

i. **Victorious over the Canaanites** (11:1-12:24)

a. **Destruction of the Amorite coalition** (11:1-23)

"It has not been generally noticed how remarkably the Gibeonite fraud, and the honorable action of Joshua in connection with it, tended in the end to the good of Israel. Had Joshua, after the discovery of the fraud, repudiated his treaty and attacked and exterminated the Gibeonites, or had he disregarded their appeal to him for help and suffered them to be crushed by Adonizedec, there would have been nothing to hinder the southern kings from uniting with the northern, and thus presenting to Joshua the most formidable opposition that was ever mustered in defense of a country. The magnificent exploit of Joshua in the plain of Gibeon, down the pass of Bethhoron, and in the valley of Ajalon entirely frustrated any such arrangement. The armies of the southern kings were destroyed or demoralized. And though the united forces in the north, with their vast resources of war, still formed a most formidable opponent, the case would have been very different if the two had combined, or if one of them had hung on Joshua's rear while he was engaged in front with the other. Nothing could have fallen out more for the advantage of Israel than the procedure of the Gibeonites, which drew off so large and powerful a section of the confederates, and exposed them thus separate to the sword of Joshua.

"Joshua was not allowed a long rest at Gilgal after his dealings with Adonizedec and his brethren. No doubt the news of that tremendous disaster would quicken the energies of the northern kings. The head of the new conspiracy was Jabin, King of Hazor. Jabin was evidently an official name borne by the chief ruler of Hazor, like Pharaoh in Egypt, for when, at a subsequent period, the place has recovered somewhat of its importance, and comes again into view as a Canaanite capital, Jabin is again the name of its chief ruler (Judges 4:2)." [Blaikie, p. 692]

(I) **Joshua's Adversaries** (11:1-9)

"God assures us before the battle (11:6), fights for us during the battle (11:8), and commands us after the battle (11:9, 25). How we follow orders after the victory is as important as what we do before the battle begins." [Wiersbe, *With the Word*, p. 135]

"This chapter continues and concludes the history of the conquest of Canaan; of the reduction of the southern parts we had an account in the foregoing chapter, after which we may suppose Joshua allowed his forces some breathing-time; now here we have the story of the war in the north, and the happy success of that war." [Matthew Henry's *Commentary II*, p. 51]

"The conquest of northern Canaan." [Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 177]

(I) **The Enemies** (11:1-5)

"We are here entering upon the story of another campaign that Joshua made, and it was a glorious one, no less illustrious than the former in the success of it, though in respect of miracles it was inferior to it in glory. The wonders God then wrought for them were to animate and encourage them to act vigorously themselves. Thus the war carried on by the preaching of the gospel against Satan's kingdom was at first forwarded by miracles; but, the war being by them sufficiently proved to be of God, the managers of it are now left to the ordinary assistance of divine grace in the use of the sword of the Spirit, and must not expect hail-stones nor the standing still of the sun. In this story we have,

"I. The Canaanites taking the field against Israel. They were the aggressors, God hardening their hearts to begin the war, that Israel might be justified beyond exception in destroying them. Joshua and all Israel had returned to the camp at Gilgal, and perhaps these kings knew no other than that they intended to sit down content with the conquest they had already made, and yet they prepare war against them.... Judah had now *couched as a lion gone up from the prey*; if the northern kings rouse him up, it is at their peril, Genesis 49:9. Now, 1. Several nations joined in this confederacy, some *in the mountains* and some *in the plains*, v. 2. Canaanites from east and west, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, etc. (v. 3), of different constitutions and divided interests

among themselves, and yet they here unite against Israel as against a common enemy.... 2. The head of this confederacy was *Jabin king of Hazor* (v. 1), as Adonizedec was of the former; it is said (v. 10) Hazor had been the *head of all those kingdoms*, which could not have revolted without occasioning ill-will; but this was forgotten and laid aside upon this occasion, by consent of parties, Luke 23:12. When they had all drawn up their forces together, every kingdom bringing in its quota, they were a very great army, much greater than the former, *as the sand on the sea shore in multitude*, and upon this account much stronger and more formidable, that they had horses and chariots very many, which we do not find the southern kings had; hereby they had a great advantage against Israel, for their army consisted only of foot, and they never brought horses nor chariots into the field. Josephus tells us that the army of the Canaanites consisted of 300,000 foot, 10,000 horses, and 20,000 chariots.” [Matthew Henry’s Commentary II, p. 51-52]

