

The Book of Joshua, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: The Northern Kings and the Land Subdued

Joshua 11:1–12:24

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal weight of this lesson rests on holding together two truths that our age finds hard to keep in one hand: the perfect justice of God and His patient, genuine grace. These chapters record the conquest of the northern coalition and a long roll of conquered kings, and they include the devotion to destruction (herem) of entrenched Canaanite nations by God's direct command. Help the class understand the conquest as God's unique, unrepeatable act of covenant judgment at one specific moment in redemptive history, His righteous response to nations whose wickedness had grown full over centuries (Genesis 15:16). This is not a model for human violence, vengeance, or any notion of 'holy war' today. The Christian's warfare is spiritual, fought with the weapons of God against spiritual strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:3–5; Ephesians 6:10–18). Lead the class to stand in awe of a God who is both just and patient, and to refuse every attempt to use these texts to justify human cruelty.

Be ready to handle Joshua 11:20, 'it was of the Lord to harden their hearts,' with great care, for it is the heaviest verse in the lesson and the place most likely to be misread. Do not let it be taught as Calvinistic unconditional reprobation, as though God arbitrarily created people for damnation and denied them any real chance to repent. Read it instead as God's judicial response to nations already entrenched and ripe in their wickedness, against whom His patience had long been extended (Genesis 15:16). The gospel call is real and universal, and human beings are genuinely able to respond; God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but desires that he turn and live (Ezekiel 18:23). The hardening here is judgment confirmed upon the persistently and fully wicked, not the predetermined doom of those who would have repented. Keep these lines clean, and keep pointing the class to the God who is both holy and gracious.

This lesson is also aimed at the faith and formation of your students. Most of them are facing some chariot-army of their own, some opposition that looks larger than their resources, and these chapters speak directly to that fear with God's word, 'Be not afraid.' Press home the call to take God at His word before the outcome is clear, to trust His promise rather than the world's measures of strength, and to keep obeying through the long campaign rather than only the quick battle. And lead them at last to the rest that follows the war, the land that rested, the promise kept down to the last king named, so that they leave not merely informed about an ancient conquest but strengthened to trust the faithful, promise-keeping God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Question 1

Student Question:

When Jabin king of Hazor hears what has happened in the south, he gathers a vast northern coalition, kings, peoples, horses, and chariots 'very many,' to destroy Israel (Joshua 11:1-5). Into this God speaks: 'Be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel' (11:6). What does God's command, given before a single sword is drawn, teach us about the ground of true courage and where Israel's confidence was meant to rest (compare Psalm 20:7)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When Jabin king of Hazor hears of Israel's victories, he summons a sweeping coalition of northern kings and peoples, with horses and chariots 'very many,' massing at the waters of Merom (Joshua 11:1-5). This is the largest concentration of force Israel has faced, a whole confederacy gathered for one purpose, to destroy them.

Into that fear God speaks before the battle: 'Be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel' (11:6). The promise comes first, before a single sword is drawn. Israel's courage is to rest not on a count of its own troops but on the bare word of God.

This is the same pattern we saw at Jericho and at the Red Sea. God repeatedly sets His people in front of an overwhelming threat and then commands them not to fear, not because the threat is small but because He is great. Courage in Scripture is never the absence of a real enemy; it is confidence in a greater God.

Psalm 20:7 distills the lesson: 'Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.' Israel's enemies brought exactly the strength Israel lacked, and that is precisely the point. The ground of true courage is the promise of God, not the resources in our hand.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- True courage rests on the promise and presence of God, not on a favorable count of our own resources (Psalm 20:7).
- God often gives His word of assurance before the battle, calling His people to trust before they see the outcome.
- The size of the threat does not determine the outcome; the faithfulness of God does (Joshua 11:6).
- Fear is answered not by minimizing the enemy but by magnifying the Lord who has already promised victory.

Discussion Prompts

- What is striking about the timing of God's promise in relation to the battle?
- Where does the text locate the true ground of Israel's courage?

- How does Psalm 20:7 sharpen the contrast between the world's confidence and the believer's?

