



Joshua - Chapter Eleven

II Joshua 6:1-12:24 - Taking the Land (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eleven

After Joshua's forces defeated several Amorite kings in the south in the previous chapter, the king of Hazor assembled the northern Canaanite kings to battle the Israelites. Joshua and his men defeated the Canaanites at the waters of Merom and pursued them to Great Sidon and the Valley of Mizpeh. Then Joshua turned back and captured the city of Hazor. The narrator again articulates that what God had commanded of Moses is carried out by Joshua.

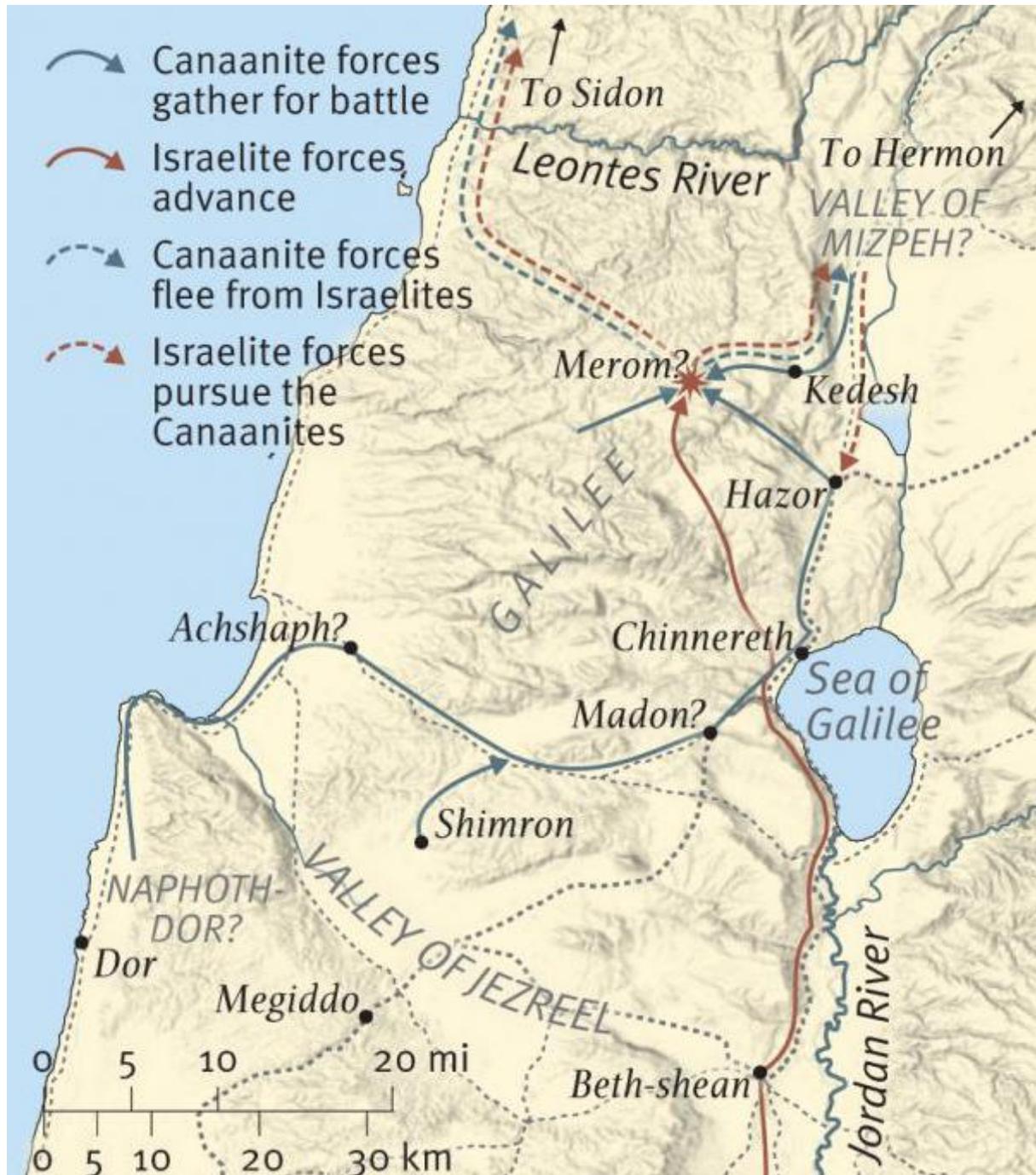
The chapter concludes with a summary of all the battles that the Israelites had to fight to gain the land. It makes it clear that the war went on for a long time and that it was God who caused the inhabitants of each city to come out to fight Israel so that they could be defeated. Finally, the land had rest from war.