“...Jabin, King of Hazor, aroused at last to fear and action by the tidings of the day of Gibeon, summoned all the tribes of the north of Canaan.” [Meyer, *Joshua*, p. 131]

“Joshua was not allowed a long rest at Gilgal after his dealings with Adonizedec and his brethren. No doubt the news of that tremendous disaster would quicken the energies of the northern kings. The head of the new conspiracy was Jabin, King of Hazor. Jabin was evidently an official name borne by the chief ruler of Hazor, like Pharaoh in Egypt, for when, at a subsequent period, the place has recovered somewhat of its importance, and comes again into view as a Canaanite capital, Jabin is again the name of its chief ruler (Judges 4:2)....

“The sacred historian...does not attempt to enumerate all the places from which the confederacy was drawn, and falls back on the old comprehensive formula — ‘Canaanites on the east and on the west, Amorites, Hittites, the Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivite under Hermon in the land of Mizpeh.’ ‘The Canaanites on the west’ embraced the people of Zidon, for Joshua is expressly stated to have followed a band of the fugitives to that city (ver. 8). The muster must have been an extraordinary one, as numerous ‘as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude.’..

“‘Horses and chariots’ was an arm unknown to the Israelites, with which hitherto they had never contended. This vast host came together and pitched at the waters of Merom. Merom, now called Huleh, is the little lake where, as already stated, the three streamlets that form the Jordan unite. It varies in size in summer and winter. To the north, a large plain spreads itself out, sufficient for the encampment of a great army. It was at or near this plain that Abraham overtook the five kings of Mesopotamia and defeated them, rescuing Lot, and all that had been taken from Sodom (Genesis 14:14, 15). Now again it is crowded with a mighty host: far as the eye can reach, the plain is darkened by the countless squadrons of the enemy. Probably, after mustering here, their intention was to bear down the Jordan valley, till they came on Joshua at Gilgal, or such other place as he might choose to meet them. But if this was their intention they were outwitted by the activity and intrepidity of Joshua, who resolved, in spite of their overwhelming numbers, to take the aggressive; and, marching, as before, with extraordinary rapidity, to fall on them by surprise and throw them at once into confusion so that they should be unable to bring their chariots and horses into the action.” [Blaikie, p. 692-693]

## (II) The Encouragement (11:6)

“It was a very serious undertaking for Joshua, and before attempting it he stood much in need of the encouragement of Jehovah — ‘Be not afraid because of them: for tomorrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough their horses, and burn all their chariots with fire.’ Not on the number nor on the bravery of his own people, though they had stood by him most nobly, was he to place his reliance, but on the power of God.... ‘Tomorrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel.’” [Blaikie, p. 693]

“The encouragement God gave to Joshua to give them the meeting, even upon the ground of their own choosing (v. 6): *Be not afraid because of them*. Joshua was remarkable for his courage — it was his master grace, and yet it seems he had need to be again and again cautioned not to be afraid. Fresh dangers and difficulties make it necessary to fetch in fresh supports and comforts

from the word of God, which we have always nigh unto us, to be made use of in every time of need. Those that have God on their side need not be disturbed at the number and power of their enemies; *more are those that are with us than those that are against us*; those have the hosts of the Lord that have the Lord of hosts engaged for them. For his encouragement, 1. God assures him of success, and fixes the hour: *Tomorrow about this time*, when an engagement (it is probable) was expected and designed on both sides, *I will deliver them up slain*. Though they were to be slain by the sword of Israel, yet it is spoken of as God's work... 2. He appoints him to *hough their horses, hamstring them, lame them, and burn their chariots*, not only that Israel might not use them hereafter, but that they might not fear them now, their God designing this contempt to be put upon them. Let Israel look upon their chariots but as rotten wood designed for the fire, and their horses of war as disabled things, scarcely good enough for the cart." [Matthew Henry's Commentary II, p. 52]