Question 2

Student Question:

Israel's enemies came with the very things Israel lacked, horses and iron chariots, the most fearsome military technology of the age. Where are you most tempted to measure your situation by what the other side has and what you do not, rather than by what God has promised? What 'chariots' loom largest in your fears?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Israel's enemies came with horses and iron chariots, the most fearsome military technology of the age, the very things Israel did not possess (Joshua 11:4). The contrast is deliberate and unmistakable.

This is a self-examination question. Press the class to notice how readily we measure our situations by what the opposition has and what we lack, tallying the other side's advantages until our own fear feels perfectly reasonable.

Help students name the specific 'chariots' that loom largest in their fears, the resources, advantages, or threats on the other side that they have allowed to define the odds. Often our anxiety is simply a spreadsheet of the enemy's strengths with God left off the page.

The remedy is not to pretend the chariots are not real but to set them in their true place, under the God who has promised. The same army that terrified Israel by sight was already, by God's word, 'as good as slain.' Faith reframes the count.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We are prone to measure our circumstances by the opposition's advantages rather than by God's promises.
- Naming our fears honestly is the first step toward setting them under the Lord's authority.
- Faith does not deny the reality of the threat; it refuses to let the threat have the final word.
- God's word can reframe an impossible count long before the visible outcome changes.

Discussion Prompts

- What 'chariots' loom largest in your own fears right now?
- How does measuring by the enemy's advantages distort the way you see your situation?
- What would change if you set those fears under God's promise the way Israel was called to?

Question 3

Student Question:

God told Joshua to hamstring the horses and burn the chariots (Joshua 11:6, 9), destroying the very things the nations trusted in and that Israel might have been tempted to keep for itself. Why would God have His people deliberately refuse to rely on the strength the world prizes, and what does this teach about where His people are forbidden to place their trust (Deuteronomy 17:16; Psalm 33:16–17)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God's command to Joshua is striking: hamstringing the horses and burning the chariots with fire (Joshua 11:6, 9). He does not tell Israel to capture and keep this prized equipment but to destroy it utterly.

The reason runs deep in Israel's calling. God had forbidden the king to 'multiply horses' (Deuteronomy 17:16), and the Psalms repeatedly warn that 'an horse is a vain thing for safety' (Psalm 33:17). God's people were to be a nation that trusted Him, not their arsenal. To keep the chariots would have been to keep a rival source of confidence.

Joshua obeyed exactly, leaving himself no chariots to fall back on (11:9). There is a deliberate stripping away here. God will not share His people's trust with the strength the world prizes. The very thing the nations relied on, Israel was commanded to reduce to ashes.

For the class, this teaches where God's people are forbidden to place their trust. It is not that horses and chariots are evil in themselves, but that they become idols of security, rivals to God. The Lord would have His people lean on Him alone, with no proud backup in reserve.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's people are forbidden to rest their security in the strength the world prizes (Deuteronomy 17:16; Psalm 33:16–17).
- Destroying the chariots was a deliberate refusal of any rival source of confidence besides God.
- Created things are not evil in themselves, but they become idols when we trust them for the safety only God gives.
- God will not share His people's trust; He calls them to lean on Him without a proud backup in reserve.

Discussion Prompts

- Why would God have Israel destroy the very equipment the nations trusted in?
- What do Deuteronomy 17:16 and Psalm 33:16–17 reveal about where trust must not rest?
- How does this challenge the way we accumulate our own sources of security?

Question 4

Student Question:

Joshua obeyed God's strange command exactly, leaving himself with no chariots to fall back on (Joshua 11:9). When God asks you to let go of a 'backup plan' or a source of security so that your trust rests on Him alone, how do you respond? What is one such security He may be asking you to release?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Joshua obeyed God's strange command precisely, hamstringing the horses and burning the chariots, leaving himself with no such resources to fall back on (Joshua 11:9). His obedience was total, even when it meant surrendering an obvious advantage.

This is a transformational question, inviting students to consider where God may be asking them to release a 'backup plan' or a source of security so that their trust rests on Him alone. Real faith often shows itself precisely at the point of what we are willing to let go.

Help the class see that the things we cling to as security are not always evil; they are simply the places our trust quietly settles instead of God. A savings account, a relationship, a reputation, a contingency plan, any of these can become the chariot we will not burn.