II.f Joshua 11:1-12:24 - Conquest of the North and a List of Defeated Kings

Just as the southern campaign was a necessary sequel to Israel's defence of the Gibeonites, the northern campaign takes shape as a defensive measure against the northern kings gathered around Jabin of Hazor. The account gives a terse description of what must have been fierce battles, more like Joshua 10:29-43, in contrast to Chapters 6 and 8 and 10:1-28. This is probably because 11:6-9 makes the main point. The idea of compliance with God's instructions given through Moses is a recurring theme, with 11:19-20 giving the narrator's theological assessment. Chapter 12 lists the kings defeated under the leadership of Moses (12:1-6) and Joshua (12:7-24), bringing the basic conquest narrative to a close.

II.f.i Joshua 11:1-15 - The United Kings of Northern Canaan Defeated

Having heard of the defeat of the northern cities, King Jabin of Hazor formed a mighty alliance with the leaders of other cities in the north and went out against Israel. Under instruction from the Lord, Joshua meets this superior army, who were subsequently destroyed, giving Israel and the Lord a series of great victories.



The Conquest of Canaan: The Northern Campaign

¹ When King Jabin of Hazor heard of this, he sent to King Jobab of Madon, to the king of Shimron, to the king of Achshaph, ² and to the kings who were in the northern hill country, and in the Arabah south of Chinneroth, and in the lowland, and in Naphoth-dor on the west, ³ to the Canaanites in the east and the west, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivites under Hermon in the land of Mizpah.

Joshua 11:1-3

When King Jabin of Hazor heard of this. After hearing of Israel's total conquest in the south, the northern kings came together expecting to defeat Israel. The huge army assembled together reflects an attitude that they believe they must stop Israel now or never. All this is prompted by what the northern kings heard regarding Israel's success and victory.

King Jabin of Hazor, is not to be confused with <<*King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor*>> during the time of Deborah and Barak (Judges 4:2a). The West Semitic name Jabin, which may mean something like '(he) builds,' is attested for rulers of Hazor in the Mari texts of the 18th Century BC, the Amarna texts (14th Century), etc., often in compound names employing the name of a deity. Thus, Jabin may have been a dynastic name especially associated with Hazor. Hazor, now Tell el-Qedah, was located about 10 miles or 16 km north of the Sea of Galilee and covered an area of over 200 acres. It was probably the largest city in Syria-Palestine in its day.

The cities Shimron and Achshaph are also attested in the Amarna texts and in the itinerary of the Egyptian pharaoh Thutmose III in the 15th Century BC.

⁴ They came out, with all their troops, a great army, in number like the sand on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots.

Joshua 11:4

The great army mustered by the northern city kings is described colourfully as in number like the sand that is on the seashore. Their chariots were of light construction, with four-spoked wheels, and were drawn by two horses, providing both speed and good manoeuvrability; this contrasts with the chariots of iron that were faced by the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh in Joshua 17:16-18.

Two things indicate that now Israel is facing challenges they had never faced before. First, the size of the enemy army: a multitude of warriors likened to the sand that is on the seashore; and second, the technological superiority of the Canaanites because of their many horses and chariots. The challenges

brought to Israel seem to increase at each step, from Jericho, to Ai, to the battle with the southern kings, and now to this series of battles.

⁵ All these kings joined their forces, and came and camped together at the waters of Merom, to fight with Israel.