### (III) The Encounter (11:7-9)

"Joshua was intimidated by the size of the army, he refused to show it. The story says that he immediately marched against these enemies and fell on them suddenly, just as he had marched against the southern coalition at Gibeon and routed it. This battle was probably the most violent and bloody of the entire conquest, although very few details are given. All we are told is that 'the LDRD gave them into the hand of Israel' and that '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. Joshua did to them as the LORD had directed: He hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots' (Josh. 11:8-9)." [Boice, p. 88]

"Arriving suddenly at the waters of Merom, he fell on the mighty host of the enemy, who, taken by surprise, seem not to have struck one blow, but to have been seized at once with that panic which so thoroughly demoralizes Eastern hordes, and to have fled in consternation. In three great streams the fugitives sought their homes. One portion made for Misrephothmaim in the southwest, now, it is thought, represented by Mus-heirifeh on the north border of the plain of Acre; another struck in a northeasterly direction through the valley of the upper Jordan, or east of Hermon to the valley of Mizpeh; a third, passing through the gorge of the Litany, made for great Zidon, in the distant north. Joshua himself would seem to have pursued this column of fugitives, and, passing over a rough path of more than forty miles, not to have abandoned them till they took refuge within the walls of Zidon. If he had attacked and 'destroyed that stronghold, it might have changed for the better much of the future history of his country; for the Jezebels and Athaliahs of after days were among the worst enemies of Israel. But....it seemed more urgent that he should demolish Hazor, the capital of the confederacy that he had just scattered. So 'he turned back and took Hazor, and smote the king thereof with the sword; for Hazor beforetime was the head of all those kingdoms.' For this reason Hazor was treated like Jericho, utterly destroyed, as were also the other cities of the confederate kings. One class of cities was spared, called in our version 'the cities that stood still in their strength,' but better in the Revised — 'the cities that stood on their mounds.' The custom referred to is that of building cities on mounds or hills for the sake of protection. With the exception of Hazor, none of these were destroyed. The reason probably was, that it would have cost too much time. But it was in such places that the old inhabitants rallied and entrenched themselves, and from them they were able in after years to inflict much loss and give great trouble to Israel. Joshua, however, had not received instructions to destroy them; they were left to serve a purpose in God's plan of discipline (Judges 2:3), and while Israel was often humbled under them their attacks proved occasions of rallying, bringing them back to God, whose worship they were so ready to neglect." [Blaikie, p. 693-694]

"III. Joshua's march against these confederate forces, v. 7. He *came upon them suddenly*, and surprised them in their quarters....

"IV. His success, v. 8. He obtained the honor and advantage of a complete victory; he smote them and chased them, in the several ways they took in their flight; some fled towards Zidon,

which lay to the northwest, others towards Mizpeh, eastward, but the parties Joshua sent out pursued them each way. So *the Lord delivered them into the hand of Israel....*

“V. His obedience to the orders given him, in destroying the horses and chariots (v. 9), which was an instance, 1. Of his subjection to the divine will, as one under authority, that must do as he is bidden. 2. Of his self-denial, and crossing his own genius and inclination in compliance with God's command. 3. Of his confidence in the power of God engaged for Israel, which enabled them to despise the chariots and horses which others trusted in, Psalm 20:7; 33:17. 4. Of his care to keep up in the people the like confidence in God, by taking that from them which they would be tempted to trust too much to.” [*Matthew Henry's Commentary II*, p. 52]

### (III) **The Outcome** (11:10-18)

“The conquest of Western Palestine was thus virtually completed. First, by taking Jericho, Joshua had possessed himself of the Jordan valley, and established a clear communication with Bashan and Gilead, which the two and a half tribes had received for their inheritance. By the conquest of Ai and Bethel, he had made a way to the great plateau of Western Palestine, and by his treaty with the Gibeonites he had extended his hold a considerable way farther to the south and the west. Then, by the great victory of Bethhoron, he had crushed the southern chiefs and possessed himself, for the time at least, of all that quarter. As to the inhabitants of the central part, we know not (as we have already said) how they were dealt with, but most probably they were too frightened to resist him.

