

# JOSHUA—WEEK 8

## HONOR AND COVENANTS



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*Joshua, Week 8 — Honor and Covenants*  
*The Cover Picture is by Jean Fouquet (1420–1477)*  
*On display in Paris at the Bibliotheque nationale de France.*

Five kings wage war against Gibeon for making peace with Israel. Gibeon asks Joshua for help and he honors the covenant by racing to their rescue. God honors this with a freak hailstorm that helps.

Then the Israelites find the five kings hiding in a cave. They ceremonially walk on them and destroy them.

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1 Joshua 10:1–5

*Now it came to pass when Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard how Joshua had taken Ai and had utterly destroyed it—as he had done to Jericho and its king, so he had done to Ai and its king—and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were among them, that they feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were mighty. Therefore Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish, and Debir king of Eglon, saying, “Come up to me and help me, that we may attack Gibeon, for it has made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel.” Therefore the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered together and went up, they and all their armies, and camped before Gibeon and made war against it.*

The mask has slipped. Their true character is revealed. Understand this and all the battles make sense.

Why on Earth would these kings attack Gibeon? They face a formidable invading army and they decide to waste resources on a battle that gains them nothing. What’s going on here?

Hatred. That’s what’s going on here. Irrational moves, especially military ones, are often motivated by hatred. The kings hate that Gibeon made peace with Israel.

These guys are a bunch of petty tyrants.

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As we watch the drama with these kings unfold, consider this dictionary plum—“pusillanimous.” Like many dictionary plums, it has a deep meaning that teaches.

This one is psychology in a can. Pusillanimous means to be mean-spirited in one’s timidity.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pusillanimous>

One of the curious aspects of sin is that cowardice and meanness often go hand in hand. That’s why we found Saddam Hussein hiding in a spider hole. It’s why standing up to bullies often stops them cold.

As we’ve pointed out before, the LORD’s sentencing these people to destruction is appropriate. They are marinated in evil.

But here we see their evil manifested not so much as brutality, but as cowardice combined with irrational hatred.

While sin is different in different people, virtue is more consistent. Specifically, the four cardinal virtues (prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude) are remarkably correlated. People tend to have them or they don’t.

These guys don’t.

2 Joshua 10:6–11

*And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp at Gilgal, saying, “Do not forsake your servants; come up to us quickly, save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the mountains have gathered together against us.”*

*So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor. And the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your hand; not a man of them shall stand before you.” Joshua therefore came upon them suddenly, having marched all night from Gilgal. So the LORD routed them before Israel, killed them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, chased them along the road that goes to Beth Horon, and struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah. And it happened, as they fled before Israel and were on the descent of Beth Horon, that the LORD cast down large hailstones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died from the hailstones than the children of Israel killed with the sword.*

Gilgal to Gibeon is about 20 miles and it’s significantly uphill. That’s pulling one heck of an all-nighter. Joshua’s response to the Gibeonite plea for help is astonishing.

Remember, Joshua was tricked into a covenant of peace with the Gibeonites. No one said anything about protecting them.

So, Joshua had every justification to say, “Serves them right for tricking us,” and let the Gibeonites and the other armies exhaust all their resources fighting among themselves. That would just make them easier pickings later. Instead, Joshua jumps into action big time. Something special is going on here.

It’s the covenant. The covenant between Israel and the Gibeonites isn’t just binding; it’s sacred.

Even though their covenant didn’t specify a treaty of mutual protection, the sacred nature of a covenant implies that automatically. This is hard for modern people to wrap their minds around.

But Joshua understands. So, Joshua honors the covenant to the fullest extent possible, and the LORD responds with a spectacular blessing. He uses a freak weather event as a weapon to help out the Israelite army. The text specifically notes that the hailstones did most of the killing.

This confirms that Joshua racing to Gibeon’s defense was the right thing to do.

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An almost identical hailstorm happened in 1360, changing the course of the Hundred Years War. As the British army camped outside Chartres, France, a sudden hailstorm killed about a thousand British troops and six thousand horses. The British invasion of France was going well up to that point, but King Edward III was so convinced the storm was God’s wrath against his actions that he dismounted his horse and knelt in a prayer of repentance. Within the month, he agreed to the Treaty of Brétigny.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_Monday\\_\(1360\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Monday_(1360))

It seems that Edward was mindful of this passage.

3 Joshua 10:12–15

*Then Joshua spoke 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 still over Gibeon;  
And Moon, in the Valley of Aijalon.”  
So the sun stood still,  
And the moon stopped,  
Till the people had revenge  
Upon their enemies.*

*Is this not written in the Book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. And there has been no day like that, before it or after it, that the LORD heeded the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel.*

*Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.*

While the hailstorm can be seen as merely a very rare freak weather event, the sun standing still in the sky is a bona fide miracle. Curiously, many commentators have struggled to explain how this could have occurred naturally. Others explain it as poetic imagery. Still others say we should not take the passage literally.

