

God's Sovereign Faithfulness

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[0 : 00] Joshua chapter 11, and in the Church Visitor's Bible, that's page 187. So Nima, maybe you'll come and join me just so you're ready to go. So Joshua chapter 11, and we're reading verses 16 to 23.

And this really marks the end of the first section in Joshua. And it's a bit of a summary of all that's happened in the first 11 chapters.

So it's a bit of a summary of all that we've been reading. So Joshua chapter 11, and I'll read from verse 16. So Joshua took all that land, the hill country, and all the Negev, and all the land of Goshen, and the lowlands, and the Araba, and the hill country of Israel, and its lowland from Mount Halak, which rises towards Seir, as far as Balgaz in the valley of Lebanon, below Mount Hermon. And he captured all their kings and struck them and put them to death. Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.

There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel except the Hibbites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. They took them all in battle. For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel and battle in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the Lord commanded Moses.

[1 : 42] And Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, and from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel.

Joshua devoted them to destruction with their cities. There was none of the Anakim left in the land of the people of Israel, only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did some remain.

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. Well, to turn back to Joshua. Joshua, Joshua chapter 11.

How do we know that everything is going to be all right? Don't our hearts ache for particular things to be resolved?

[2 : 52] Don't you wish that your fears, the things that keep you up at night, would just disappear? We long to know that everything will, in the end, be all right.

Well, that is the great Christian hope. You and I know that, in the end, everything will be all right, in the end.

But we're not there yet. Things will only be all right, in an ultimate and final sense, when the Lord returns. But we're not there yet.

We are waiting. So how do we know that everything will be all right in the end? How do we know that one day we will enjoy our eternal inheritance with the Lord?

How do we know? Well, the book of Joshua gives us a resounding answer to that question. And our passage this evening, in particular, answers that how question.

[3 : 52] We can know that everything will be all right in the end, because God is faithful to his words. He will do just as he says. And because we know that everything will be all right in the end, we can trust him as we wait, as we live in the messy and the difficult here and now.

The book of Joshua records real events which speak of the God, who is our God, who is your God, who never leaves nor forsakes his people, and who is faithful, utterly faithful to his words.

And this brief paragraph that we're looking at this evening is a summary. And it's a summary of the summary.

All that we've been looking at in Joshua is a summary of the events of the conquest. And here at the end of chapter 11, we have a summary of that summary. Dale Ralph Davis calls it the war wrap-up.

We see at the start and the end of the paragraph that Joshua took all that land. Look at verse 16. And then again at verse 23, Joshua took the whole land.

[5 : 09] Last week, if you were here, we were back in chapter 9. And we were looking at the treaty made with Gibeon. And since then, a lot has happened.

We've not looked at chapters 10 and 11 in any detail, but they record two campaigns. Battles against a coalition of southern kings in chapter 10, and then battles against a northern coalition in the first half of chapter 11.

And the outcome of those battles is that Joshua and all Israel have conquered the whole land. Now, this is a hugely significant moment.

What was promised many centuries before has now at last come to pass. How has this happened? How has Joshua and Israel now claimed the land?

Well, our passage gives some of the answers. Fundamentally, the great and primary reason is, of course, that God is faithful to his word. That is the great resounding message of the whole book.

[6 : 17] Great is thy faithfulness. You could very roughly divide the book into two unequal halves, as Dale Ralph Davis does. Chapters 1 to 21 contains a record of God's faithfulness.

And the second half, chapters 22 to 24, is the response to the first half, namely the responsibility of God's people.

In light of all that God has done, in response to his grace, his people are to demonstrate fidelity to him. And again, here in chapter 11, we see that God has done just as he promised.

Notice again in verse 23, so Joshua took the whole land according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses. It's just as he said, just as the Lord promised Moses, it's happened.

The Lord's word is fulfilled. He is always faithful to his word. And that means that God is powerful to bring about what he has said. Again and again, we've seen this conquest has been supernaturally fought.

[7 : 30] God is powerful to do what he's promised, from the crossing of the Jordan to the battle at Jericho. And just flick back to chapter 10, where we're given a mini summary of the victory over the Southern Coalition.

Chapter 10, verse 42. And Joshua captured all these kings and their lands one at a time because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel.

This is all the Lord's doing. He is faithful to his word and he has fought for his people. He is powerful to ensure that what he has said will come to pass.

Now isn't that one truth just greatly reassuring? Not just for Joshua, not just for those for who this account was first written, but for all of us, for all believers at all times down through history.

God is faithful to his word. That is unchanging. You can rely upon God because he never forgets a word that he's uttered. He doesn't get lost in the details or mis-remember things as we often do.

[8 : 42] He is steadily and surely fulfilling all that he's promised for his whole world, for his church, and for you. God will fulfill his promises.

Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow. Great is thy faithfulness. Now that's all very well and very encouraging, but we see more specific aspects of his faithfulness in the summary of this conquest.

So let's look a little closer at this paragraph and notice three things in particular about God's faithfulness. God is faithful to his word no matter the passing of time for his persevering people, verse 18.

