

When the Sun Stood Still: Joshua 10

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Do you believe in miracles? As I ask that question my thoughts digress to a lesser miracle, a non-miracle really, but an exciting moment in sports history that was referred to as a miracle. I'm thinking of the 1980 US Olympic hockey team that, very surprisingly, beat the Soviet Union and went on to win gold. Al Michaels was calling the game, and as the final period was coming to an end, just a few seconds remaining, he said with great enthusiasm, "Do you believe in miracles?" It's a great sports story. And I enjoy watching the movie about that team. The movie is called . . . you guessed it, *Miracle*.

Well, it makes us think about what miracles really are. Of course, the word is used in this casual way to refer to any event that is somehow extraordinary. But when we look into God's Word, when we observe the One living and true God, we know of events that are truly miraculous. They are entirely out of the realm of possibility for any human to accomplish.

It seemed very unlikely that the 1980 US Olympic hockey team could beat the Soviet Union, but it was not entirely out of the realm of possibility. The sun standing still, however, is in a different category. The parting of the Red Sea. The Jordan River halting its waters. These are rightly called miracles. A divine intervention. Something that only God can do.

So I ask you again, Do you believe in miracles? Do you believe in a God who can do such things? I hope you do. We're going to talk about a couple of these miracles this morning which I just read about in Joshua 10.

First, though, we'll talk about a couple other facets of this text. I'll begin with some observations about loyalty and leadership, Joshua's loyalty and leadership.

Loyalty and Leadership

Chapter 10 begins in a way very similar to the previous chapter. Chapter 9 started with a description of a coalition that was forming against Israel. Last week I called our attention to the fact that those kings, those armies, did not seem to be afraid of Israel . . . not in the way Jericho had feared Israel. Since being defeated by Ai on their first attempt to take that city, Israel is less intimidating to these other Canaanite peoples. Well, in chapter 10

another coalition is forming, but notice that fear is part of the equation again. Verses 1-2 say that Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem (by the way, this is the first time in the Bible that we read the word Jerusalem, the first place where this city is mentioned by this name, a very important city), feared greatly. What was the cause of his fear? A big part of the fear came from the fact that Gibeon had made peace with Israel. Isn't that interesting. Now that the people of Gibeon are in alliance with Israel, the king of Jerusalem is scared.

Gibeon could have been on the side of these other armies. Everyone would have expected them to be on the side of these other armies. So this was, indeed, a game changer. Now this strong city, with strong warriors, was in alliance with Israel.

So the king of Jerusalem called these other kings to join with him to attack Gibeon. And that's exactly what they did. As the end of verse 5 tells us, they encamped against Gibeon and made war against it.

Well, then the men of Gibeon send for help. And who do they turn to? Joshua. They send a message to Joshua asking for him to come quickly to save them.

Now, verse 7 is really amazing. Here's where we see Joshua's loyalty and leadership. To realize how shocking this is, we have to think back to last week, to the previous chapter, where there was a leadership crisis. In verse 14 of chapter 9 we're told very clearly that the leaders of Israel did not ask counsel from the Lord, and thus they made a covenant with the Gibeonites that they should not have made. The Gibeonites tricked them. The Gibeonites made them think they were from a faraway place. But they weren't. They were from very nearby, and therefore should have been destroyed along with all the other peoples of Canaan.

And then do you remember the aftermath? The fallout from that leadership crisis? In verse 18 of chapter 9, the latter part of that verse says, "Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders." I can just picture the headlines on the Israelite Times, Joshua's Approval Rating Plummetts, according to recent polls. Loss of confidence in Joshua's leadership ability. Israel's Leadership Duped by Gibeonites. Disgruntled military. Disgruntled nation.

Well, for those who are still fuming over that whole debacle, Joshua's action now in chapter 10 would be like salt in the wound. Just think of those soldiers who wanted to destroy the Gibeonites but were told they couldn't due to an unlawful alliance

that Israel's leaders accidentally made with Gibeon. And now those same soldiers are being given new marching orders, to go up and defend Gibeon.

Two things stand out to me here. Joshua's loyalty to Gibeon, and Joshua's bold leadership of Israel.

Loyalty

Isn't loyalty a beautiful thing? Especially in a story like this, since the Gibeonites didn't deserve any loyalty. They hadn't earned the right to be able to call up Joshua and his army to come rescue them. What had they done? They told a very elaborate and creative lie. They deceived Joshua into making a covenant with them. But Joshua is a man of his word. He's going to maintain his allegiance to Gibeon.

