

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

JOSH. 10:1 Now it came to pass, when Adoni-zedec king of Jerusalem had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it; as he had done to Jericho and her king, so he had done to Ai and her king; and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel, and were among them;

2 That they feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty.

3 Wherefore Adoni-zedec king of Jerusalem sent unto Hoham king of Hebron, and unto Piram king of Jarmuth, and unto Japhia king of Lachish, and unto Debir king of Eglon, saying,

4 Come up unto me, and help me, that we may smite Gibeon: for it hath made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel.

5 Therefore the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon, gathered themselves together, and went up, they and all their hosts, and encamped before Gibeon, and made war against it.

6 And the men of Gibeon sent unto Joshua to the camp to Gilgal, saying, Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us: for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the mountains are gathered together against us.

7 So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he, and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valour.

8 And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee.

9 Joshua therefore came unto them suddenly, *and* went up from Gilgal all night.

10 And the LORD discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Beth-horon, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah.

11 And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, *and* were in the going down to Beth-horon, that the LORD cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: *they were* more which died with hailstones than *they* whom the children of Israel slew with the sword.

12 Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon.

13 And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. *Is* not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.

14 And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel.

15 And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal.

Joshua Commands the Sun to Stand Still

Lesson Text: Joshua 10:1-15

Related Scriptures: Joshua 1:5-9; 23:1-13; Isaiah 38:4-8; 60:19-22

TIME: between 1405-1398 B.C.

PLACES: Gilgal; Gibeon

GOLDEN TEXT—“And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel” (Joshua 10:14).

Lesson Exposition

THE THREAT—Josh. 10:1-5

The enemies' alarm (Josh. 10:1-2). Since their crossing of the Jordan and entrance into the Promised Land, Joshua and the Israelites had been on a tear. Jericho had fallen. After an initial stumble, the city of Ai was captured next. Following that, the people of Gibeon entered into a peace agreement with Israel.

None of these events went unnoticed by the remaining inhabitants of the land. In particular, Adoni-zedec, the king of Jerusalem, heard the reports with growing concern and decided to take action. He was particularly alarmed at the news that Gibeon had allied with the Israelites. Gibeon was a substantial city, much larger than Ai, and could field a formidable fighting force. Adoni-zedec knew his situation was precarious.

The enemy coalition (Josh. 10:3-4). Aware that he would be unable to withstand Joshua's forces on his own, Adoni-zedec sent out an urgent appeal to four other kings for immediate

help. Hoham of Hebron, Piram of Jarmuth, Japhia of Lachish, and Debir of Eglon represented some of the most formidable powers in the region. Acting together, they could pose a serious threat to Joshua and his army.

But rather than attempt a direct assault on the invading Israelites, Adoni-zedec asked the four leaders for help in attacking Gibeon. Part of the reason may have been a desire to punish the Gibeonites for the perceived betrayal in siding with the invaders. But the main reason would have been strategic. The Gibeonites would be easier to vanquish, and eliminating them as allies for the Israelites would remove a key advantage for Joshua, at least as Adoni-zedec perceived it.

The enemy action (Josh. 10:5). The four kings wasted no time answering Adoni-zedec's call to arms, and in short order Gibeon found itself under attack by their mobilized forces. For the Gibeonites, this was a perilous situation of the highest order.

THE RESPONSE—Josh. 10:6-11

The plea for help (Josh. 10:6). The Gibeonites, who had been potential enemies not long before, were now allies of the Israelites because of the treaty agreed to by Joshua (cf. 9:15). As allies, they now could count on Israelite protection from other foes, and they quickly availed themselves of that promise. A message was sent to Joshua's encampment at Gilgal near the Jordan River; its contents were simple and direct: Come quickly and save us! We're being attacked by the combined forces of the Amorites!

Joshua's response (Josh. 10:7). Joshua did not hesitate in his response. Even though the Gibeonite treaty had been based on a ruse (9:4-5, 15-16), the Israelites were bound to honor it, for they had sworn an oath before the Lord (vss. 18-19). So Joshua immediately marched his entire army up from Gilgal.

The Lord's assurance (Josh. 10:8). Joshua does not appear to have entertained any misgivings or doubts about what he was doing. The Lord nevertheless spoke words of assurance to bolster the Israelites' courage and resolve. Perhaps He wanted to especially reassure Joshua that even though they had used poor judgment in agreeing to the Gibeonite treaty (specifically, failing to consult Him), they were now doing the right thing in honoring that commitment. And it would serve to further the purpose of conquering and possessing the land that was rightfully theirs.

The action on the field (Josh. 10:9-11). No doubt encouraged by this promise, Joshua pushed his men to complete an all-night march to the vicinity of the coalition encampments. He took the enemy completely by surprise, descending on them suddenly and without warning.

It was not primarily tactical sur-

prise and strength that won the day, however. The enemy was thrown into disarray by direct action of the Lord, enabling Israel to gain a decisive victory at Gibeon. The enemy fled, and the Israelites pursued them for miles.

As if the Israelite pursuit were not enough trouble for them, the enemy forces found themselves cut to shreds by a massive hailstorm sent from God. More, in fact, died from the hail than from Israelite action. It appeared that the Canaanite coalition's destruction was going to be total.

However, time was running out. The day was wearing on, and when darkness fell, the pursuit would end.

