Joshua Fights for God

Josh 11:6-9, 16-23
SS Lesson for 09/20/2026

Devotional Scripture: Ps 27:1-6

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary
Key Verses: Joshua 11:20

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

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  - Assurance that the Holy Spirit will be with believers (John 14:16)
  - Assurance of never being separated from the love of Jesus (Rom 8:37-39)
  - Assurance of better things stored up in heaven (Ps 31:19)
  - Assurance of the crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4:8)
- *Joshua's actions (7)*
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  - Action through not just being hearing of the word, but doers (Ezek 33:30-32)
  - Action through being obedient (Matt 21:28-31)
- *God's deliverance (8)*
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- *Joshua's obedience (9)*
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  - Obedience to witness (Acts 8:26-31)
  - Obedience must be done with all of the heart (Deut 26:16)
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CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM THOMAS CONSTABLE
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

After crossing the Jordan River, Joshua led the Israelites through the land of Canaan. This campaign included the victories at Jericho (Joshua 6) and Ai (8:1-29). However, the Israelites were deceived by the Gibeonites, resulting in an inappropriate covenant with them (Joshua 9). In the cases of both Ai and the Gibeonites, Joshua's decisions revealed a key spiritual weakness by his deciding courses of action without consulting the Lord first (7:3-5; 8:1; 9:14-15). Despite this shortcoming, Joshua and the Israelites defeated many kings and their armies in the southern parts of Canaan (10:16-43). Having heard of the Israelites' advances, rulers in the northern Canaan formed an alliance (Joshua 11:1-5). Although the leaders of this coalition were each designated as a "king," their respective kingdoms were comparatively small and weak in power. By coming together, they thought they could present an effective, united front that could not be overcome, at least it seemed to be so.

The book of Joshua is part of the section of the Old Testament designated as the Historical Books; there are twelve of these. The principle of writing a coherent historical account requires that the included elements come together to reveal a narrative regarding plot development and character development. The book of Joshua is no exception to this principle. Many accounts in this book emphasize the unity of the Israelites and their obedience to God, while other accounts pinpoint instances of the people's disobedience and resulting consequences (example: Joshua 7). Together, these accounts convey the central message of the book of Joshua: the Israelites' obedience to God results in their success in taking the land, thus solidifying a unified identity. Additionally, modern readers might view the text of Joshua as a testimony to God and his people. This testimony reveals God's redemptive power despite human sin. At times, the narrative of Joshua delves into the depths of human depravity experienced by individuals before their rescue. The details, albeit negative, enhance the remarkable nature of God's actions, the greater the transformation from sin to righteousness, the more honor God receives.

Key Verses: Joshua 11:20

For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might utterly destroy them, and that they might receive no mercy, but that He might destroy them, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Fight by the Waters (Josh 11:6-9)

6 But the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow about this time I will deliver all of them slain before Israel. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire."
7 So Joshua and all the people of war with him came against them suddenly by the waters of Merom, and they attacked them.
8 And the Lord delivered them into the hand of Israel, who defeated them and chased them to Greater Sidon, to the Brook Misrephoth, and to the Valley of Mizpah eastward; they attacked them until they left none of them remaining.
9 So Joshua did to them as the Lord had told him: he hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots with fire.

God's assurance to Joshua (6)

Assurance to be with His people to the very end (Matt 28:19-20)

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Assurance that the Holy Spirit will be with believers (John 14:16)

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—

Assurance of never being separated from the love of Jesus (Rom 8:37-39)

> 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Assurance of better things stored up in heaven (Ps 31:19)

> 19 How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.

Assurance of the crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4:8)

> 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Joshua's actions (7)

Action through responding to daily opportunities (Matt 25:41-43)

> 41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

Action through putting God's word into practice (Luke 6:47-49)

> 47 I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. 48 He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. 49 But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."

Action through not just being hearing of the word, but doers (Ezek 33:30-32)

> 30 "As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, 'Come and hear the message that has come from the Lord.' 31 My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. 32 Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.

Action through being obedient (Matt 21:28-31)

> 28 "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 29 "'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. 30 "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. 31 "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

God's deliverance (8)

Deliverance from deadly peril (2 Cor 1:10)

> 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

Deliverance from trials (2 Peter 2:9)

> 9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

Deliverance from temptations (1 Cor 10:13)

> 13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Deliverance from evil attacks (2 Tim 4:18)

> 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Joshua's obedience (9)

Obedience to show faith (Gen 22:9-12)

> 9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

Obedience to witness (Acts 8:26-31)

> 26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road — the desert road — that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." 30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. 31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Obedience must be done with all of the heart (Deut 26:16)

> 16 The Lord your God commands you this day to follow these decrees and laws; carefully observe them with all your heart and with all your soul.

