



SOVEREIGNTY & OBEDIENCE

Joshua 11:1-11 & 15-23

I. Intro

a. Good morning. My name is John Seago, I'm an elder here at City Life Church and am honored to bring God's word to you today.

b. In 2018 we live so much of our lives online (work, entertainment, social life), using electronic devices we've just come to accept that targeted digital ads follow us around. You see ads based on what you google, what pages you like on facebook, what words you type in a tweet. We just accept that. AND the ads work. I will click on an ad for philosophy T-Shirts every time. I love a shirt with a philosophers face on it and a joke or quote, and I can never have too many. (I'd be wearing one now if it wasn't for my wise wife)

c. So, I was on Instagram and a video ad showed up in my feed for spray paint. A company that sells spray paint thought I was their target market. I don't know what I could have possibly done to lead that algorithm to that conclusion, but there I am watching this video ad about spray paint (yeah of course I watched it) they got me right where they want me.

d. Yeah it was a nice commercial, a diverse bunch of attractive millennials socializing around art projects of re-painting an old desk, a bike, stuff like that.

e. The caption was "What's in a can of spray paint? A new lease on existence" Wow.

i. That's quite a pitch, quite deep for art supplies. How could that product possibly deliver?

ii. This is emblematic of the Western society – change the appearance of something – an old bike and you've got a new lease on existence. Absurd.

f. When someone asked me what Joshua 11 (our passage) was about earlier I was tempted to simply say, "a new lease on existence."

g. The part of Joshua we're looking at today though does shape our own perception of existence. – It goes below just the surface appearance of our lives and really does say something significant about existence.

h. In this narrative in an unfamiliar and foreign world (Ancient Near East), we see that there is a sovereign God who controls the cosmos but calls his people to play a role in his divine plan with obedient faith. Its worldview shaping and it has serious implications for us.

i. So, we're going to look at how God is sovereign over world events, whether there's room for human responsibility with his sovereignty, and God's glorious goal.

j. Let's pray.

k. First, God is Sovereign over World Events

- When we get to chapter 11, we see a familiar situation in the book of Joshua, another set of enemies of God plotting to conquer Joshua and Israel.

- Remember where we are in the narrative, the people of God were delivered out of slavery in Egypt and God promised them a land of their own, however because of their disbelief and disobedience they wandered in the desert for 40 years, now the disobedient generation has died off, including Moses and they are on a conquest into Canaan the land that God is giving them for their future Kingdom.

- We've seen city after city fall, people after people come against Joshua in war and the Lord has given him victory over them all.

- Now in chapter 11, we have a new episode, and the...

a. Circumstances looked dire

- i. Verses 1-5 puts the emphasis on the overwhelming situation the Israelites face.

1. If we read it too quickly or skipped over the details, all those names and places, the text would lose its punch. By reading this extended description of Israel's opposition you begin to feel how overwhelming the enemy is, and see the almost hopeless circumstances they face.

2. There were several aspects:

- ii. First, there is an impressive **Political coalition** forming against them.

1. After hearing of great victories that the Lord has won for his people, an enemy king gathers a coalition of other kings and cities to join him in the fight against the Israelites to stop their advance into the land.

2. So, the kings of the north gather their armies altogether to fight Israel.

- a. There were no less than six kings and people groups forming a type of impressive evil dream team to put a final end to Joshua and his people.

- b. Verse 4 says "And they came out with all their troops, a great horde, in number like the sand that is on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots."

- iii. It wasn't just the political coalition that was worrisome for Israel, but these enemies' armies had a **Technological Advantage** over Israel.

1. The passage says "very many horses and chariots"

2. We don't think of these as cutting edge technology, but compared to foot soldiers having a horse or chariot is a huge advantage in the ancient world.

- iv. However, despite being outnumbered by a grand political axis and being outgunned by better military technology...

b. God promises to give Israel Victory

- i. In our text, once the forces gather, the Lord speaks to Joshua in verse 6, and look what he says:

1. Do not be afraid of them

2. I will give over all of them, slain, to Israel

3. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire

- ii. How do any of these points make sense?

1. Joshua and his men of rag-tag warriors are looking at the well-armed coalition, yet he's not supposed to be worried? Without a plan?

- iii. Here we find some profound truths the Lord is teaching Joshua, and us this morning.

- iv. God is reminding them:

1.They shouldn't worry because he possesses infinite power – he is omnipotent,

2.He has all authority – he rightly rules over all creation.

