

JOSHUA FIGHTS FOR GOD

“Marketing is what I love to do,” Kolby said to his favorite church elder.

He was on a campaign to become the new media director for his church. He felt the current person in the role was not doing an adequate job, but he didn’t want to come right out and say so. So he began to drop not-so-subtle hints wherever he could.

“Our church is growing, and the media department should expand with it,” Kolby continued. “I have such great ideas. I was the one who suggested using more social media.”

In the back of Kolby’s mind, he needed a new job, and he could see so many advantages to working for a church. But Alexandra, the current director, happened to be the only paid staff on the media team.

One Sunday morning, Kolby was in the kitchen and struck up a conversation with someone from the hospitality staff. “I’ve worked as a freelance writer for a few organizations,” he said to the sister at the sink who was washing out a pot. “No, I haven’t had any professional training. I didn’t realize that Alexandra had, but I am self-taught, which is probably better. I have my own video channel.”

A few weeks later Kolby cornered the pastor. “I’m between jobs right now, but I could be working day and night for some of these media projects. It sure seems like Alexandra is overwhelmed by all the extra things in the fall. Why don’t you let me try to handle it?”

1 Do you like to be the one making decisions in a group? Why or why not?

2 Does allowing others to lead make you a passive observer? Why or why not?

⁶ And the LORD said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire.

⁷ So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly; and they fell upon them. ⁸ And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephothmaim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining.

⁹ And Joshua did unto them as the LORD bade him: he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire.

⁶ The LORD said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them, slain, over to Israel. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots.”

⁷ So Joshua and his whole army came against them suddenly at the Waters of Merom and attacked them, ⁸ and the LORD gave them into the hand of Israel. They defeated them and pursued them all the way to Greater Sidon, to Misrephoth Maim, and to the Valley of Mizpah on the east, until no survivors were left. ⁹ Joshua did to them as the LORD had directed: He hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots.

God Defeats a Whole Army

How will the people respond to heavily armed opposition from ruthless kings who resist? That’s the question behind today’s reading. We have skipped forward a few years past the entry into Canaan. Under Joshua’s leadership, the Israelites experienced victories from God—times when God did all of the fighting for them (see Josh. 6). The Israelites also met defeat and setback when some of them tried to hold back spoils of war (see the sin of Achan in Josh. 7). The pattern shows that God expects His people to conduct themselves as a nation of priests: God isn’t devoted to their cause as much as they must seek to be aligned with God (see Josh. 5:13–14).

In some cases, Canaanites surrender and submit to what God is doing. Other times—as in Joshua 11—armed forces organize to oppose everything that God is wanting to accomplish through the establishment of Israel.

In Joshua 11:1–5, the most powerful leaders of northern Canaanite territories create an alliance. Their combined army is like “sand on

the seashore” (v. 4). Moreover, they are not just an army of foot soldiers; they have horse-drawn chariots (like armored tanks of the ancient world). A brilliant tactician such as Joshua might think to turn these weapons against the enemy, perhaps by capturing the chariots and arming them with Israelites who can win the next battle.

But we see a counterintuitive strategy described by God. First, God says that this army is not to be feared, that they shall be overcome in a single day. Second, God asks Joshua to order the destruction of their horses and chariots *after* they have already been successfully captured (v. 6). Joshua prepares himself to give this order, which would raise many eyebrows and might lead to the question, “Couldn’t these have been put to use?”

In the text that follows, we find only a brief description of the way the battle is won. The attack from Joshua’s forces is swift, showing their courage to oppose a strong army. And “the LORD gave [the Canaanites] into the hand of Israel” (v. 8). Nothing remains of the opposing army that seemed innumerable, like sand on the seashore.

1 What might Joshua have thought when God asked him to destroy horses and chariots?

2 Why would God command chariots and horses to be destroyed?

3 When have you been tempted to take shortcuts or to use wrong methods to do what is good?

¹⁶ So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same; ¹⁷ Even from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baalgad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew 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, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other 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 destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

²¹ And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities.

²² There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained.

²³ So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.

¹⁶ So Joshua took this entire land: the hill country, all the Negev, the whole region of Goshen, the western foothills, the Arabah and the mountains of Israel with their foothills, ¹⁷ from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, to Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings and put them to death. ¹⁸ Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time. ¹⁹ Except for the Hivites living in Gibeon, not one city made a treaty of peace with the Israelites, who took them all in battle. ²⁰ For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

²¹ At that time Joshua went and destroyed the Anakites from the hill country: from Hebron, Debir and Anab, from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua totally destroyed them and their towns. ²² No Anakites were left in Israelite territory; only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did any survive.