Encourage students to name one specific security the Lord may be asking them to hold with an open hand. The aim is not recklessness but undivided trust, the kind that can obey God even when obedience removes the safety net.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith is tested most clearly at the point of what we are willing to release into God's hands.
- Our sources of security are often not sinful in themselves but become rivals when our trust settles on them.
- Obedience sometimes means surrendering an obvious advantage so that trust rests on God alone.
- Holding our securities with an open hand is the posture of undivided trust the Lord calls for.

Discussion Prompts

- What 'backup plan' or source of security might God be asking you to release to Him?
- How do you tell the difference between wise preparation and a chariot you refuse to burn?
- What would undivided trust look like for you in a current decision?

Question 5**Student Question:**

The text says plainly, 'Joshua made war a long time with all those kings' (Joshua 11:18). The conquest was not one swift afternoon but a long, grinding campaign of years. What does this

teach us about the way God often accomplishes His purposes, and why does He so seldom give His people the quick, total victory we crave (compare Exodus 23:29–30)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The text states plainly, 'Joshua made war a long time with all those kings' (Joshua 11:18). The conquest was not a single dramatic afternoon but a long, grinding campaign stretching over years, city after city, battle after battle.

This matches a pattern God revealed in advance. In Exodus 23:29–30 He said He would drive out the nations 'by little and little' and not 'in one year,' lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply. God's slower pace was itself a mercy and a wisdom, not a failure of power.

We tend to want our victories complete and immediate, but God often works on a longer calendar than our patience prefers. The slowness is not divine reluctance; it is divine wisdom, accomplishing more than a single thunderclap of conquest could.

For the class, this reframes how we read seasons of partial, ongoing struggle. A long campaign is not a sign that God has abandoned the field. He had promised the whole land, and He gave it, but in His time and by His method, teaching His people endurance along the way.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God often accomplishes His purposes gradually rather than in a single decisive moment (Exodus 23:29–30).
- The slower pace can be divine wisdom and mercy, not a failure of power or willingness.
- A long, ongoing struggle is not evidence that God has abandoned His promise.
- God uses the long campaign to form endurance and dependence in His people.

Discussion Prompts

- What does 'Joshua made war a long time' teach about the way God often works?
- Why might God choose to give victory gradually rather than all at once?
- How does Exodus 23:29–30 reveal wisdom and mercy in the slower pace?

Question 6

Student Question:

Think of an area of your own life where God seems to be working slowly, where the victory is real but partial, and the fight goes on far longer than you hoped. How do you keep trusting and obeying through the long campaign rather than the single battle? Where are you tempted to give up because it is taking so long?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a self-examination question, turning the long campaign of Joshua 11 toward the long campaigns of our own lives. Most of us know an area where the victory is real but partial, where the fight drags on far longer than we hoped.

Ask students to name that area honestly, the besetting sin not yet fully conquered, the relationship slowly mending, the prayer long unanswered, the growth that comes by little and by little rather than all at once.

Help them see that faithfulness in a long campaign looks different from a single heroic battle. It is the quiet discipline of trusting and obeying again today, and again tomorrow, without the satisfaction of a finished victory in hand.

Encourage them against the particular temptation of the long fight, which is to give up simply because it is taking so long. The God who made war a long time with all those kings finishes what He begins; our part is to keep showing up in trust.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Many of God's works in us come gradually, by little and by little, not in one finished moment.
- Faithfulness in a long campaign is the discipline of trusting and obeying again today.
- The peculiar temptation of the long fight is to quit simply because it is slow.
- The God who finishes what He begins calls us to endure the long middle of the battle (Philippians 1:6).

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your life is the victory real but partial, the campaign still going on?
- What makes a long, slow struggle harder to endure than a single decisive battle?
- Where are you tempted to give up simply because it is taking so long?

Question 7

Student Question:

Hazor had been 'the head of all those kingdoms' (Joshua 11:10), and Joshua burned it to the ground while leaving other cities standing on their mounds (11:11-13). The devotion to destruction, the herem, fell hardest on the center of organized resistance to God. What does it mean that this destruction was covenant judgment carried out by God's specific command at one moment in redemptive history, and why is it crucial that we do not turn it into a warrant for human violence today (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hazor had been 'the head of all those kingdoms' (Joshua 11:10), the political and military center of the northern resistance. Joshua burned it to the ground while leaving other cities standing on

their mounds (11:11–13). The devotion to destruction, the herem, fell hardest on the heart of organized opposition to God.