3.And he wants his people to trust in his sovereignty, nothing else.

v.In Job 12 we read that God, “makes nations great, and he destroys them: he enlarges nations, and leads them away.”

vi.And he proves he has the power and authority to win the battle, verse 8 says that “The Lord gave them into the hand of Israel.”

1.Now, there are no real battle details, unlike that last battle we discussed where God stopped the sun and rained down rocks to defeat the army, here in chapter 11, in this battle we see no directly visible divine intervention..

2.No, it could seem like its all up to Joshua, but there is no doubt as to why they would be so comprehensively victorious.

3.It is incorrect for us to think that “if we know the “natural” cause of something in this world, then God did not cause it.” The Lord is in control even when we don't see him working

vii.So we see God expelling the current population of Canaan from the land. This can be hard for us as modern readers to take. If you are grappling with this, here at City we don't tell you to forget or silence those hard questions, but we want to engage our doubts, our questions. On this issue of war, I highly recommend going back in our podcasts to a Sermon earlier in this series titled, “The Victory of God” on our website.

1.To be clear, John Walton points out “The text does not affirm that killing the Canaanites is good, because killing the Canaanites is not the objective of the conquest. The objective of the conquest is to fulfill the covenant [God had made]... which leads to a new covenant...which leads to a new creation.”

2.In other words, this war, these military conquests are all part of a greater narrative of a sovereign God writing human history to reconcile himself to his people.

viii.So God causes Joshua to defeat Jabin, we see then the armies scatter, then he goes city to city defeating the rest of those in the North Country.

ix.This is a significant conclusion in verse 23, “So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses.”

1.This marks the end of the first half of the book.

2.This is a definitive moment in God fulfilling his preposterous promise of giving Israel this land that all these more powerful kings and advanced armies currently occupied.

3.To emphasize this point, in verses 16-23 we see an entire summary of all the Wars/conquests of Israel – recapping all their victories.

x.It is celebrating the Lord's fulfilled promises. No political coalition is a match for the sovereign Lord – he has the ability and the authority to shape world events.

xi.That third part of God's words to Joshua, were instructions for him to hamstring the horses and burn the chariots. Its largely lost on a 21st Century audience, but this was a pretty outrageous.

1.The horses and chariots were valuable and serious military tools that Joshua could have used.

2.But the Lord is reminding his people they do not need better weapons to win more battles. Our God is sufficient.

a. This is written in the Psalms, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God."

3. We need to ask the Lord today to reveal what we're trusting in this morning. What may the Lord be asking you to let go of so that you may rely upon him more?

a. They may be good things we don't need to get rid of, but confess we trust in them before God: Job, spouse, bank account.

xii. **So the Lord told Joshua, don't be afraid, I will give you victory, and don't rely on anything but me for victory.**

xiii. So, how do we respond to a sovereign God?

1. Praise. He's the omnipotent creator of the universe, the ultimate authority who allows nations to rise and fall.

a. "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!..."

b. what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?"

2. We respond in confident prayers – we can ask God for outlandish things, for things hard to imagine. We can ask for a great awakening in Austin, Texas – that our friends, family, co-workers will be given faith and come to the Lord – we ask these outsized things because we are praying to a Sovereign God.

3. Trust he's in control of the great and small aspects of our lives.

4. Moving on to the question is there room to be Human here?

c. Biblical Compatibilism

i. You may think, okay if God is sovereign over the affairs of man-shaping human history, gives victory to some armies, and defeat to others, how exactly do we fit into that picture?

ii. Is it contradictory or inconsistent for us then to talk about humans making decision, seeking holiness or sinning against the will of God?

iii. These two issues (God's sovereignty and his call for our obedience) may not seem compatible at a first glance, but there's a beautiful and compelling picture of how these work together in the God is sovereign, but he gives humans real agency and responsibility.

1. The Bible's commands, instructions, pleas, are not just a cheap layer of spray paint to cover up fatalism.

2. We have real moral agency, decisions, and responsibility.

iv. The Bible doesn't treat our role as just fake façade on the outside while God is the puppet master. God actually calls us to obedience, to make decisions, to strive to glorify him.

v. Our existence is made up of a concurrence of human and divine action.

