 4 and 5. So please open to that one. The context here is where Deborah and Barak are the leaders of the people. Deborah is a prophetess and she ends up being the main leader.

Barak is sort of a subsidiary to her. Chapter 4 tells the story in the prose account. Chapter 5 is the song of Deborah and Barak.

Chapter 5 verse 1, Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day. Then it goes on. You can see in your prose it's narrative.

Again, we have a test case of how poetry treats the events, how narrative, and how prose treat the events. So, the wrap-up to the story in Judges 4 is in verses 23 and 24. Just kind of a prosaic account.

I'm old enough to have known there was a famous TV series back in the 1960s called Dragnet. Dragnet was a short police drama and the hard-boiled Sergeant Friday was the main character and he would always, within half an hour, solve whatever crimes and mysteries that had taken place. But Sergeant Friday had a signature line as he was investigating the aftermath of whatever crime.

And it was as he interviewed people, he just wanted the facts. And the signature line was, just the facts, ma'am. Nothing but the facts.

As I read Judges 4, especially the conclusion here, to me it's sort of the Sergeant Friday view of history. Just the facts. So, in chapter 4 verses 23-24, On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the people of Israel.

The hand of the people of Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed Jabin king of Canaan. That's the prose summary. Prosaic, it's not very dramatic.

In some ways it's to me like the video camera, the security camera in the 7-11. It gives a picture of what's happening but you don't get the emotion, you don't get really involved in the action. Whereas the poem is very colorful, very emotive, very creative.

And that's what we see when we get to Chapter 5. And let's look at some of the things here. Look at verse 4 in Judges Chapter 5. It says, Lord, when you went out from Seir when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled, the heavens dripped, yes, the clouds dropped water. Well, we don't read anything about earthquakes and storms and things like that in Chapter 4. So, this is an additional perspective or maybe a figurative perspective.

Verse 5, the mountains quake before the Lord, even Sinai, before the Lord the God of Israel. So again, we have imagery here that's not found in Chapter 4. And yet this is reflecting back upon that. Look at verse 20.

From heaven the stars fought. From their courses they fought against Sisera. Sisera being the King of that general in Chapter 4. There's no mention of the stars in Chapter 4. And I think intuitively, as we read that passage, we're not thinking, you know, there's any special things happening.

Did God send special gamma rays down to hit Jabin, Sisera? I don't think so. The text doesn't mention any of that in the prose account. I think intuitively understand, it's as if the victory is so overwhelming, it's as if all the forces of nature were arrayed against Jabin and Sisera.

The mountains quaking, the earth quaking, the heavens dropping water, and even the stars were fighting against the Canaanites. But we don't take that literally. I don't find any references on the internet to NASA, somebody looking for the stars fighting in Sisera's day, trying to find the scientific estimation behind verse 20.

So, we intuitively understand how to interpret poetry versus prose. So with all that as background, I think it's solid background because we find it in the Bible itself. We're

not coming in from left field, sort of trying to explain away a miracle, but we're seeing how the Bible itself instructs us about how to interpret prose versus poetry.

And we're back at Joshua now, chapter 10. And in my view, we have verses 12B, sun stands still at Gibeon, moon in the valley of Aijaon. That's all poetic.

And reference to the book of Yashar in the middle of verse 13, that book is only mentioned elsewhere once in 1 Samuel chapter 1. It's an extra-biblical book that barely has been lost. But then it goes on, and the rest of verse 13, I would also argue that it's poetic. Now most Bible versions don't print that as poetry, but for various reasons, I think that even the second part of verse 13 is poetic.

And when it says, the sun stopped in the middle of heaven, it did not hurry to set down for a whole day. That's also figurative language. It's not literal.

And so, all of this, and a couple more things to say. Verse 12, I would see, it says, Joshua spoke to the Lord on the day when the Lord gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel. I would see what he said. The next word, it says, he said in that sight of Israel.