Joshua 11:5

Merom may be another name for Madon (v.1), commonly identified with Tell Qarnei Hittin, located 5 miles or 8 km west of the Sea of Galilee. It is mentioned by both Thutmose III in the 15th Century BC and by the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III in the 8th Century BC.

⁶ And the Lord said to Joshua, 'Do not be afraid of them, for tomorrow at this time I will hand over all of them, slain, to Israel; you shall hamstring their horses, and burn their chariots with fire.' ⁷ So Joshua came suddenly upon them with all his fighting force, by the waters of Merom, and fell upon them. ⁸ And the Lord handed them over to Israel, who attacked them and chased them as far as Great Sidon and Misrephoth-maim, and eastwards as far as the valley of Mizpeh. They struck them down, until they had left no one remaining. ⁹ And Joshua did to them as the Lord commanded him; he hamstrung their horses, and burned their chariots with fire.

Joshua 11:6-9

Do not be afraid of them, for tomorrow at this time I will hand over all of them, slain, to Israel. This attack was new, and more severe than previous challenges. Joshua needed a fresh confirmation of God's promise for his life, and the Lord was faithful to bring it. This statement also shows that fear was still an issue for Joshua and the people of Israel. God has a reason for everything he does, and he would not have assured them do not be afraid unless there was a reason for the encouragement.

So Joshua came suddenly upon them with all his fighting force. Joshua fought with boldness and strategy, he surprised them with an unexpected ambush.

They struck them down, until they had left no one remaining. Joshua fought with passion and commitment; he did not let up until he had accomplished as much as he could.

In keeping with the biblical prohibition against amassing and placing confidence in military hardware: <<*Even so, he must not acquire many horses for himself, or return the people to Egypt in order to acquire more horses, since the Lord has said to you, 'You must never return that way again'*>> (Deuteronomy 17:16),

Joshua is to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots. The former would have involved cutting the horses' equivalent of the Achilles tendon, which would at the very least make the animal unfit for any military use. David also used this method to destroy the articles of war: <<*David took from him one thousand seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand foot-soldiers. David hamstringed all the chariot horses, but left enough for a hundred chariots*>> (2 Samuel 8:4).

¹⁰ Joshua turned back at that time, and took Hazor, and struck its king down with the sword. Before that time Hazor was the head of all those kingdoms. ¹¹ And they put to the sword all who were in it, utterly destroying them; there was no one left who breathed, and he burned Hazor with fire. ¹² And all the towns of those kings, and all their kings, Joshua took, and struck them with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded. ¹³ But Israel burned none of the towns that stood on mounds except Hazor, which Joshua did burn. ¹⁴ All the spoil of these towns, and the livestock, the Israelites took for their booty; but all the people they struck down with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, and they did not leave any who breathed. ¹⁵ As the Lord had commanded his servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses.

Joshua 11:10-15

That Hazor was the head of all those kingdoms is not surprising, given its size and prominent location beside a major north-south trade route.

Having decimated the northern coalition forces at Merom (vv.7-9), Joshua turned back to Hazor, struck its king down with the sword along with all who were in it, and finally burned Hazor with fire. Joshua struck the other coalition cities as well, destroying them or devoting them to destruction, but none of these cities was burned except Hazor alone.

Archæologists looking for physical signs of Israel's conquest must keep in mind that only three sites: Jericho in Joshua 6:24, Ai in Joshua 8:28, and Hazor here, are explicitly said to have been burned. The Israelites were, after all, to live in towns and houses they had not built and to enjoy vineyards and olive groves they had not cultivated (Deuteronomy 6:10-11). The archæology of Hazor attests several violent destructions by fire, including in circa 1400 BC, 1300 BC, and 1230 BC, which could relate to the conquest of the Promised Land by the Israelites.

II.f.ii Joshua 11:16-23 - Summary of Joshua's Conquests

This sub-section summarises all the battles that occurred during the initial conquest of the Promised Land. Although the time frame is not specified, it does state that it took a long time, probably several years rather than months. When Joshua had faithfully fulfilled all that the Lord had commanded him through Moses the land finally knew peace.