One of those explanations could well be correct, but there’s no reason to jump through all those hoops. It was a miracle. Miracles are, by definition, events where the laws of nature and physics don’t hold.

What’s the big deal? God created the whole universe just by speaking.

This is a piece of cake.

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The book of Joshua is a great vehicle for teaching us to see things from God’s point of view.

“Impossible” miracles somehow seem harder to accept than more mundane ones. People want to explain this passage in natural terms the same way they want to explain how crossing the Jordan on dry land could have happened naturally.

This runs into big problems with the resurrection of Christ. That miracle is the foundation of our faith.

*if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. — Romans 10:9*

I know I reference this verse a lot, but it’s absolutely key. He was dead. His resurrection proves He’s the Lord.

People who explain away the resurrection as Jesus reviving in the cool of the tomb aren’t saved.

4 Joshua 10:16–21

*But these five kings had fled and hidden themselves in a cave at Makkedah. And it was told Joshua, saying, “The five kings have been found hidden in the cave at Makkedah.”*

*So Joshua said, “Roll large stones against the mouth of the cave, and set men by it to guard them. And do not stay there yourselves, but pursue your enemies, and attack their rear guard. Do not allow them to enter their cities, for the LORD your God has delivered them into your hand.” Then it happened, while Joshua and the children of Israel made an end of slaying them with a very great slaughter, till they had finished, that those who escaped entered fortified cities. And all the people returned to the camp, to Joshua at Makkedah, in peace.*

*No one moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel.*

What a bunch of cowards. How in the world did these clowns end up becoming kings? Maybe daddy was king and they just inherited the job. They certainly didn't earn it.

In the hailstorm of 1360, King Edward III of England was right there getting pelted by the hailstones. That's what drove him to repentance. He wasn't hiding somewhere comfortable; he was on the battlefield where he got up-to-the-minute information about the war. Edward was far from perfect, but he wasn't a coward like these guys.

The five kings have abandoned their troops and are safe and warm in a cave. Meanwhile, their soldiers are fighting and dying. Of course, they're fighting and dying attacking Gibeon, instead of protecting their own families.

But that's all at the direction of these five clown kings.

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“A fish rots from the head first.” This political adage applies to all societies. Leaders lead. They can lead well or lead badly. This section of Joshua recounts some amazingly bad leading.

We don't have enough backstory to know how all the people of Canaan became so wicked, but it seems to have religious roots. We quoted Deuteronomy 18:9–12 before. Here's Deuteronomy 12:31.

*You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.*

*“Ideas have consequences. Bad ideas have victims.” — John Stonestreet*

Child sacrifice is an extreme example of this. How could a people get this far removed from sanity?

Bad leaders, particularly bad religious leaders. Somehow these people fell under the spell of some incredibly evil leaders.

And never lose sight of the fact that the chief purveyor of bad ideas isn't human.

5 Joshua 10:22–27

*Then Joshua said, “Open the mouth of the cave, and bring out those five kings to me from the cave.” And they did so, and brought out those five kings to him from the cave: the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon.*

*So it was, when they brought out those kings to Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said to the captains of the men of war who went with him, “Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings.” And they drew near and put their feet on their necks. Then Joshua said to them, “Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; be strong and of good courage, for thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight.” And afterward Joshua struck them and killed them, and hanged them on five trees; and they were hanging on the trees until evening. So it was at the time of the going down of the sun that Joshua commanded, and they took them down from the trees, cast them into the cave where they had been hidden, and laid large stones against the cave’s mouth, which remain until this very day.*

This bit with putting their feet on the necks of the five kings isn’t to hold them down; it’s a ceremony. There are only five kings but lots of Israelite troops. Everyone gets a turn.

But what’s up with Joshua telling them to not be afraid? There’s nothing here to be afraid of.

This isn’t about the present. The ceremony is to steel them for the battles to come. That’s where they need to *not be afraid, nor be dismayed; be strong and of good courage*.

They need to see themselves as mighty conquerors, blessed by the LORD.

So Joshua has them “walk on kings.”

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We’re mighty conquerors blessed by the LORD, too.

But our conquering isn’t military, it’s evangelistic. So, walking on people is the opposite of what we should do to give us courage for the battles ahead. Our goal isn’t to defeat others; it’s to share victory with them.

So, our encouraging ceremony couldn’t be more different. It begins with the words, “On the night He was betrayed.”

But this ceremony doesn’t commemorate our Lord’s victory over death; it commemorates the death itself. The symbol of our religion, the one we hang on walls and wear as jewelry, is a symbol of the horrible way He died.

This serves to focus our encouragement on Him. We are helpless. He did it all. We played absolutely no role in the great victory. Like the hailstorm, it was all God.

Thus, in communion we celebrate what Christ’s did for us.

That gives us a different kind of courage—one born not of self-confidence but of Him-confidence.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Have you seen someone be pusillanimous?
2. Have you seen honor trump justice?
3. What's the biggest miracle you've seen?
4. When has bad leadership been catastrophic?
5. How does communion encourage you?

*Items for prayer:*