Obedience is an essential part of being guided (Acts 8:26-27)

> 26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road — the desert road — that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship

Fight in the Lands (Josh 11:16-23)

16 Thus Joshua took all this land: the mountain country, all the South, all the land of Goshen, the lowland, and the Jordan plain, the mountains of Israel and its lowlands,
17 from Mount Halak and the ascent to Seir, even as far as Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings, and struck them down and killed them.
18 Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.
19 There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. All the others they took in battle.
20 For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might utterly destroy them, and that they might receive no mercy, but that He might destroy them, as the Lord had commanded Moses.
21 And at that time Joshua came and cut off the Anakim from the mountains: from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel; Joshua utterly destroyed them with their cities.
22 None of the Anakim were left in the land of the children of Israel; they remained only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod.
23 So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Then the land rested from war.

War is waged (16-19)

Wars where nations will be eliminated (Deut 7:22-24)

22 The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you. 23 But the Lord your God will deliver them over to you, throwing them into great confusion until they are destroyed. 24 He will give their kings into your hand, and you will wipe out their names from under heaven. No one will be able to stand up against you; you will destroy them.

Wars where kings and lands will be conquered (Josh 10:42)

42 All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered in one campaign, because the Lord, the God of Israel, fought for Israel.

Wars where no weapon can prevail against (Isa 54:15-17)

15 If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you. 16 "See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work. And it is I who have created the destroyer to work havoc; 17 no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me," declares the Lord.

Wars where God provides the victory (1 Cor 15:57)

57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God hardens hearts (20)

A hardened heart because of being obstinate (Ezek 3:7)

7 But the house of Israel is not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for the whole house of Israel is hardened and obstinate.

A hardened heart because of pride (Dan 5:20)

20 But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.

A hardened heart because of sin's deceitfulness (Heb 3:13)

13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

A hardened heart because of rejecting the truth (Rom 2:8)

8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

Cities destroyed (21-22)

Cities destroyed because of sin (Gen 19:24-28)

24 Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah — from the Lord out of the heavens. 25 Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities — and also the vegetation in the land. 26 But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. 27 Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord. 28 He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.

Cities destroyed because of disbelief (Matt 11:21-24)

> 21 "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. 24 But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

Cities destroyed because of ungodliness (2 Peter 2:4-6)

> 4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; 6 if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;

Cities destroyed because of God's discipline (Deut 29:22-23)

> 22 Your children who follow you in later generations and foreigners who come from distant lands will see the calamities that have fallen on the land and the diseases with which the Lord has afflicted it. 23 The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur — nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord overthrew in fierce anger.

God and Joshua divided the inheritances (23)

An inheritance of God's kingdom (Luke 12:32)

> 32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

An inheritance because of being an heir (Rom 8:17)

> 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

An inheritance of the crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4:8)

> 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

An inheritance that can never perish (1 Pet 1:3-4)

> 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Thomas Constable

Verses 1-3

The leaders of the northern Canaanite cities also decided to unite to withstand the threat of Israelite expansion.

Verses 4-9

According to Josephus the combined armies of the Canaanite tribes totaled 300,000 armed footmen, 10,000 horsemen, and 20,000 chariots. [Note: Josephus, 5:1:18.]

"The northern coalition was Israel's most formidable foe in terms of both numbers and weaponry. Each successive battle that Israel fought was more difficult than the last." [Note: Madvig, p. 309.]

The waters of Merom (Joshua 11:5) were evidently small lakes close to the village of Merom that was west of Hazor. Some scholars equate the waters of Merom with Lake Huleh. Lake Huleh lay to the north of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee). Others equate Merom with Madon, about five miles west of modern Tiberias. [Note: Hess, p. 209.] These locations seem less likely.

Hamstringing involved cutting the hamstring muscle of the horses' legs. Hamstringing the horses and burning the chariots (Joshua 11:6; Joshua 11:9) had two effects. The enemy could not use them again, and the Israelites could not use them or trust in them.

Verses 10-15

Archaeological evidence supports a fifteenth-century destruction of Hazor. [Note: Douglas Petrovich, "The Dating of Hazor's Destruction in Joshua 11 by Way of Biblical, Archaeological, and Epigraphical Evidence," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 51:3 (September 2008):489-512.] The meaning of the phrase "cities that stood on their mounds" (Joshua 11:13) is unclear.

"It would be difficult to point out any single expression in the whole book of Joshua, perhaps in the whole Scriptures, more difficult of explanation than this." [Note: Bush, p. 134.]

Perhaps these were the older more influential towns that previous generations had rebuilt on their former ruins. [Note: Keil and Delitzsch, p. 122.] If this is the meaning, probably Joshua did not burn them because he wanted to preserve these towns with time-honored sites for the Israelites' occupation.