“The northern section had been subdued at Merom, and much crippled through the pursuit of Joshua after the battle there. The only important parts of the country of which he did not gain possession were the land of the Philistines, the strip of sea coast held by Tyre and Zidon, and some small kingdoms on the northeast. It would seem that in the instructions received by him from Moses, these were not included, for it is expressly said of him that ‘he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses.’ Emphasis is laid on the fact that his conquests were not confined to one section or denomination of territory, but embraced the whole. ‘Joshua took all that land, the hill country, and all the South, and all the land of Goshen, and the lowland, and the Arabah, and the hill country of Israel, and the lowland of the same; from Mount Halak (or, the bare mountain) [on the south], that goeth up to Seir [the land of Edom], even unto Baalgad in the valley of Lebanon under Mount Hermon [in the north]: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and put them to death’ (R.V.)....

“We are told that the wars of Joshua occupied a long time. Probably from five to seven years were consumed by them, for though the pitched battles of Bethhoron and Merom virtually decided the mastership of the country, there must have been a large amount of guerilla warfare, and the sieges of the various cities may have required much time. The list of kings subdued, as given in chap. 12., is a remarkable document.... If Joshua was not divinely aided, the conquest of all these chieftains and the capture of their cities is the most inexplicable event in history.” [Blaikie, p. 694]

“(15, 16) **Joshua took**, the sacred writer pauses to survey and sum up the conquests of the Israelitish leader.” [*Gray & Adams Bible Commentary I*, p. 587]

“The God who strikes is the God whose Son wept over Jerusalem.” {George Macdonald in *Gray & Adams Bible Commentary I*, p. 587]

“In my opinion the most important thing that is said about Joshua in this book is found in Joshua 11:15: ‘As the LORD commanded his servant Moses, so Moses Commanded Joshua, and Joshua did it; he left nothing undone of all that the LOD commanded Moses.’ What a remarkable statement! Joshua ‘left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses.’ He was told to conquer Canaan, so he did it step-by-step in obedience to God’s commands. First Jericho, then Ai, then Gibeon, then the cities of the south, then the cities of the north. He did it all. No one could point to one single thing and say, ‘Joshua, you forgot to do this. The task isn’t finished.’

“How great would it be if that could be the case with each of us — if no one could point to anything we had left undone...” [Boice, p. 92]

#### (IV) The Clarifications (1:19-22)

“Two additional statements are made towards the close of the eleventh chapter. One is, that with the single exception of Gibeon, no attempt was made by any of the chiefs or cities to make peace with Joshua. ‘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 favor, but that he might destroy them, as the Lord commanded Moses.’ It would have been very embarrassing to Joshua if they had submitted spontaneously, and cast themselves on his generosity, for his orders were to destroy them. But this difficulty did not arise. None of the cities seem to have shared the conviction of the Gibeonites that opposition was needless, that Israel was sure to prevail, and get possession of the country.... The effect of this resistance by the Canaanites was, that while Joshua’s task was increased in one way, it was simplified in another. Ages before, God had given the country to the fathers of the Hebrew nation. That people now came and demanded in God’s name possession of the land which He had given them. Had the nations submitted voluntarily they must have left the country to seek new settlements elsewhere. By resisting, they compelled Joshua to meet them with the sword; and having resisted Israel with all their might, nothing remained but that they should encounter the doom which they had so fiercely provoked....