1. We can think of it in terms of Primary and Secondary causes.

vi. However, in this passage that shows God's sovereignty, we also see an emphatic message that humans have a meaningful role in God's story.

vii. We have a positive and a negative example then an exception.

d. Positive example: Joshua, God's servant obeys

i. The positive example is Joshua's obedience.

ii. There is a weird parallel between verse 6 and 7 – In verse 6 we see God’s assurance that he will give them victory, but immediately after that in response, in verse 7, Joshua and Israel blast into the enemy camp with a surprise attack.

iii. Its very strange, its like me telling my children I’m going to clean the whole house and then having them rush into their rooms to start scrubbing the baseboards. What?

1. In reality that does not work: my kids would high five each other and rush to the trampoline enjoying being liberated from the chore chart.

iv. In reality though, Divine sovereignty does not negate human activity, but stimulates it.

1. We often allege that if God ordains something as certain it renders human effort irrelevant. But Joshua knew better.

2. Remember, the Lord told Joshua not to fear, God was going to give him victory ... then Joshua didn’t wait to see if God was going to do another miracle like throwing down rocks from heaven, no. Joshua burst into action.

v. This type of obedience is pointed out time and time again in our text with phrases like “Joshua did to them just as the LORD said to him.”

1. Like Moses, Joshua has taken on the title ‘the servant of the Lord’ for his strict conformity to God’s written and spoken instructions.

a. He was obedient, but not perfect, remember his prayerlessness and foolishness two weeks ago...

2. But Joshua points to the only faultless “servant of God” – Jesus Christ.

vi. Even though he was God and ranked much higher than Moses or Joshua, Jesus obeyed more faithfully.

1. We see “he humbled himself and was “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

2. That act of obedience was the pinnacle of the gospel story itself.

vii. But, looking back at Joshua. There are three characteristics of his obedience we have in our passage:

1. Immediate obedience: We already discussed this, Lord spoke and Joshua “came suddenly (or ‘immediately’) against them” in verse 8.

a. Where you sluggish this week to obey something the Lord has called you to?

b. Didn’t do the opposite, just not prompt following the call and direction of the Lord.

c. There is a time for discernment, figuring out which job the Lord wants you to take or whether you should buy that house you’re looking at, but there are times when we know from Scripture, prayer, and encouragement of other believers what we need to do and then it’s our role to obey immediately.

2. Persistent obedience: Verse 18 says that Joshua made war a long time. Effort was required, we have no supernatural events recorded here.

a. The army could not sleep in, sat back, and watch from a far while the Lord gave them the land. No, they actually had to go out to war, and battle for what looks like seven years. Their obedience was persistent.

b. Have you grown tired in obedience? The call was a while ago and this relationship is still tough. Its hard to forgive that friend or family member AGAIN.

c. Maybe even coming to church week after week is difficult.

d. Believers, persevere in obeying and following the Lord – he gives strength to the weary, he'll draw near to the worn out, ask him for a persevering obedient faith.

3. Wise Obedience: Joshua did not just blindly obey the word of the Lord, but used wisdom to adopted a military strategy.

a. You have to look at the details, which we usually rush over, but Joshua attacked his enemies at Morem where those chariots and horses would have less of an advantage.

b. Just because the Lord promised victory, Joshua still used his reason and military strategy to win.

c. Our response should not be foolish or thoughtless “okay, Lord you said to go preach the gospel so I’m going to shout Bible verses at people walking down 2nd Street.”

i. Is that obeying? Yes.

ii. Is that wise? No.

d. The Lord calls us to thoughtful obedience: how can we love others well, effectively, not just checking off boxes on a moral to do list.

viii. Divine Sovereignty is not a doctrine that shackles us but a reality that liberates us, you could even say it gives us a new lease on existence.

e. Now a negative example: Disobedience doesn't thwart God's plan

i. So, God's sovereignty is compatible with our call to obedience & the flip side of this truth, on the side of the coin, we see that disobedience, our sin, does not thwart God's will and his plan in the world.

ii. There is an interesting point in verse 21 – Anakim is mentioned, which seems random. Could easily be lost in all the names, but look, this was the very people that the spies in Exodus went to see. These were the giants that terrified most of the spies Moses sent into the Promised Land.

1. That stubbornness and lack of faith cause the people of Israel to take a detour and wander in the wilderness for forty years, but God's plan to give them that land is not thwarted by human sin.

2. Joshua is back and God gave that city to his people.

iii. God is bigger than our disobedience and sin.

1. The history shaping work of Christ removes all the guilt, fear, and weight of perfection we put on our own shoulders to earn God's favor.