This must be understood as covenant judgment, carried out by God's specific command at one particular moment in redemptive history. It was not Israel's idea, not freelance conquest, and not a pattern to be imitated. It was the just sentence of God on nations whose wickedness had grown full, executed by His express word (Deuteronomy 9:4–5).

Handle this with care and honesty. The herem was God's unique, unrepeatable act of judgment, bounded to that time and that command. It is never a warrant for human violence, vengeance, or 'holy war' in any age since. To wrench it into a justification for cruelty is to abuse the text.

For the people of God now, the New Testament is explicit that our warfare has changed in kind. 'Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God' (2 Corinthians 10:3–5). The battle the Christian fights is spiritual, against sin and the powers of darkness, never against flesh and blood.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The herem was covenant judgment by God's direct command at one specific moment in redemptive history, not a model for any age since.
- The conquest was God's righteous sentence on entrenched wickedness, not Israel's freelance violence (Deuteronomy 9:4–5).
- These texts give no warrant for human vengeance, cruelty, or any notion of 'holy war' today.
- The Christian's warfare is spiritual, fought with God's weapons against sin and darkness, never against flesh and blood (2 Corinthians 10:3–5; Ephesians 6:12).

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it essential to understand the herem as covenant judgment at one moment in redemptive history?
- How does Deuteronomy 9:4–5 guard us against reading the conquest as a reward for Israel's merit?
- How does the New Testament redefine the warfare of God's people today?

Question 8

Student Question:

When you read these chapters of conquest, what stirs in you, discomfort, questions, even resistance? Rather than pushing those reactions away, bring them honestly before God. What does wrestling with the hard parts of Scripture, instead of avoiding them, do to deepen your trust in His character?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a self-examination question that gives the class permission to be honest. The conquest narratives stir real discomfort in thoughtful readers, questions about violence, judgment, and the character of God. Pretending we feel none of that is neither honest nor helpful.

Encourage students not to push those reactions away or to feel guilty for having them, but to bring them honestly before God. Scripture itself is full of saints who wrestled openly with God's ways, from Abraham pleading over Sodom to Habakkuk's complaints to the psalmists' raw questions.

Help the class see the difference between wrestling with a text and dismissing it. To wrestle is to hold on, like Jacob, refusing to let go until we are blessed with understanding. To dismiss is to let go entirely. Faith does the former.

The fruit of honest wrestling is a deeper, more durable trust. A faith that has never faced the hard parts of Scripture is brittle; a faith that has brought its hardest questions to God and found Him still trustworthy is anchored. The aim is not to resolve every difficulty but to know the God whose justice and grace hold together even where we cannot fully trace them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- It is honest and healthy to acknowledge the discomfort the conquest narratives can stir.
- Scripture models saints who wrestled openly with God's ways and were not rebuked for it (Genesis 18:23–25; Habakkuk 1).
- Wrestling with a hard text means holding on for understanding, not letting go in dismissal.
- Honest wrestling, brought before God, produces a deeper and more durable trust in His character.

Discussion Prompts

- What honestly stirs in you when you read these chapters of conquest?
- What is the difference between wrestling with a hard text and dismissing it?
- How might bringing your hardest questions to God deepen rather than weaken your trust?

Question 9

Student Question:

Joshua 11:20 says, '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.' Holding this beside Genesis 15:16, where God waited centuries because 'the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full,' and beside Ezekiel 18:20–23, how are we to understand this hardening as God's righteous judgment on nations long ripe in entrenched wickedness, rather than as the Calvinist idea that God arbitrarily damns people who never had a real chance to repent? How does this passage hold together God's perfect justice and His patient, genuine grace?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest verse in the lesson. Joshua 11:20 says, '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.' We must read it with great care, for it touches the very justice of God.

Set it first beside Genesis 15:16, where God told Abraham his descendants would return only after four generations, 'for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.' God had waited centuries, extending patience to these nations while their wickedness ran its long course. The hardening in Joshua 11:20 falls at the end of that patience, not at the beginning. These were not innocents denied a chance, but nations long ripe and entrenched in evil, against whom judgment had finally come due.