Did Joshua speak those words? Or did God? And there are reasons to believe, I would think, that it's God who spoke the words to the sun and the moon, not Joshua. And so, we see God as the primary actor in this passage. Remember, in the verses preceding, verse 10, the Lord threw the Canaanites into a panic.

He struck them with a great blow. In the middle of verse 11, the Lord threw down large hailstones and so on. And so, God is in control of all of the elements of nature, including the sun and the moon.

It's much more appropriate for God to make a command of the sun and the moon to stop and so on than for Joshua to do that. So, my view is that the subject of he said in the sight of Israel is that God is doing this. So, Joshua spoke to the Lord in verse 12.

What did he speak? We don't have the words, but my view is that he uttered a prayer saying, Lord, help us, deliver us. So, God responds saying, the sun stands still. In other words, an overwhelming victory against the Canaanites here.

And then one more thing in verse 13, it says, the sun stood still, the moon stopped until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. There's a very interesting variant to this in the Greek translation. It says until God took vengeance against his enemies.

And I think that might be the better reading. And that gives us an unbroken string of God being the subject of the verbs here of conquering the Canaanites. And so, it's

God doing the victories, God taking vengeance, God commanding the sun and the moon to stop.

And all of this is poetic to talk about the overwhelming nature of the victory in verses 6 to 11. So there, verses 12 and 13, in my view, are a brief, now, a brief hymnic reflection back on the battle of verses 6 to 11 in the same way that Exodus 15 is a longer hymnic reflection back on the battle of 14, Judges 5 and Judges 4. So, I don't think there was a great miracle of the stopping of the Earth spinning on its axis. I do think there was a great miracle of God overwhelming the Canaanites with the hailstorm.

And this short, brief burst of hymnic reflection is to reflect upon that. Not the popular traditional view, but I believe it's rooted in, hermeneutically, in things we see elsewhere in Scripture. Let me finish, let's finish up this section, and then we'll go on to finish the rest of the chapter.

One other thing that we can say is, verse 14, it says, And the traditional view thinks, well, of course, there's not been a day like this, because the earth has never stopped spinning in this way. This is the one time in world history that this has happened. But if you read the verse carefully, that's not what that is saying.

It's not saying, there's not been a day like it before since when the earth stopped spinning, when the sun stood still on the moon. It says, rather, You could translate that as the Lord obeyed the voice of a man because the Lord fought for Israel. So that finishes the sequence of the verbs of God's fighting for Israel.

And how did he heed the voice of a man? It's when Joshua spoke, verse 12, Interesting, this exact wording, the Lord obeyed the voice of a man, and we know earlier, God certainly responded to prayer, Abraham and Moses and others, but before this in Scripture, there's no place, there's never a place where this wording is found, where God is responding to or literally obeying the voice of a man. So, I think the point here is to say, up to this point, there's never been a direct request by a human that God literally followed through and obeyed in that same way, using that vocabulary. So even there, careful reading helps us to see something different than we often imagine.

Something to think about, and I'll leave it with you to make your judgments about that. Again, further discussion of this you can find in almost any commentary. In my view, you can see it in my commentary in the book of Joshua, where I discuss the other options as well.

Well, it says, Joshua returned and all Israel with him to the camp of Gilgal, verse 15. There's a little problem there, because we see in verse 43, the last verse in the

chapter, the same exact verse. Joshua returned, all of Israel with him to the camp of Gilgal.

So, did he come back twice? Maybe. But it's also possible that this is just an accidental recopying of the same verse in two different places. At the end of verse 42, it says, the Lord God of Israel had fought for Israel.

At the end of verse 14, it talks about the Lord fought for Israel. So it may be that a copyist, sometime in the history of copying the text, saw that fought for Israel phrase and copied it twice, or inserted it in the wrong place. I think, probably doesn't really belong here in verse 15, it's probably at the end of the chapter.

But now, in the rest of the chapter, there are two parts to it. Verses 16 through 28 show the aftermath of this battle with the Gibeonites. Basically, it shows Joshua and the people chasing the enemy to the west and then to the south.