The secret of Joshua's remarkable success from the human viewpoint was his consistent obedience to the Lord (Joshua 11:15). We too will experience victory over our spiritual enemies-the world, the flesh, and the devil-to the extent that we do God's will as He has revealed that in His Word.

Verses 16-23

The writer referred to Canaan as "the land of the sons of Israel" first here in Scripture (Joshua 11:22). The Anakim were the mighty warriors that the 10 spies had feared (Numbers 13:28). Israel destroyed most of them.

"The hardening of their [the kings Joshua defeated] hearts [Joshua 11:20] was punitive. Their iniquity was now full (cf. Genesis 15:16). The long respite granted to them by a long-suffering God wrought no repentance in them." [Note: Armerding, p. 108. See also Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Divine Hardening in the Old Testament," Bibliotheca Sacra 153:612 (October-December 1996):429-30.]

"Here is a biblical lesson which has always been difficult for the people of God to learn. Deuteronomy commanded Israel to obey God, destroy the inhabitants, have no mercy, make no covenant, make no marriages (Joshua 7:1-3). Such a command had a divine purpose. It removed the temptations to follow other gods. From the days of the Judges and especially from the period of Solomon onward, the great temptation was to make political alliances through covenants and political marriages between royal families (1 Kings 11:1-8; 1 Kings 16:31; 1 Kings 20:30-43). To protect Israel against the major sin of idolatry, God commanded her not to show mercy to the enemy. To enable her to keep his commandment, God caused her enemies to fight her rather than seek mercy and peace." [Note: Butler, p. 130.]

Joshua subdued the whole land (Joshua 11:23) in the sense that there were no more pitched battles by the combined Israelite tribal forces following Joshua's conquests. God expected individual tribes to subdue the remaining towns and pockets of resistance from then on (cf. Joshua 13:1; Judges 1:1).

"The taking of the whole land does not imply that all the towns and villages to the very last had been conquered, or that all the Canaanites were rooted out from every corner of the land, but simply that the conquest was of such a character that the power of the Canaanites was broken, their dominion overthrown, and their whole land so thoroughly given into the hands of the Israelites, that those who still remained here and there were crushed

into powerless fugitives, who could neither offer any further opposition to the Israelites, nor dispute the possession of the land with them, if they would only strive to fulfil [sic] the commandments of their God and persevere in the gradual extermination of the scattered remnants." [Note: Keil and Delitzsch, p. 125.]

"The error of contrasting Joshua's rapid campaigns (misread as permanent conquest) with slower occupation in Judges 1 misses the point entirely. And how often the proponents of this theory omit even to read Joshua 13! Thirty-one dead kinglets (Joshua 12) were not a conquest in depth, merely a cropping of the leadership. At the end of Joshua's career, there still remained 'very much land to be possessed' (Joshua 13:1)-both the areas listed (Joshua 13:2-6) largely unreached by Joshua's vigour, as well as the in-depth settlement of most of the districts already raided. That process was more painfully slow, even in Joshua's lifetime; cf. the remarks in Joshua 18:2-3 (Joshua's rebuke), besides the frustrated efforts recorded here and there (Joshua 15:63; Joshua 16:10; Joshua 17:12; Joshua 17:16)." [Note: Kitchen, pp. 90-91.]

The words of God to Moses to which the writer alluded (Joshua 11:23) are probably those in Exodus 23:27-33 (cf. Deuteronomy 7:22). There God told Moses He would not drive all the Canaanites out of the land in one year but little by little. This is how the conquest of the land had advanced thus far and how it should have continued to its completion.

The major war with the Canaanites ended (Joshua 11:23), but minor battles and mopping up operations were still necessary. Not only did the Israelites obtain the land, but they defeated the Canaanite kings and broke their power. Jensen considered Joshua 11:23 the key verse of the book. [Note: Jensen, p. 17.]

"There has never been a greater war for a greater cause. The battle of Waterloo decided the fate of Europe, but this series of contests in far-off Canaan decided the fate of the world." [Note: Henry T. Sell, Bible Study by Periods, p. 83.]

(Adapted from URL:https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/joshua-11.html)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Scripture's accounts of the conquest of Canaan raise questions and concerns for modern readers. The themes of extreme violence, scorched-earth warfare, and the merciless destruction of cities and people challenge our sensibilities. We wonder why God would not only allow but also command such things. However, as we read these accounts, it's essential to consider the context in which they were written. These warfare texts should not be read as glorifying senseless destruction and violence. Instead, they were written for the Israelites at a particular time to remind them of the necessity for spiritual purity in the land. The sin of the Canaanites had stained the land, and if they remained in the land, their pagan practices could lead others into sin (Numbers 33:55-56). Thus, their corrupting influence needed to be removed to provide God with a specific location where his holy purpose and presence might be established, a purpose and presence focused on bringing the Messiah into the world. Is that how you view the sometimes-sobering events of salvation history?