# **Joshua in the Promised Land—Wasted opportunities**

# Pastor Emeritus Joe Fuiten, April 28, 2021

I have taught and preached this text several times in the last 40 years I have been at Cedar Park. I taught it once to the Sunday School teachers around 1980 at least a year and a half before I became the pastor. George Johnson, the founding pastor had asked me to do the session even though he didn’t know me well. I was just a district guy attending his church. He apparently liked it because after that he gave me opportunity to fill in for him when he left for vacation every month of August. In my travels around the state I used it in several churches to present the vision of dividing the work. It was also my first sermon after becoming Pastor on May 1, 1981. Thereafter I preached it every few years on my anniversary of ministry at the church.

Tonight we come to this passage as we work our way through Joshua. Last week our main idea from chapter 10 was that no matter how much time elapsed between various occupancies of Israel, the promise to Abraham to give him the land has never, and will never expire. The same idea applies to chapter 11 and the Northern campaign.

**11***When Jabin king of Hazor heard of this, he sent word to Jobab king of Madon, to the kings of Shimron and Akshaph,****2****and to the northern kings who were in the mountains, in the Arabah south of Kinnereth, in the western foothills and in Naphoth Dor on the west;****3****to the Canaanites in the east and west; to the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites and Jebusites in the hill country; and to the Hivites below Hermon in the region of Mizpah.****4****They came out with all their troops and a large number of horses and chariots—a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore.****5****All these kings joined forces and made camp together at the Waters of Merom to fight against Israel.* ***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.* ***10****At that time Joshua turned back and captured Hazor and put its king to the sword. (Hazor had been the head of all these kingdoms.)****11****Everyone in it they put to the sword. They totally destroyed[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joshua%2011&version=NIV#fen-NIV-6119a)*] them, not sparing anyone that breathed, and he burned Hazor itself.* ***12****Joshua took all these royal cities and their kings and put them to the sword. He totally destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded.****13****Yet Israel did not burn any of the cities built on their mounds—except Hazor, which Joshua burned.****14****The Israelites carried off for themselves all the plunder and livestock of these cities, but all the people they put to the sword until they completely destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed.****15****As the Lord commanded his servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and Joshua did it; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses.* ***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*.

The places identified represented the largest part of Israel in the north. Of these cities the one for which I have the best pictures and which was the leading city of that day is Hazor. Hazor is identified as the head of all the northern kingdoms. Hazor was the largest city in ancient Israel with a population of about 20,000. It was also one of the leading cities in the entire Fertile Crescent. It is located due north from the Sea of Galilee and was on the major trade route that linked Egypt and Babylon. Given its size and location, it had a dominant place for many centuries particularly as it deployed its horse drawn chariots.

This particular King Jabin is different from a later king Jabin of the same name, also of Hazor, who was defeated by Judge Deborah and Barak.

Chapter 11 presents a picture of nearly complete success. The language used indicates that Israel was very successful against the residents who fiercely fought against them. God had hardened the hearts of the locals to fight against Israel so they could be thoroughly defeated. Not only the people but also the various pagan gods could be shown as inferior and unable to protect the people who were loyal pagans.

The book of Joshua opens with Joshua’s encounter with God who gave him one of the most sweeping promises imaginable. Here it is again for review: Joshua 1:1-9 ***“****After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide:2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them-- to the Israelites. 3* ***I will give you every place where you set your foot****, as I promised Moses.4Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates-- all the Hittite country-- to the Great Sea on the west.5* ***No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life****. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.6 "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.*"

Think how wonderful it must have been to have been Joshua on that day! You are God’s project. In all the world, this is what God is doing at this moment. Joshua is God’s man doing God’s job, in God’s timing, and now he has God’s promise of help. It really doesn’t get any better than that.

The firsttime they tried to enter Canaan, 10 of the 12 spies lost faith in God. They thought it was up to them. Now those people were dead and a new generation had arisen who had learned the hard way to trust God. The desert was a stern but effective teacher.