²³ So Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.

God Overcomes All Other Kings

Joshua and his combined forces take possession of central and northern Canaan. This includes hills, desert, and mountainous regions—each with its own geography (v. 16). The various “kings” of each region should be understood as local tribal leaders in competition to hold power. According to Joshua 12, which includes a list extolling the victories that God gave, thirty-one kings were defeated in all.

The description of God’s “[hardening] their hearts” (Josh. 11:20) of these warrior-kings can easily be misunderstood. It doesn’t mean that they had no free choice or ability to respond with humility to God’s desire to resettle Canaan. Verse 19 mentions a counterexample—the Gibeonites—who chose to make peace with Israel rather than face their God in battle (Josh. 9). Frequently Scripture describes God as the one able to “drive out” inhabitants of Canaan (Deut. 33:27; Josh. 24:12; compare Judg. 2:3). But for those who already made their decision to oppose this plan, God brings them together so that they can all be utterly defeated (Josh. 11:20). This includes the Anakites who are driven out and killed; they are descended from the Nephilim and the same people who were so large that Moses’ spies worried, “We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them” (Num. 13:33).

God’s plan in all of this is found in Joshua 11:23. Again, Joshua is compared to Moses as a prophet and effective intermediary (one who can share what God desires). Faithfulness to what God expects results in Israel’s receipt of their “inheritance,” meaning the territory that had been promised to Abraham and his descendants. The phrase describing a “rest” from war shows that God’s design is for peace and security to reign among His people in their new homes.

1 What choices were available to the tribes of Canaanites?

2 Why does the text describe the destruction and driving out of the Anakites?

3 How would you explain why the Canaanites were driven out or destroyed?

Trust the Source of Strength

The first time that Moses ordered spies to enter the land of Canaan, they returned with fantastic reports of the land's potential. However, all they could talk about were obstacles: "The people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large" (Num. 13:28). None of that mattered if God was inviting them to take the territory! Psalm 2 says, "The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed" (v. 2). No matter the odds, God is more powerful.

But when God uses us, we are constantly tempted to make a show of our involvement. We stand on our abilities and our strength, forgetting that God alone can provide these in the first place. We read today about a demonstration of epic proportions, when God asked Joshua and the other Israelites to go into battle without a single horse or chariot. Were I in their shoes, I might have called that crazy!

It reminds me of one of the hymns from Martin Luther, the words describing our ultimate enemy: "his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate." But in the next verse Luther writes, "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing." It means that we can put all of our energies into the battle against evil—emptying our storehouse of reserves—and still it would never be enough to overcome the enemy we face. Only with *faith* can we hope to "extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Eph. 6:16).

Here is how to make this truth practical. First, if God invites you to do something extraordinary, don't dismiss what seems too hard. Second, when you look back at a lifetime of struggles against opposing forces, assume that your skills and abilities didn't make the difference. Finally, don't go into your "battles" alone. When struggles are against evil, you need God to be your bulwark, His strength to be your hope. Invite others to join you in prayer and discernment, as you ask God to show faithfulness and protection.

1 What is a time that you have seen only the obstacles, instead of the invitation from God?

2 What makes our human striving a losing strategy?

3 Who are your allies in prayer for the next battle?

Clear Space for God

God wants to drive out the distractions, temptations, and vulnerabilities in our lives that would pull us away from honoring Him. Nothing can satisfy our deepest longings other than Him. What area might be preventing you from experiencing the joys of this relationship? Ask God to give you the strength to drive out whatever would keep you from living in the promise.

Lord God, be our protector as we stand against a fearsome enemy. Through faith, help me to clear this new territory for You (a distraction, temptation, or source of fear): _____.

Key Text

For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses. —Joshua 11:20 KJV

For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses. —Joshua 11:20 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of September 21 through September 26

- Mon.** Joshua 2:1–7—Welcoming Strangers.
- Tue.** James 2:14–26—Faith Without Works Is Dead.
- Wed.** Psalm 67—May the Nations Know God’s Salvation.
- Thu.** Hebrews 11:1–2, 29–31—Faith to Live By.
- Fri.** Acts 10:34–48—God Shows No Partiality.
- Sat.** Joshua 2:8–14—Rahab’s Faith in God.

Next Week: Joshua 2:8–13; 6:16–17

Ask yourself, “When has God provided an ally in an unexpected place?”