“The other statement relates to the Anakim. Sometime, not precisely defined, while engaged in his conflicts Joshua ‘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,’ leaving none of them except in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod (Joshua 11:21). Afterwards it is said (Joshua 15:14) that it was Caleb that drove from Hebron the three sons of Anak, Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi; but this cannot be counted a contradiction inasmuch as ‘Joshua,’ being the leader of the army, must be held to represent and include all who fought in connection with his enterprise. These Anakim were the men that had so terrified the ten spies. ‘And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight’ (Numbers 13:33). To men of little faith, giants, whether physical or moral, are always formidable. Kings, with the resources of an empire at their back; generals, at the head of mighty battalions; intellectual chiefs, with all their talent and brilliancy, their wit, their irony, their power to make the worse appear the better reason, are more than a match for the obscure handfuls to whom the battles of the faith are often left. But if the obscure handfuls are allied with the Lord of hosts, their victory is sure; the triumphant experience of the forty-sixth psalm awaits them: ‘God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early.’

“We are weary of the din of arms, and come at last to the refreshing statement: ‘And the land rested from war.’ The annals of peace are always more brief than the records of war...” [Blaikie, p. 694-695]

“We have here the conclusion of this whole matter.

“I. A short account is here given of what was done in four things: —

“1. The obstinacy of the Canaanites in their opposition to the Israelites. It was strange that though it appeared so manifestly that God fought for Israel, and in every engagement the Canaanites had the worst of it, yet they stood it out to the last; not one city made peace with Israel, but the Gibeonites only, who understood the things that belonged to their peace better than their neighbors, v. 19. It is intimated that other cities might have made as good terms for themselves, without ragged clothes and clouted shoes, if they would have humbled themselves, but they never so much as *desired conditions of peace*. We here are told whence this unaccountable infatuation came: *It was of the Lord to harden their hearts*, v. 20. As Pharaoh’s heart was hardened by his own pride and willfulness first, and afterwards by the righteous judgment of God, to his destruction, so were the hearts of these Canaanites. To punish them for all their other follies, God left them to this, to make those their enemies whom they might have made their friends. This was it that ruined them: they *came against Israel in battle*, and gave the first blow, and therefore *might have no favor* shown them. Those know not what they do who

give the provocation to divine justice, or the authorized instruments of it. *Are we stronger than God?* Observe here, That hardness of heart is the ruin of sinners. Those that are stupid and secure, and heedless of divine warnings, are already marked for destruction.

“2. The constancy of the Israelites in prosecuting this war (v. 18): *Joshua made war a long time*; some reckon it five years, others seven, that were spent in subduing this land: so long God would train up Israel to war, and give them repeated instances of his power and goodness in every new victory that he gave them.

“3. The conquest of the Anakim at last, v. 21, 22. Either this was done as they met with them where they were dispersed, as some think, or rather it should seem the Anakim had retired to their fastnesses, and so were hunted out and cut off at last, after all the rest of Israel's enemies. The mountains of Judah and Israel were the habitations of those mountains of men; but not their height, nor the strength of their caves, nor the difficulty of the passes to them, could secure, no, not these mighty men, from the sword of Joshua. The cutting off of the sons of Anak is particularly mentioned because these had been such a terror to the spies forty years before, and their bulk and strength had been thought an insuperable difficulty in the way of the reducing of Canaan, Numbers 13:28, 33. Even that opposition which seemed invincible was got over.... Giants are dwarfs to Omnipotence....

“4. The end and issue of this long war. The Canaanites were rooted out, not perfectly (as we shall find after in the book of Judges), but in a good measure....” [*Matthew Henry's Commentary II*, p. 53-54]

#### **b. Summarization of Israel's Triumphs (12:1-22)**

“...Fresh mercies must not drown the remembrance of former mercies, nor must the glory of the present instruments of good to the church be suffered to eclipse and diminish the just honor of those who have gone before them, and who were the blessings and ornaments of their day. Joshua's services and achievements are confessedly great, but let not those under Moses be overlooked and forgotten, since God was the same who wrought both, and both put together proclaim him the Alpha and Omega of Israel's great salvation.” [*Matthew Henry's Commentary II*, p. 55]

(I) **Moses' triumphs** (12:1-6)

(II) **Joshua's triumphs** (12:10-22)

“Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.”  
[Shakespeare in *Gray & Adams Bible Commentary I*, p. 587-588]