Here is the irony. The walled cities were just as strong, maybe even stronger. There were still giants in the land. The enemy had not declined in strength at all. As always, it is never about the enemy but about us.

This time, the difference was Israel understood more clearly who God was, and they understood who they were.

The personal application I hope you get from this teaching is that if God is with you you do not need to be afraid of the future. You don’t have to fear the giants in the land. You don’t have to worry about the battles that lie ahead. Even though there will always be a struggle, and it sometimes lasts for a long time, you don’t have to be afraid.

This is a timely study because many are afraid. These are certainly the times that “try men’s souls” but we are God’s project every bit as much as Joshua was. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:10 *“For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

Returning to Joshua, I estimate that all the battles listed up through chapter 11 could have taken as long as seven years. But whatever the length the center of Israel was theirs.

They took tribute and booty. They took all they wanted. It is true that Philistines, Canaanites, Mt. Lebanon people, and assorted other perimeter people still remained. But Israel had the center and it was a good and productive land.

Having won the center, they paused to settle the land. Farms were plowed and crops flourished. They even moved into the houses formerly occupied by their defeated foes.

The boys came home from the war, got married and started families. Homesteads became settlements, which became communities, which became cities. The land indeed flowed with milk and honey. I understand the process of doing God’s work while also raising a family. Linda and I arrived to Pastor Cedar Park with two girls. Our son Ben was dedicated the Sunday we were installed as pastors. Our son Zachary was born on Father’s Day a couple of years after we started here. All our grandchildren either are or have attended Cedar Park Christian School. It is one of the challenges of ministry to balance the church mission with the family mission.

In the case of Joshua’s Israel they kept on track for a while but pretty quickly the pioneers became settlers. It happens quickly.

In the early pilgrim days in America, a meeting was held to decide about building a road five miles to the west from the East Coast. These pioneers had left their homes, coming from England and Holland. They had crossed the dangerous and uncharted Atlantic Ocean to arrive in this wilderness land. Having arrived, why would anyone want to go five miles west? They voted NO. How quickly pioneers become settlers.

In some ways it was natural for the Israelis to enjoy the success of battle. That’s what we do. For Israel—10 to 15 years passed by in this relaxed situation before God returns to inquire as to what has happened.

Joshua 13:1 “*When Joshua was old and well advanced in years, the LORD said to him, "You are very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over.”*

They had been promised it all, but they were given only what they were strong and courageous enough to possess. God needed to remind them about the unconquered territory.

**13***When Joshua had grown old, the Lord said to him, “You are now very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over.* ***2****“This is the land that remains: all the regions of the Philistines and Geshurites,****3****from the Shihor River on the east of Egypt to the territory of Ekron on the north, all of it counted as Canaanite though held by the five Philistine rulers in Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron; the territory of the Avvites****4****on the south; all the land of the Canaanites, from Arah of the Sidonians as far as Aphek and the border of the Amorites;****5****the area of Byblos; and all Lebanon to the east, from Baal Gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo Hamath.* ***6****“As for all the inhabitants of the mountain regions from Lebanon to Misrephoth Maim, that is, all the Sidonians, I myself will drive them out before the Israelites. Be sure to allocate this land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have instructed you,****7****and divide it as an inheritance among the nine tribes and half of the tribe of Manasseh.”*

This was not an insignificant part of the land. The Philistine land was all along the seacoast. All Geshuri is in the area of what we now call Syria. Sihor is east of the Nile in Egypt and all the land north of there. The Promised Land included significant parts of Lebanon. The maps show just how extensive the unconquered lands were.

God not only told them to get going, but he gave them a plan. He said, “*Divide the land for an inheritance among the tribes*.” Each group got part of the conquered territory, but also some of the unconquered.

When you think about it, dividing the work among the various tribes gave everyone responsibility for some part of the future land and future battles. All the land would require all the people.