A couple application points that come to mind . . . One is simply an encouragement to be loyal. Be a person of your word. When you make commitments, keep those commitments. Whether they're big or small, whether they're commitments you're excited about at the moment or commitments you regret having made.

I'm not saying you need to be obsessive about this. There's a sad story in the book of Judges where Jephthah makes a tragic vow to offer as a sacrifice the first thing that would come out from the doors of his house when he would return home. When he returned home, it turned out that his daughter came out to him. And he felt compelled to sacrifice her. That's not loyalty. That's foolishness.

There has to be discernment here. If you make a rash vow that ends up leading to sin, you need to recognize the foolishness of it and turn away from it.

But I don't think that's our main problem. I think what we're more likely to fall into is making a commitment to a small group or a ministry or a friendship, and then new opportunities come up and those previous commitments suffer. Let's make efforts, by God's grace, to be people who are loyal, faithful, committed.

The other thing this makes us think about is Jesus' loyalty to us, in spite of the rotten ways we've treated Him. Joshua is a type of Christ. He is a foreshadowing of Jesus. In various ways, this person Joshua in the Old Testament gives us a preview of Jesus Christ who would come to earth hundreds of years later (about 1400 years later). And I think one of the ways we see

Joshua as a pointer to Jesus is in his loyalty to a group of people who don't deserve any mercy or kindness from him.

Just think about that the next time you call to Jesus for help, which should be very often. Reflect on the fact that He owes you nothing. You don't deserve His help, His salvation. But He has freely committed Himself to you, sheer grace, in such a way that when you call, He will come to help you. He is faithful. He is loyal.

Leadership

The other thing to talk about here briefly is leadership. Leadership can be tough. Leadership sometimes requires going out on a limb, moving in a direction that not everyone is on board with. It's particularly difficult when you're not Jesus (who's perfect) but you're Joshua or someone like him, someone who is fallible, someone who makes mistakes. That should make us humble. But it should not make us any less courageous in our leadership. We see a good example of that here in Joshua 10. Joshua had made a mistake in failing to ask the Lord's counsel. But he wasn't going to let that past failure cripple him permanently. A covenant had been made (I would argue this is different than Jephthah's rash vow). So Joshua was committed to upholding that covenant even though it would have been very unpopular.

In whatever leadership roles God has given you, take these lessons to heart.

Encouragement from the Lord

The next thing we see in our passage is encouragement from the Lord. Joshua receives some encouragement from the Lord, similar to the things said back in chapter 1.

“And the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands. Not a man of them shall stand before you.””
(Joshua 10:8, ESV)

Look back to Joshua 1: 2, 5, 9

This is such a great blessing as God puts us in places of leadership, as God leads us in living out the Christian life. He assures us again and again of His presence with us. He promises us, again and again, that He is for us, that He is fighting on our behalf. He encourages us with the hope, and sure hope, that the battle is already won.

So be encouraged today, as Joshua was encouraged. Be encouraged with the knowledge of God's promises to you. Just think of a couple promises from Romans 8, promises that are the bookends of that great chapter. It opens with the great promise that

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1, ESV)

And the chapter ends with the promise that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And in the midst of the chapter are other great promises, too.

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28, ESV)

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31, ESV) which Don Whitney preached on here recently.

Hold on to those promises. When you're facing a tough decision, when you're facing a situation that's going to take some courage, go to those promises and know that God is with you and will lead you and will give you victory in the things He is leading you to do.

The Lord Fights for His People

Now we get to the miracles in this chapter as we see how the Lord fights for His people. We see here, as we've seen before, the Lord fighting Israel's battles, giving them the land He had promised to them. We also see the Israelites very much involved in this mission, working, marching, fighting . . . And these two different pieces are not at odds. It's not contradictory to view the Israel's efforts as necessary for victory and at the same time recognizing God's actions as absolutely essential as well. In chapter 1 there's an interesting statement that weaves these together.

"Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses." (Joshua 1:3, ESV)

God has promised and is promising to do something very great. He is giving this land to Joshua and the Israelites. But not apart from Joshua and the Israelites moving their feet. Do you see that in verse 3? Every place that the sole of your foot will tread

upon I have given to you. In other words: I have given it to you, so go and get it.

And that's what Joshua and the people are doing here in chapter 10. They're going up to rescue Gibeon, and in doing so they will also be defeating five Canaanite armies.