¹⁶ So Joshua took all that land: the hill country and all the Negeb and all the land of Goshen and the lowland and the Arabah and the hill country of Israel and its lowland, ¹⁷ from Mount Halak, which rises towards Seir, as far as Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He took all their kings, struck them down, and put them to death. ¹⁸ Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. ¹⁹ There was not a town that made peace with the Israelites, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon; all were taken in battle. ²⁰ For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts so that they would come against Israel in battle, in order that they might be utterly destroyed, and might receive no mercy, but be exterminated, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Joshua 11:16-20

Not unlike the brief summary of the southern campaign in Joshua 10:40-42, the summary following the successful completion of the northern campaign is cast in absolute phrases, describing how Joshua took all that land, from the far south to the far north. The regions that were taken are described in v.16, and v.17, and provide the demarcation of the southern and northern regions of the entire conquered area.

Although some mistakenly assume the conquest under Joshua to have been a blitzkrieg, in fact it took a long time, perhaps as long as seven years. This number is calculated from information provided for Caleb, Joshua's fellow spy in Numbers Chapters 13-14. Caleb was 40 years old when Moses sent him as a spy according to Joshua 14:7. From that time to the entry into the land of Canaan was another 38 years (Deuteronomy 2:14), making Caleb 78 years old at the beginning of the conquest. Caleb receives his allotted territory at age 85 (Joshua 14:10), seven years after the start of the conquest.

The political reality that was not a town that made peace with the Israelites, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon is conjoined without embarrassment with the theological explanation that it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts. On the interplay of human responsibility and divine

sovereignty, refer to the long saga of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart recounted in Exodus Chapters 4-14, beginning at 4:21.

This account reveals that, in part, this judgement on the Canaanites was accomplished when God did harden their hearts against Israel. The hardening of human hearts is when God gives people up to the sin that is in their hearts; refer to Romans 1:24-28. The reader need not think that God parcelled out some particular judgement upon the Canaanites. He dealt with their hearts the same way he deals with the hearts of all people, but God's grace either hardens the heart or it softens it.

²¹ At that time Joshua came and wiped out the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel; Joshua utterly destroyed them with their towns. ²² None of the Anakim was left in the land of the Israelites; some remained only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod.

Joshua 11:21-22

That Joshua wiped out the Anakim is highly significant. This race of giants, beside whom the spies under Moses felt like 'grasshoppers' (Numbers 13:33), terrified ten of the twelve spies and prompted Israel to shrink back in fear. It is fitting to crown the account of the subjugation phase of the conquest by describing how Joshua has now largely eradicated this frightening threat; refer also to Joshua 14:6-15.

Significantly, Israel faced the Anakim last, only after God had trained them in battle and in working with him through the months of conquest. When Israel refused to enter Canaan out of a fear of the Anakim, they did not realise that God would manage their affairs so they would face this most difficult challenge last. God knows how to manage the battles in a person's life. And they must allow God to manage those battles. All too often the church is convinced that they must go out and fight the Anakim first, when God would have them face that battle last.

Some remained only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod. The Anakim remained only in these coastal cities occupied by the Philistines. The giant Goliath came from the city of Gath some five hundred years later: <<*And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span*>> (1 Samuel 17:4).

²³ So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war.

Joshua 11:23

This verse begins the transition from the subjugation phase of the conquest (Joshua took the whole land) to the allocation/occupation phase (Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments). The latter notice anticipates the events of Chapters 13-19.

And the land had rest from war. More fighting remains to be done when the Israelites attempt to occupy the conquered territories, but the Lord has proven true to the promises of Joshua 1:3-5, and the land lies subdued before them: <<*Then the whole congregation of the Israelites assembled at Shiloh, and set up the tent of meeting there. The land lay subdued before them*>> (Joshua 18:1). Another promise of God was fulfilled: <<*He said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest'*>> (Exodus 33:14).

Not every small town and village had been conquered and occupied. That was up to each individual tribe to do in the land that was apportioned to them. In the same sense, Jesus has already defeated the enemy and conquered the land, but he also calls the church into battle to gain what is theirs - the Kingdom of God.