Secondly, God is faithful to his word no matter the obstinacy of his enemies or our scruples, verses 19 to 20. And God is faithful to his word no matter the fearsome opponents of his faint-hearted people, verses 21 to 22.

So firstly then, God is faithful to his word, verse 18, no matter the passing of time for his persevering people. We see there in that verse the faithfulness of God through his people's diligence and patient obedience.

[10 : 03] Look back to verses 16 and 17 where you get brief details about the extent of the lands conquered by Joshua. And then we read under verse 17 that he captured all their kings and struck them and put them to death.

And then verse 18, we read this, Joshua made war for a long time with all those kings. It's an interesting little aside, isn't it, from the writer.

It can be easy to forget that the Bible is highly selective in what it records. You can read the first 11 chapters of Joshua in under an hour. But in reality, the events we read there, verses chapters 1 to 11, probably took between five and seven years to accomplish.

Now we know that because in a couple of chapters we're given some details about Caleb and about his age at various points in the life of Israel and in the conquest. And that gives us about a five to seven year window in which the events in chapter 1 of Joshua and the conclusion of the conquest in chapter 11.

About seven years. Now think about World War II, a broadly similar length of time, but yet consider how much has been written.

[11 : 23] Joshua 1 to 11 is just a brief summary of what happened. And we could perhaps miss that it took quite a long time. That God is faithful to his people and fighting for them does not necessarily mean that progress is always rapid and spectacular.

Not every battle was a Jericho. Not every river crossing was a Jordan-type event. Yes, God does sometimes work in the spectacular, but no less does he work in the mundane, in the weekly, yearly slog.

Joshua and all the people had to exercise great patience and diligence in the conquest. And it's the same for God's people now. We, all of us, in light of God's faithfulness to his word, are to press on, to persevere, to endure, because we know that in the end, what he has said will come to pass.

Not one word that he has uttered would fail. Now, in many ways, this past year has been towards the more spectacular end for us as a church.

New locations, new services, new opportunities to serve and to witness to the gospel. It's been exciting. The Lord has provided and proved his faithfulness in amazing ways.

[12 : 52] But let's guard against that being our expectation for next year. Let's be ready for patient endurance, for the weekly slog of ministry.

Now, I'm not wanting to sound downbeat, not at all, but that is the reality. When you're 10 weeks into the release of the word term, or small groups, or mainly music, when you're getting things set up for the ladies' fellowship in the depths of my least favorite month, January, it's a bit of a slog. It's hard work. But we can press on knowing the bigger picture, knowing that God is faithful. He keeps his promises no matter the passing of time as we persevere.

Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. Sometimes it takes a while, but God is faithful no matter the passing of time.

Let's look on. Secondly, God is faithful to his word no matter the obstinacy of his enemies or our scruples, verses 19 and 20. And we see here the faithfulness of God and his sovereignty in salvation.

[14 : 11] We read there at the end of verse 19 that Joshua took all the kings in battle. And in the very next verse, it's as if the writer is pulling back the curtain on the seen world and shows us what is really going on.

He gives us the reason for these victories. He shows us just how mighty and how sovereign God really is. And if it shocks us, it really means that we just not grasp the majesty, the power, the sovereignty of God.

If it shocks us, it perhaps means we haven't grasped our finitude, our creatureliness, our sinfulness. Verse 20 shows us why it was that all these kings took their people into battle against Joshua and his army.

Even though they'd heard about all the Lord had done for his people, even though they'd heard about the Exodus events, the crossing of the Jordan, the defeat of Jericho, even though they'd heard all that, they went into battle.

Now on the surface, their actions might seem utterly foolish. Why did they go into battle against Joshua? Joshua? Well, the ultimate reason was that the Lord hardened their hearts.

[15 : 34] Look again at verse 20. For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel and battle. It was the hardening of their hearts that led them into battle against Joshua and to their deaths.

Their going into battle was, second half of verse 20, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy. God was in total control and he would do just as he said. He was going to give the land he promised. He was going to give it to his chosen people no matter how obstinate and how rebellious the people in that land were.

Now, perhaps we find that shocking. Our scruples about the matter bubble to the surface. We don't like it. It sounds horrible.

Well, two things to say. Firstly, this was a sinful and unrepentant people. Centuries before, when God promised this very land to Abraham, he said that his people would not inherit the land until their four centuries of slavery in Egypt because of the iniquities of the Amorites is not yet complete. [16:57] Back in Genesis, God was giving them time. He was showing his patience. But four centuries later, they had not repented.

They were a sinful people. And God gave them over to their sin. Just as it was with Pharaoh, God hardened his heart and Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

So too were this people. They hardened their hearts and God hardened theirs. The two go together and so too here. They refuse to turn and repent to the laws.

Secondly, God is sovereign and holy and we are not. the astonishing and shocking truth is not that these people were destroyed but rather that not everyone was destroyed.

There was nothing inherently virtuous about Israel. They were deserving as all of us are of God's judgments. But the fact that God is merciful to some, that is the shocking thing.