They marched all night to get there, as verse 9 tells us. And then it was a surprise, early morning attack. In verse 10 the Lord is the subject of the sentence. Israel is fighting . . . yes, indeed. In verse 11 there's a reference to those whom Israel killed with the sword. So Israel had their swords drawn, actively fighting in this battle. But the Lord was also fighting for them, guaranteeing their victory. The Lord is One who threw these armies into a panic. And then He also poured down huge, lethal hailstones upon them. This was nothing short of miraculous. It was a supernatural hailstorm.

I don't know if you've ever been in a severe hailstorm. I've never been outside for one. I've been inside and watched out the window as the hail pounded on the roof, pounded on the cars, pelted the ground. There are records of deadly hailstorms. One that I read about was in northern India in 1888. It is said that the hail was as big as oranges and that over 230 people died and over 1600 sheep and goats. What a horrific storm.

It paints a picture for us of what this scene would have been like for the armies who opposed Israel. Part of the miracle here is that the hail only did damage to Israel's enemies. It's like in the 10 plagues which impacted Egypt, but not Israel. In fact, one of those plagues was hail.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, so that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, on man and beast and every plant of the field, in the land of Egypt.” Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, was there no hail.”
(Exodus 9:22–26, ESV)

Well, a similar thing must have happened here in Joshua 10 because none of the Israelites were killed by the hail. But *many* of

the soldiers in the opposing armies were killed. Verse 11 says that actually more were killed by the Lord's hailstones than were killed by Israel's swords. The Lord was truly fighting for His people. I like the way Kent Hughes described this in a sermon I listened to by him. He spoke of this hail as the "artillery of heaven." God, in this miraculous way, was using His own, unique artillery to fight this battle.

The Lord Listens and Responds

Finally, then, we come to the most memorable miracle in this battle – the miracle of the sun standing still. What we see here is that the Lord listens and responds to Joshua.

To understand Joshua's bold prayer in verse 12 we need to understand a bit more about this battle. First of all, we have to remember that the Israelite army had marched all night long to get here for a surprise morning attack. And secondly, we have to realize that this battle was now spreading out for miles and miles across the central hill country of Canaan and even westward down and out of the hill country. Based on the cities that are mentioned in these verses, we know that the battle was now spanning an area of more than 20 miles, as the Israelites were chasing their enemies, seeking to put them to death.

And what a strategic moment it was for Joshua and his army. This was a chance to eliminate 5 significant armies. This would be a huge advance in the conquest. They would be taking control of a major portion of the Promised Land.

After all, the Lord was fighting for them, giving these Amorites over to them. By the way, the terms Canaanite and Amorite are basically synonymous here. These are general terms referring to the people groups living there in that land at the time. Verse 12 says that the Lord gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel.

What does Joshua decide to do in this moment? His own soldiers must have been exhausted after an all-night march (which itself might have been 20 miles uphill) and now a day of chasing their enemies 20 miles or more. And yet Israel had them on the run and were within reach of defeating them entirely. What a shame it would be if the sun went down and those armies were able to retreat to their places of refuge. So what does Joshua do? He asks for more time.

He boldly commands the sun and the moon to stand still. He needed more daylight to continue this chase and finish the job.

And amazingly, the Lord listened to Joshua's request and responded with this very unique and unmistakably divine miracle.

There are various theories about how this happened exactly. Some argue that the language is figurative, poetic. Nothing unusual actually happened with the sun or moon or earth. We shouldn't take it literally. I don't find that interpretation convincing because verse 13 goes on to state it so plainly, even citing another book (unknown to us) which recorded this event. And then verse 14 emphasizes how absolutely unique this day was.

So I don't think we can write this off as a literary device. These verses speak plainly of a day that spanned the time of 2 days. The sun was visible in the sky, not just for the normal daylight hour, but about twice that.

We shouldn't get hung up on the non-scientific description. Of course, we know that the sun doesn't rotate around the earth. The earth rotates around the sun, and the earth rotates on its axis, giving us day and night. But still we speak of the sun rising in the morning and setting in the evening. So however this happened, the appearance was that the sun stood still in the sky. Some speculate that God caused the earth's rotation to slow down, and that's how this miracle came about. Or it could be that God caused the earth to tilt, giving the Israelites a day kind of like Alaska has in the summer time.