And so, this is kind of that southern sweep of the victory of the Israelites over the Canaanites and destroyed the five kings. And it's a wonderful thing for Israel. So, we'll leave that there.

But then, starting in verse 29, we have from here to verse 39, kind of now a broad overview, a sweeping overview of more cities in the south. And starting with verse 28, actually, you'll see a city called Makkedah. And then there are six more cities.

In other words, there's seven cities that are named by name. Makkedah, verse 28. Verse 29, Libnah.

Verse 31, Lachish. Verse 33, Gezer. Verse 34, Eglon. Verse 36, Hebron. And verse 38, Debir. These are all cities in the south.

And if you look at this section, it's kind of a formulaic repetition of each one. There are only one or two verses with each one. And they fought against... So, for example, we'll look at verse 31.

Joshua and all Israel with him passed on from Libnah to Lachish. They had seized to it, fought against it. God gave Lachish into their hand.

They captured it. The second day, struck it with the edge of the sword, every person in it, as they had done to Libnah. Then, in verse 33, Hiram king of Gezer came up to help Lachish, and Joshua struck him and the people.

And so it goes, seven times. That's all we know. Now, verses 40 to 43 are kind of the final summary, or 40 to 42.

And it says that Joshua struck the whole land, the hill country, the Negev, the lowland, the slopes, all their kings. So, it seems to me that that is saying they had a victory over everybody in the south, not just those seven cities. And those seven cities are representative of the important cities.

Maybe it's a symbolic number, number seven of the idea of completeness there. But I think they're chosen to represent the broader destruction in the South. And this process was one of complete destruction there.

So, let's look at the final paragraph of the chapter, which is verses 40 to 43, or the specific focus is 40 to 42, talking about the nature of the conquest. So, it says, verse 40, Joshua struck the whole land, hill country, Negev, lowland, slopes, all their kings. He left none remaining, devoted to destruction.

There's that word, haram, devoted to destruction. Everything that breathed, just as the Lord God had commanded. Joshua struck them from Kadesh, Barnea, in the far south, as far as Gaza, in the southwest, all the country of Goshen.

That's way down by Egypt, perhaps, as far as Gibeon, up in the north. And verse 42, Joshua captured all these kings and their land at one time, because, again, the Lord God fought for Israel. So that idea of God being the warrior is found here.

But this picture makes it seem like there's just nobody left. All corpses, nobody breathing, and that is it. And yet, we find in later chapters, starting in chapter 13, that the text tells us in chapter 13 that there was yet much more land remaining to be taken.

We've mentioned before that also there are places where it says the tribe of such and such were not able to drive out the inhabitants from their territory, etc. So it appears that in these later chapters, there are people living in these territories that the Israelites did not wipe out completely. And so how do we bring those things together? I think, again, we can see this as kind of the summarizing statement, summarizing all the specifics of the battles here, the different battles here in chapter 10, and basically saying God gave a complete victory to the Israelites.

The nations were afraid of him, or if they did come into attack, God gave the victory, and basically that was it. But not literally every last individual. There clearly were some survivors, and so this has to be seen as sort of a figurative blanket statement that is trying to convey the immensity of God's triumph, and the specifics kind of play out a little bit later where we find that some actually did survive.

But this is an important chapter. It shows, first of all, the testing of the Gibeonite treaty from chapter 9. Was Israel going to be faithful to the Gibeonites when they were attacked? And the answer was yes, and God gave the great victory there at

Gibeon, at the hailstorm. The little hymnic reflection back upon that, celebrating that, celebrating that God actually listened to the prayer of Joshua, the voice of a man, verse 14.

And then the aftermath of that, capturing the kings, verses 16 to 28. And then kind of the summarizing statement of here's the whole southern campaign, the seven cities, and then the final statements there. So, it's a very impressive chapter for lots of reasons, one of which I don't think is that it's understood still literally, but I hope you see that it's not because I don't believe in miracles, it's because I think that's where the textual evidence would lead us.

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