

Unit I: From Nomadic Tribes to Settled People

Fighting among the Nations

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 108

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Joshua 6; 8:26; 10:28–43; 11:1–23;

Deuteronomy 7:1–26

PRINT PASSAGE: Joshua 11:6–9, 16–23

Key Verse

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)

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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)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Discover that God is with us in both our triumphs and struggles.
- Understand that God guides us each step of the way in life.
- Show faithfulness in all that they do and praise God.

*Key Terms

Attacked (verse 7)—Hebrew: *nāphal* (naw-fal’): overwhelmed; cast down; knocked out; “fell upon” (KJV). God commissioned Joshua to attack the massive army of the Canaanite kings at the waters of Merom.

Captured (verse 17)—Hebrew: *lākad* (lawkad’): seized; caught; grasped; “took” (KJV). Joshua captured all the kings from Mount Halak toward Seir and Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon.

Deliver (verse 6)—Hebrew: *nāthan* (naw-than’): to bestow, bring forth, give up (over); “hand . . . over” (NIV). The Lord informed Joshua not to be afraid of the kings of Shimron and Akshaph or the Canaanites, the Amorites, Hittites, or Perizzites because He was going to give them into his hands the next day.

Inheritance (verse 23)—Hebrew: *nachālāh* (nah-khah-lah): possession; estate, patrimony, portion, or an heirloom. God gave the land of Canaan to the people of Israel as an inheritance.

Mercy (verse 20)—Hebrew: *techinnāh* (tekhin-naw’): supplication for “favour” (KJV); grace; entreaty; plea. The Lord did not allow there to be any mercy offered to the cities against which Joshua waged war.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



Overview

Joshua 11 presents an opportunity to see God's promise realized—and the complications that come with it. This is a story rarely discussed in Bible study. This text, which could be considered a text of terror, outlines how Joshua led Israel in the battle against the Canaanite nations in response to God's guidance and with God's promise of victory. The narrative described here is violent in nature, detailing the gruesome massacre of women and children, ethnic cleansing and destruction on a massive scale. These accounts of possession of the Promised Land have often been misused to justify Christian imperialism and support slavery, which cannot be ignored and warrants our theological reflection. The heartbeat of this passage is not intended to glorify savagery, but to emphasize Joshua's faith and trust to God and God fulfilling His promise to His people. The Lord guides Joshua in battle, just as God guides us in the triumphs and in our struggles each step of the way so that we can be faithful in all that we do.

Life Happens

Samira works in social media marketing and is constantly exposed to global headlines. Every day, her feed fills with images of nations clashing—Ukraine, Israel and Palestine, and other regions where ordinary people are caught in extraordinary violence. The stories are relentless, and the suffering feels impossible to ignore.

Her friends often scroll past, shrugging, “It’s too complicated” or “That’s not our problem.” But Samira feels differently. She has a Palestinian coworker whose family lives under daily uncertainty, and she sees how the conflict drains them emotionally and financially. At the same time, another close friend is serving in the military, preparing for deployment in a different conflict zone. The global tensions she sees online are woven directly into the lives of people she cares about.

Samira began to wonder whether she should stay silent and focus on her own life or use her voice to raise awareness, even if it risks backlash from people who think she’s “taking sides.” She knows that speaking up online can be messy, misunderstood, or even polarizing, but staying silent feels like looking away from real human suffering.

Slowly, she realized that fighting among nations isn’t just about politics or borders. It’s about human lives, dignity, and the everyday choices ordinary people make whether to care, to listen, to empathize, or to scroll past. Samira found herself at a crossroad, deciding what kind of person she wants to be in a world where conflict feels both far away and painfully close.

Questions

1. How do conflicts between nations such as Israel and Palestine—shape the way we see justice and humanity today?
2. What responsibility do individuals have when global violence feels far away but impacts people close to us?
3. How can we engage with complex conflicts without oversimplifying or ignoring the human cost?

COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Prepared for Battle (*Joshua 11:6-9*)

KJV

6 And the LORD said unto Joshua, 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 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 Misrephoth-maim, 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.

NIV

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 hamstringed their horses and burned their chariots.

By Joshua 11, Israel has already fought its way through the southern region of Canaan. A coalition led by King Jabin of Hazor gathers a large army, with horses and chariots to match. Israel does not. God speaks to Joshua the night before battle and tells him plainly: do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them over to Israel, slain. He gives Joshua an unusual instruction—hamstringing their horses and burn their chariots. This seems wasteful. A smarter military move would be to capture the horses and add the chariots to Israel’s own arsenal. But God was asking Joshua to destroy the things that would make Israel feel self-sufficient. The victory was supposed to be credited to God alone.