When we were talking about this at dinner time a few nights ago, my son Noah brought up an idea that I had never thought about. He said, I wonder what it was like for the people on the other side of the world who had the equivalent of 2 nights. We had some good laughs thinking about the people who might have woken up after a good length of sleep, but it was still dark, so maybe they just went back to sleep. The longest night's sleep ever!

This is certainly a very interesting event described here, and naturally there are many ideas about what could be going on. It's impossible to know exactly how God did it. But that's not our main concern. The main thing to affirm and appreciate is *that* God did it. God somehow, miraculously, gave Joshua and his army many additional hours of daylight, as verse 13 says, "until the nation took vengeance on their enemies."

Joshua's Boldness in Prayer

A couple things to notice about this. One is Joshua's boldness in prayer. Joshua asked for something that only God could do. That's one of the astounding things about prayer. We

are talking to the Almighty God of the universe, who made everything that is, who is sovereign over everything that is. He controls the sun and the moon. He can do as He pleases. And so, why not ask Him boldly for great things?

Joshua's Eagerness to Win This Battle

Another interesting thing about Joshua's request is that he is not passive about his own involvement in this battle. If I was in his place, I might have just asked for more hailstones. God, can we just sit down on this hillside (our legs are tired!) and watch You finish the battle? Could You just unload your heavenly artillery and finish this thing . . ." But that wasn't Joshua's request. The request was, Give us more time so that we can finish the battle.

The Lord had promised him in verse 8, "I have given them into your hands. Not a man of them shall stand before you." And Joshua intended to see the fulfillment of that promise, understanding that it would involve much effort on the part of him and his army.

And Joshua voiced his bold prayer in the sight of Israel, as verse 12 says. I find that intriguing as well. This was part of his leadership and part of his boldness. There's certainly nothing wrong with whispering a prayer to God privately. We should definitely do that. But there's also something bold and exciting about voicing a prayer in the hearing of many others. That can be inspiring to those who hear, and it can bolster your own resolve to pursue the thing you're praying about. There's a built in accountability when you pray before others.

I think of the spiritual battles we all face in our lives, and I would encourage to pray openly and boldly about these battles. Pray alongside other believers so that we can spur one another on. Pray boldly for victory in your battles against sin . . . Some of you need to get together with some trusted believers and cry out to God, "Please, give me victory over pornography," or "Give me victory over alcohol," or "Give me victory over worry and anxiety." "God, please help me put to death these enemies of mine." And then what do you do? Do you sit back on your couch and wait for spiritual hailstones to destroy those sinful inclinations? No, you go and fight. You fight those sinful inclinations. And you fight with the power of God's promises. He will give you victory. If you truly belong to Him, then His Spirit lives within you and He is sanctifying you. And, as Philippians 1:6 says, "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

I also think of the Great Commission, another promise that we should pray boldly about and actively participate in.

Jesus said, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:18–20, ESV)

Jesus is bringing victory in the fierce battle against spiritual darkness. He is causing His powerful Word to invade people groups that have been hardened against the Gospel. So we should pray with boldness and preach with boldness and serve others and support frontier missionaries, knowing that this Great Commission will someday be fulfilled. And it will be fulfilled through us as we are enabled by the supernatural power of our great God, and His Son, Our Savior, Jesus Christ.

I want to conclude with a New Testament scene that I’m reminded of when I think of Joshua commanding the sun and moon. I mentioned earlier how Joshua is a type of Jesus Christ. He is a preview of Jesus Christ. And as we see Joshua, the great leader of Israel, standing there in the sight of the people, telling the sun and moon to stop in their places, what does that make you think of?

Jesus’ Authority over Nature

The second Joshua, Jesus Christ, stood there in that boat with His disciples, in the midst of a great storm on the sea. He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And do you know what, it happened! The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. (Mark 4:39) This is our miracle-working Savior. He went to the cross, and as He hung on that cross there was another miracle having to do with the sun. There was a supernatural darkness that came over the whole land, symbolizing God’s wrath against sin which was coming down upon His own Son. Jesus bore that wrath for us, for all who believe in Him.

Do you believe in Him? Do you believe in miracles? I hope you do. Because the God who made the sun stop in the sky in Joshua 10, is the miracle-worker who can do a miracle in your life, too. He can bring about the miracle of new life. If you are spiritually dead, separated from Him, He can cause you to be born again. He can give you a new heart and set you on a new course. I hope you will boldly ask Him for that today.