2. Christ was the perfect servant, remember, he's sovereignly secured our salvation. We cannot take away from that.

3. We can be quick to confess our sin, quick to repent and draw near to God again after sin because he is still in control.

f. The Exception: Hardening hearts

i. We saw positive and negative example of how human behavior and God's sovereignty are concurrent, now our passage has some sort of an exception.

ii. Look at verse 20, "**20** For it was the LORD's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in 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. God's divine purpose seems to affect the decision of men with this hardening.

iii. Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will."

iv. "God's hardening process...in no way exonerates the Canaanites." They could have repented before now, we saw the Gibeonites do that. But "God gives up to their own wickedness those how have shown that they prefer the lie to the truth."

v. Some may read this and think that this is not fair.

1. But look at the order of events they decided to come against Joshua before the hardening occurred.

2. But God seemed to be cutting off their ability to turn back and try to make peace with Joshua after already coming to defeat him.

3. Scripture teaches us that our hearts are naturally harden by sin to stay in disbelief, however we see here there is a time when the Lord gives people up to their wickedness and disbelief, we see the same thing in the New Testament in Romans 1.

vi. In the case of the Canaanites, in the end their own wickedness is bringing about their own destruction but the Lord seemed to be directing how that came about.

vii. This is not just a condemnation on others, the same goes for us! We're warned in Hebrews,

1. **12** Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." Then Hebrews tells us to remind one another not to "be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

viii. Church, do not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

1. This is why we need community, we need city groups, and fight clubs. Sin is deceitful, it slowly hardens our hearts and we need the Holy Spirit to use one another to remind us of the gospel, how Jesus is better, how repentance is possible.

2. Lastly, **God's Sovereignty has a direction/an end**

g. Not a will to power

i. When we think about God's authority and ability to give victory and defeat to whomever he pleases, sometimes tempted to think of him as an arbitrary cosmic 'will to power.'

ii. One thing our society fears today is world leaders starting wars, making dangerous political decisions, simply to show they can. Some aimless expression of strength.

1. There were rumors of the North Korea dictator having one of his own government leaders killed because he did not clap enthusiastically enough at the Dictator's speech. We're appalled by this type of capricious power.

iii. The God of the Bible, is omnipotent, all the imaginable power, has the authority to do whatever he pleases as Creator, but has a focus. A plan that all that sovereign power and authority is directed. That's the gospel.

1. The gospel is the story of the Creation of the world, including humans who disobeyed and fell, earning condemnation and deserving eternal punishment, yet God stepped in a promised someone to redeem mankind, to live a perfect life and die a sacrificial death, then he didn't just pay for sin, he conquered it and death for eternity. Rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and now we wait until he returns and makes peace between God and man again.

iv. God wrote all of human history to emphasize this gospel narrative.

v. He has a plan and we get a taste of it in verse 23.

h. Temporary rest in the land

i. We see God had been working through these ups and downs, the sin, mistakes, and victories from Exodus to Joshua so that we will arrive at verse 23

1. "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."

ii. This is a highlight. This is the zenith of all these wars, all these struggles, and trials.

iii. God's promise to give them the land is finally fulfilled: "the whole land."

1. Whole point of Joshua 12. We have a sort of appendix in Chapter 12 that lists each and every one of the conquered kings, first under Moses and then under Joshua.

iv. And that's fulfilled here, "And the land had rest from war."

v. Finally. After years of battle, chaos, death, destruction, and striving.

1. Peace, order, and Shalom are restored to the land.

vi. This is part of that bigger story of the gospel going all the way back to the very beginning in Genesis.

i. Permanent rest in Christ

i. That fulfilled promise points to a greater peace, shalom and order still to come in God's redemptive history.

ii. The "rest" referred to at the end of Joshua 11 is therefore a prototype or foreshadowing of the rest that remains for the New Testament people of God. Joshua could only replicate in the physical, temporal sphere what Jesus

has won for his people in his spiritual and eternal kingly rule. That is God's gracious intention for his people.

iii. There was a permanent rest, peace coming in Jesus Christ, who the prophets called the "Prince of Peace."

1. His reign, "means the end of violence and conflict, and all the brokenness and shattering that war brings. God's reign will bring wholeness and fullness of life, when all things are as God intended them to be, when we are at peace with God, with ourselves and with the world."

iv. We're invited into that rest today.

1. "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience." (Heb 4:9-11)