This is judicial hardening, God's righteous confirmation of nations who had persistently and fully hardened themselves. It is not the Calvinist idea of unconditional reprobation, as though God arbitrarily created and predestined people to damnation while denying them any real opportunity to repent. Scripture forbids that reading: 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die' for its own sin (Ezekiel 18:20), and God plainly declares, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live' (Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11).

Hold the two truths together. God is perfectly just; His judgment on full, entrenched wickedness is right and good. And God is patient and genuinely gracious; the gospel call is real and universal, and human beings are truly able to respond. Rahab was a Canaanite from these very nations, and she repented and was saved. The hardening confirms the persistently impenitent in the judgment they have chosen; it does not doom those who would have turned. God's justice and His grace meet here without contradiction.

Guard the class carefully at this point, for it is the place most likely to be misread. Do not let anyone leave thinking God arbitrarily damns people who never had a chance, and do not let anyone leave thinking God winks at full and settled wickedness. The God of Joshua 11 is the same God who waited four generations in patience, who spared a repentant harlot, and who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He is both holy and gracious, and these chapters display both.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The hardening of Joshua 11:20 is God's judicial judgment on nations long ripe in entrenched wickedness, not arbitrary reprobation (Genesis 15:16).
- God's patience had been extended for centuries before judgment fell; these were not innocents denied any chance to repent.
- This is not Calvinist unconditional election or reprobation; the gospel call is real and universal, and people are genuinely able to respond.

- God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but desires that he turn and live (Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11).
- Rahab, a Canaanite from these nations, repented and was saved, proving the door of mercy was genuinely open.
- God's perfect justice and His patient grace hold together here without contradiction; we must teach both and collapse neither.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Genesis 15:16 reshape the way we read the hardening in Joshua 11:20?
- Why is it vital to distinguish God's judicial judgment on the fully wicked from arbitrary reprobation?
- How do Ezekiel 18:23 and the example of Rahab hold God's justice and His grace together?

Question 10

Student Question:

The chapters close with two restful summaries: 'the land rested from war' (Joshua 11:23), and a long roll of thirty-one conquered kings, the monument of a promise kept (Joshua 12). Looking back over the whole long, hard campaign, what is the Lord asking you to believe about His faithfulness to His promises, and what is He asking you to do as someone whose real warfare now is not against flesh and blood but spiritual (Ephesians 6:10-18)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

These chapters close in rest. 'And the land rested from war' (Joshua 11:23) sets down one of the most beautiful clauses in the book, the quiet that follows the long campaign. And chapter 12 names thirty-one conquered kings one after another, a long roll that reads less like a boast of Israel's sword than like a monument to a promise kept.

This is the capstone question, gathering the whole hard campaign toward what the Lord is forming in us. The land that rested and the kings that were named both testify to one thing: God keeps His word. He had promised this land to Abraham generations before, and now He has kept that promise down to the last detail.

Help the class draw the line from God's faithfulness then to His faithfulness now. The same God who finished what He began in the conquest finishes what He begins in us (Philippians 1:6). The roll of conquered kings is, in its own ancient way, an encouragement to trust the God who completes His promises.

Then turn the class plainly to the present. Our warfare now is not against flesh and blood. 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers,' and we are armed with the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). The conquest of Canaan was God's unique act in redemptive history; the believer's battle today is spiritual, fought in Christ with

truth, righteousness, faith, and the word of God. Ask each student to name one truth about God's faithfulness to hold and one spiritual battle to take up in His strength this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The rest of the land and the roll of conquered kings together testify that God keeps His promises down to the last detail (Joshua 11:23; 12:1-24).
- The God who finished the conquest finishes what He begins in His people (Philippians 1:6).
- The believer's warfare today is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers (Ephesians 6:10-18).
- We fight now in Christ with the armor of God, truth, righteousness, faith, and the word, not with sword and chariot.
- Each student should name one truth about God's faithfulness to hold and one spiritual battle to take up this week.

Discussion Prompts

- What does 'the land rested from war,' set beside the roll of conquered kings, reveal about God's faithfulness?
- How does God's promise-keeping in the conquest encourage you to trust Him today?
- What does it mean that your real warfare now is spiritual, and how will you take it up this week?