TOTAL VICTORY—Josh. 10:12-15

Joshua's amazing prayer (Josh. 10:12). As a great general, Joshua knew that just a partial victory could pose great trouble and danger in the future. He knew his army needed to finish the job they had started that day, but at some point, it became evident that the pursuit could not be completed in the remaining hours of daylight. So, he went to the Lord to ask for more time.

Joshua did not whisper a private prayer on this occasion. He put his reputation on the line by voicing his request boldly "in the sight of Israel." Was he treating the sun and moon as pagan deities in addressing them directly: "Sun, stand thou still . . . and thou, Moon"? That is hardly tenable. He understood that the heavenly bodies were under God's authority.

God's amazing answer (Josh. 10:13-15). One of the most extraordinary answers to prayer in all of Scripture is reported quite matter-of-factly: "And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed" (vs. 13). The Israelites were thus able to complete their victory and finish off the enemy. The biblical writer, however, reveals his awe at the event by noting its inclusion in a

source available at the time, the book of Jasher. This appears to have been an ongoing collection of historical poetry and chronicles; it is also cited in II Samuel 1:18.

The writer's high regard for the answer to this prayer is further seen in the repetition in Joshua 10:13: "the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day." But as straightforward as this statement appears, it has been the subject of widely differing interpretations.

The best understanding is the straightforward reading that the sun appeared to slow down in the sky and come to a halt, resulting in a day that was up to twice as long as normal (there is a bit of leeway regarding the precise meaning of "hasted not to go down about a whole day"). This is bolstered by the biblical writer's commentary in verse 14: "And there was no day like that before it or after it."

The writer presents the day as unique, particularly in that "the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man." He is, of course, not saying that this was the only day in which the Lord answered someone's prayer. Rather, this was the only time the Lord responded to a request like this, to modify the ordained motion of the heavenly bodies, something He had established on the fourth day of Creation.

The writer notes the one reason God answered in this way: "for the Lord fought for Israel." Today many people are uncomfortable with the idea of God fighting on behalf of one side in a conflict, but we must see and accept it as evidence of His faithfulness to His covenant. It shows us (and should comfort us) that there are no lengths to which God will not go to demonstrate His faithfulness to His people.

Still, the idea that the sun actually stopped in the sky for one day in history confounds many readers, and

the objections to a literal long day are numerous. One is that if the earth's rotation had stopped to allow the sun to maintain its position in one place, all life everywhere would have been destroyed by the sudden interruption of planetary motion. Maybe the gradual slowing down of the earth would have been a more plausible explanation. More crucially, however, if God can control the motion of the earth, He can certainly control the effects of a miraculous intervention in that motion.

In the end, *how* God accomplished the long day matters little. It was a genuine miracle, and it decisively altered the outcome of the battle on behalf of His servants.

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

QUESTIONS

1. About what was the Canaanite king Adoni-zedec alarmed?
2. What did the coalition of kings do rather than attack Israel directly?
3. What message did the Gibeonites send to Joshua?
4. Why did Joshua decide to come to the aid of the Gibeonites?
5. What was the reason for the decisive Israelite victory at Gibeon?
6. What direct action did God take in the battle?
7. What problem did Joshua face even as his army was winning on the field?
8. What did Joshua ask for in his prayer?
9. How did God answer Joshua's prayer in an extraordinary way?
10. How does the biblical writer show that this was an unprecedented answer by God?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God reveals Himself to a nonbelieving world through His works on behalf of His people (Josh. 10:1-2).
2. We must learn to trust God when tested by challenges on any and all fronts (vss. 3-5).
3. We teach the world about a faithful God as we honor our commitments (vss. 6-7).
4. As God's children, we have victory through faith in Him (vss. 8-11).
5. Prayer is the Christian's most effective weapon in battle (vss. 12-13).
6. God has recorded His past deeds to encourage every believer in times of trouble (vss. 14-15).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. King Adoni-zedec's name means "Lord (or master) of righteousness." In what ways did this king represent the opposite of righteousness?
2. How do our spiritual enemies respond to threats? How is understanding the responses and tactics of those enemies crucial to a victorious Christian life?
3. What lessons can believers take from the vow Joshua made to the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:7-21)? What does this story teach us about the people of God?
4. How could Joshua and the Israelites obey God's command to "fear them not" (10:8) when confronted by five enemy armies?
5. How has your faith been strengthened from reading about God's miracles in Scripture?

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

Golden Text Illuminated

"And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel" (Joshua 10:14).

Although the scientific explanation of what happened during this battle is widely debated, the message of the passage is clear when it comes to God's response to Joshua's request. Joshua had the faith to ask for a lengthened day so his army could be more successful in the battle. The Lord heard his cry for help, and He gave the Israelites just what they needed. He rewarded Joshua's faith and courage. He came through on His promises and was there for them.

God even added to Joshua's request, sending down hailstones upon their enemies, which killed more of their opponents than the Israelites did themselves. When God told His people that He would be there for them and fight for them, He meant it, and He was willing to use supernatural means to show that He meant what He said. The Israelites did not win the battle; God did.

Joshua's faith and courage go hand in hand in this passage. His courage was not based on his own strength. Joshua was courageous because he knew that the omnipotent Lord of all was the one who would fight for him and his people.

God's faithfulness is not locked up in the past. Believers today can look back upon this miracle and know that they serve a God who comes through on His promises.

—Carissa Dobson.