[18:05] God is God and we are mere finite creatures. If we perhaps think this is a quirk of the book of Joshua, the New Testament speaks no differently.

God is absolutely sovereign in salvation and he will honor our choices. In Romans chapter 1 we read of God giving men up to the lusts of their own hearts.

The hardening of our own hearts through persistent sin goes hand in hand with God's hardening. Now if this challenges how we think of God then perhaps we need to rethink.

Have we domesticated God? Have we reduced him to just a slightly bigger version of ourselves? He is the almighty God of all creation. We are mere creatures.

He is sovereign and holy and we're not. It truly is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. We're to tremble at these verses.

[19:19] God is sovereign but he is a merciful God. Remember that some of the inhabitants of the land were not destroyed.

Remember Rahab. Remember Gibeon. They heard about the God of Israel. They knew that he was someone to be feared and so they threw themselves upon his mercy.

God is faithful to his words and is sovereign to deliver on his promises. no matter the obstinacy of his enemies and no matter our particular scruples.

Now this is a good thing. The writer is utterly unapologetic. It is cause a great confidence and certainty for his people. For you and I, we don't have a weak impotent God.

Quite the opposite. He is able to do just as he promises. Thirdly, looking on to verses 21 and 22, God is faithful to his word no matter the fearsome opponents of his faint-hearted people.

[20:37] And we see here the faithfulness of the God who triumphs over all. Now verses 21 and 22 are a bit striking. It's striking that in this summary of summaries, we have one particular people group mentioned.

Look there in verse 21. He mentions the Anakim. Why is that? Why is the writer mentioned this one particular group?

It should at the very least cause us to sit up and take notice. Perhaps in your line of work you have to read reports. And if you're sensible, you'll read the executive summary, which should help you decide whether you spend time reading further or not.

But if particular people or particular things are mentioned in that executive summary, you take notice. You zoom in on them. And likewise here, the fact that the Anakim are mentioned should cause us to ask why.

Who are they? Who were the Anakim? Well, if you rewind 40 years, we discover that they were the most feared inhabitants of the promised land.

[21:52] Forty years prior to this event, Moses sent 12 spies into the land to go and scope it out. And in the report back, 10 of the spies mention the men of Anak in particular.

And in Deuteronomy, we hear the reasons given for the people's refusal to enter the land. It says the people are greater and taller than we. The cities are great and fortified to heaven.

And besides, we have seen the sons of Anakim there. Back then, 40 years prior to this event, the Anakim struck fear into the heart of Israel.

It was because of the Anakim that they refused to enter. And so aren't these verses, 21 and 22, an extraordinary testimony to God's faithfulness? Despite his people's faint-heartedness, God was faithful.

Here were the people that once turned the courage of Israel to jelly. Here were the people that once seemed an insurmountable foe. But now, the Anakim had been cut off from the land.

[23 : 01] A people that once struck fear into the hearts of Israel were no longer a threat. the generation that died in the wilderness that refused to enter the land because of the Anakim, well, they had no reason to fear, really.

These giants were no match for the Lord. And surely the lesson the writer wants us to learn here is that God is more than a match, even for the most feared of enemies.

And in fact, as we know, our greatest enemies have already been comprehensively dealt with. our greatest fears are done. Christ, through his resurrection, has defeated Satan and death.

And if those great and fearsome and terrifying enemies have been dealt with, how much more the things that we fear in the day-to-day, the things that keep us up at night, the enemies that we worry about, they are no match for God, a God who is faithful to his word, no matter the fearsome opponents we might have.

The Anakim, they were no match for the God of Israel. The Anakim who struck fear into them 40 years before, they were no match for God's.

[24 : 20] God. So yes, we are often a faint-hearted people. Yes, we are often cowed by God's obstinate enemies.

Yes, we often grow tired in the long slog of spiritual battle, but God is faithful. Your God is faithful in the midst of all that, in the midst of the mess, in the midst of the here and now.

Despite our faint-heartedness, despite our tiredness, despite our lack of patience, he is patient and faithful. He will do just as he promises, and so we can trust him.

One day he will be seen to have defeated all our enemies. The whole world will see it. He will bring us to our promised heavenly rest. He will never leave nor forsake his people.

He will never leave nor forsake you. That is the great message of the first part of Joshua. God is faithful.

[25 : 33] He will keep his promises. He will bring you safely into his eternal rest. Let me pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. So Joshua took the whole land according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses.

Lord, what reassuring words these are. You are God who does exactly as he says. Every promise you've made will come to pass.

God and we thank you that we living here and now can look back on your greatest and biggest promises fulfilled in Christ.

Thank you that in him we have such certainty, such security. And so as we wait, as we wait for him to return, would you strengthen us, embolden us by these words which speak again of your faithfulness.

[26 : 50] Help us to trust you. Grant us patience in the day-to-day and the week-to-week. Help us stand firm in the face of our enemies who strike fear into our hearts.

Let us remember the God that you are. So strengthen and encourage us, for you are faithful. people. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.