Joshua obeys without hesitation. He moves on the coalition suddenly at the Waters of Merom, and the Lord gave them into Israel’s hand. The army scattered in every direction and were pursued until no survivors remained. Joshua hamstringed the horses and burned the chariots, exactly as the Lord had directed. The passage focuses less on how Israel fought and more on the fact that Joshua did precisely what God told him to do. In a chapter full of violence and destruction, obedience holds every verse together.

 **What Do You Think?** Do you recognize God in this text? Was ethnic cleansing necessary to fulfill God’s promise to His chosen people?

The Scope of Conquest (*Joshua 11:16-20*)

KJV

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.

NIV

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.

This section zooms out to show the full scope of what Joshua's campaigns had accomplished. From Mount Halak in the south to Baal Gad in the north, every king was captured and put to death. Verse 18 makes a quiet but important note: Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time. The conquest was not a single decisive event. It stretched on for years, one battle after another, one region at a time.

Verse 20 is one of the hardest lines in the entire book to sit with. It was the Lord Himself who hardened the hearts of the Canaanite nations so that they would wage war against Israel, so that He might destroy them totally, without mercy, as He had commanded Moses. The language is jarring. It echoes the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in Exodus 9:12, and it raises the kind of questions that deserve to be sat with rather than quickly resolved. Biblical scholars note that the book of Joshua was written long after Israel had settled in the land, as a theological reflection on God's promise of land, heritage, and blessing. It was not written to celebrate violence but to make sense of how a people who had been wandering for decades finally arrived where God said they would. Young adults reading this passage should feel permission to bring their discomfort to the text. Asking hard questions about Scripture is not the same as rejecting it.

 **What Do You Think?** How does conflict over holy land play out today?

The Land Rests from War (*Joshua 11:21-23*)

KJV

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.

NIV

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.

In verse 21, the text introduces the Anakites. These are the same giants that terrified the Israelite spies in Numbers 13:33. An entire generation refused to enter the Promised Land because of them, and the fear of them cost Israel forty years in the wilderness. Now, a generation later, Joshua drives them out, destroying them and their towns. What paralyzed their parents did not paralyze them. The giants that loomed so large in Israel’s memory were no longer standing in the way.

Verse 23 brings the chapter to a close with a single line that carries the weight of generations: Joshua took the land, gave it as inheritance, and the land rested from war. After years of battle, displacement, grief, and uncertainty, there was finally rest. The promise God made to Abraham, carried through Moses, and handed to Joshua had reached its fulfillment. God finished what He started.

 **What Do You Think?** What does it look like to trust God’s promises when the process of getting there feels longer or harder than expected?

Your Life

Even when we’re afraid, God is always with us. Our lives are a living witness to our Creator’s faithfulness. Meditate on a time when you felt scared, unsure, or unsettled about a situation and how God intervened to assure you of His presence. Share your experience with a trusted friend or classmate.

Your World!

The violent narratives in our Biblical texts shouldn’t be excluded from the lectionary. As a church, unpacking these atrocities gives us space to grow and engage in open dialogue. Churches should consider inviting local theologians and academicians to talk candidly about these “texts of terror” from various points of view.

 Closing Prayer

Dear God, help us to lean on you in times of difficulty and doubt. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Home Daily Bible Readings		
MONDAY, September 21	“Welcoming Strangers”	(Joshua 2:1-7)
TUESDAY, September 22	“Faith without Works Is Dead”	(James 2:18-26)
WEDNESDAY, September 23	“May the Nations Know God’s Salvation”	(Psalm 67)
THURSDAY, September 24	“Faith to Live By”	(Hebrews 11:1-2, 29-31)
FRIDAY, September 25	“God Shows No Partiality”	(Acts 10:34-48)
SATURDAY, September 26	“Rahab’s Faith in Israel’s God”	(Joshua 2:8-14)
SUNDAY, September 27	“Rahab Is Spared”	(Joshua 6:6-17)

Unit I: From Nomadic Tribes to Settled People Joining Forces with Unlikely Allies

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 25:31–46

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Joshua 2; 6:16–25; Matthew 1:5;
James 2:25; Hebrews 11:31

PRINT PASSAGE: Joshua 2:8–13; 6:16–17

Key Verse

And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. (Joshua 6:17, KJV)

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The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. (Joshua 6:17, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Understand how God works using unlikely means.
- Discover God's ways by studying the stories of His acts of salvation.
- Recognize God's hand in the events of their lives..

*Key Terms

Accursed (6:17)—Hebrew: *chêrem* (khay'-rem): banned; completely destroyed; exterminated; consecrated, dedicated, or "devoted" (NIV) for destruction. God declared the destruction of the entire city, but He spared Rahab and her household for her protection of the spies sent by Joshua.

Courage (2:11)—Hebrew: *rûwach* (roo'-akh): spirit, wind, breath; figuratively, life or spirit; vivacity, vigor.

Faint (2:9)—Hebrew: *mûwg* (moog): to melt, literally and figuratively; to fear, be fainthearted; flow down; "melting in fear" (NIV). Rahab informed the spies that those who lived in the country feared (and did faint because of) the spies.

Kindness (2:12)—Hebrew: *cheçed* (kheh'-sed): piety; goodness; favor; mercy; reproach.

Shout (6:16)—Hebrew: *rûwa'* (roo-ah'): to raise a sound, cry out; split the ears, used in the sense of blowing an alarm, or crying out.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



Overview

The 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City continues to be remembered as one of the most storied sites of human rights protest around the world. During the medal ceremony for the men's 200 meter race, U.S. sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their black-gloved fists in the air in defiance of the segregation and racism Black people experienced in the U.S. Their Black Power protest resulted in both Smith and Carlos being banned from the Olympics. The Australian silver medalist, sprinter Peter Norman, usually doesn't get mentioned as being part of the protest on the podium but he was an unlikely ally. Norman participated in a silent protest in solidarity with Smith and Carlos by wearing a small badge that read "Olympic Project for Human Rights," an organization combating racism in sports. He was under heavy scrutiny from his countrymen for his actions, putting his individual accolades and Olympic career on the line for a righteous cause. In this lesson, we find an unlikely ally in Rahab who took on great risk to serve God by showing radical hospitality and assisting the Israelites in accessing the Promised Land.

Life Happens

Jalen is a young activist passionate about criminal justice reform. He's been organizing small community events, hosting workshops, and meeting with families affected by the system. Despite his dedication, his efforts often feel too small to make a real impact. Then, unexpectedly, a local political group he has always distrusted reaches out to him. They have resources, media connections, and funding, all things Jalen lacks. However, their reputation is complicated: they've supported policies in the past that harmed the very communities Jalen fights for.

The group proposes a partnership: "Work with us, and we'll amplify your cause." Jalen knows that joining forces could lead to real changes, including new laws, broader awareness, and tangible progress. Yet it also means aligning with people whose motives may be self-serving and risking his credibility among peers who see the group as the "enemy."

If he refuses, his movement may remain small and overlooked. If he accepts, he could achieve far more, but at the cost of being accused of "selling out." The decision gnaws at him. Jalen feels caught between the purity of principle and the messy compromises required for real world change. Could he effect more change from the so-called 'inside'? Will he lose himself if he loses touch with his community?

He lies awake at night wondering whether progress is worth the price of partnership, or whether protecting his integrity means accepting slower, quieter work. Jalen stands at a crossroads, forced to confront what kind of leader he wants to be—and what kind of change he believes is worth fighting for.

Questions

1. Is it better to achieve progress through compromise, or to hold firm even if change is slower?
2. How do you decide whether an ally's motives matter more than the outcomes they help achieve?
3. What risks come with partnering across ideological divides, and how can those risks be managed?
4. Can working with unlikely allies strengthen your credibility, or does it always weaken it?

COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

A Canaanite Woman's Confession (*Joshua 2:8-11*)

KJV

8 And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof;

9 And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is

fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

11 And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

NIV

8 Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof

9 and said to them, “I know that the LORD has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.

10 We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed.

11 When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

Before the spies even lay down for the night, Rahab went up to the roof where she had hidden them and began to speak. What she said next was striking. She told them plainly, “I know that the Lord has given you this land.” She described how fear had spread through the entire region, how the people of Jericho had heard what God did at the Red Sea and what Israel did to the Amorite kings Sihon and Og on the other side of the Jordan. She said their hearts had melted and that no one had any courage left.

Then she made a declaration that would have stunned the spies. “The Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.” This was a Canaanite woman, living in a city devoted to other gods, and she was confessing faith in the God of Israel. She had no covenant relationship with God. She had no access to the Law or the priesthood. Everything she knew about the Lord came from stories she had heard.

The Hebrew word *zona*, used to describe Rahab, is traditionally translated “prostitute,” though some scholars suggest it could also mean “innkeeper.” Either way, she was a woman on the margins. Her social standing, her nationality, her reputation in the community meant nothing to God when measured against the faith she carried. Rahab saw something in Israel’s God that her own people could not see, and she acted on it.

 **What Do You Think?** Rahab’s allyship was a sacrifice. How do you think Rahab’s family reacted to her working with the spies?

A Bold Request (*Joshua 2:12-13*)

KJV

12 Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father’s house, and give me a true token:

13 And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

NIV

12 “Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign

13 that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them—and that you will save us from death.”

After declaring her faith, Rahab shifts from confession to negotiation. She asks the spies to swear by the Lord that they will show kindness to her family because she has shown kindness to them. She wants a sure sign, something she can hold on to, a guarantee that her mother, her father, her brothers and sisters, and everyone who belongs to them will be spared from death when Israel comes to take the city.

Rahab was not asking for her own life alone. She was bargaining for her entire family in the middle of a military operation that was already in motion. She understood what was coming for Jericho. She had just described the terror that had gripped the whole region. She knew the city would fall. And rather than freeze in that fear or try to run, she positioned herself to save the people she loved.

The Hebrew word she uses for kindness is *chesed*, a term that shows up throughout the Old Testament to describe God’s covenant loyalty and faithful love. Rahab was using covenant language to appeal to covenant people. She was asking Israel to extend the same kind of faithfulness to her that God had extended to them. For a woman with no formal place inside Israel’s community, she understood the character of their God better than some who had walked with Him for years. Her request was not timid. It was rooted in a faith that had already counted the cost and decided that trusting Israel’s God was worth whatever was next.



What Do You Think? How do you think Rahab felt being the only house spared after her entire city was destroyed?

Spared in the Midst of Destruction (*Joshua 6:16-17*)

KJV

16 And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

17 And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

NIV

16 The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, “Shout! For the LORD has given you the city!

17 The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.

The scene jumps forward to the fall of Jericho. The Israelites have marched around the city for seven days. On the seventh day, the priests blow the trumpets, and Joshua commands the people to shout because the Lord has given them the city. Everything inside the walls is to be devoted to the Lord for destruction. Every person, every animal, every possession. Then Joshua says one thing more: “Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.”

In the middle of total destruction, one household was set apart. The woman who lived in the wall of a condemned city became the one person the entire army was told to protect. God honored the promise the spies had made to her. Her faith, which began as a whispered confession on a rooftop, carried her family through the collapse of everything around them.

Rahab’s story does not end at Jericho. Matthew 1:5 places her in the genealogy of Jesus. A Canaanite woman, a social outsider, a person most people would have written off, became part of the lineage that brought the Messiah into the world. Hebrews 11:31 names her alongside Abraham, Moses, and David as a model of faith. James 2:25 points to her actions as evidence that faith and works go together. God went further than sparing Rahab. He wrote her into the storyline of redemption in a way no one standing at Jericho’s walls could have predicted.

 **What Do You Think?** Has God ever used someone unexpected in your life to show you something about His character? What did that experience teach you about how God works?

Your Life

Rahab was a committed ally, a co-conspirator in service of God’s plan for God’s people. She did this with courage and at great risk of being shunned further in her larger community. Consider what you are willing to risk – access, status, friends, professional opportunities, etc. to be faithful and follow God’s will.

Your World!

There have been unlikely allies of God’s work found outside of the walls of the church. They may not be buttoned up or a polished speaker, but their heart’s desires are aligned with God’s purposes. Consider the work of unlikely allies in your broader community. How have you seen God’s hand at work in what they do?

 Closing Prayer

Creator God, open our eyes to see others as You see them, to honor the image of God, within us all. Lord help us understand that You can work through anyone. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Home Daily Bible Readings		
MONDAY, September 28	“Hold Fast to the Lord”	(Joshua 23:1-11)
TUESDAY, September 29	“Reaffirming the Covenant”	(Joshua 24:1-13)
FRIDAY, September 30	“Obey Christ’s commandments”	(1 John 1:8–2:5)
THURSDAY, October 1	“No Turning Back”	(Luke 9:57-62)
FRIDAY, October 2	“The Greatest Commandments”	(Matthew 22:34-40)
SATURDAY, October 3	“God, Redeem Your People”	(Psalm 25:12-22)
SUNDAY, October 4	“We Will Serve the Lord”	(Joshua 24:14-27)