

Joshua 10:40

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded.

Analysis

So Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded. And Joshua smote them from Kadeshbarnea even unto Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, even unto Gibeon. And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel.

This summary emphasizes both Joshua's comprehensive obedience and God's decisive action. The geographical terms—"hills" (central highlands), "south" (Negev), "vale" (Shephelah lowlands), and "springs" (possibly the region near Kadesh)—indicate thorough conquest of southern Canaan's diverse terrain. The phrase "he left none remaining" (lo hish'ir sarid, לא הִשְׁאִיר שְׂרִיד) appears frequently in conquest accounts, describing complete military victory by ancient Near Eastern standards—total defeat of organized military resistance.

The troubling phrase "utterly destroyed all that breathed" (vayacharem kol-nefesh,

וַיִּחְרֶם כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ) describes herem warfare—total devotion to destruction as an act of divine judgment. Reformed theology addresses this difficulty by recognizing:

1. the unique, unrepeatable nature of conquest as divine judgment on exceptionally wicked nations (Leviticus 18:24-28; Deuteronomy 9:4-5)
2. the long period of patience God extended before judgment (Genesis 15:16)
3. the typological nature of Canaan conquest foreshadowing final judgment;
4. the escalation principle—greater revelation brings greater responsibility (Luke 12:48).

This was not ethnic cleansing but covenant judgment executing divine justice on cultures characterized by child sacrifice, sacred prostitution, and extreme moral corruption.

The theological climax appears in verse 42: "because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel." Three times in two verses the text names "the LORD God of Israel" (Yahweh Elohe Yisrael, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), emphasizing that covenant relationship, not military superiority, explains Israel's success. This guards against triumphalism—victory comes not from Israel's righteousness but from God's faithfulness to His promises and His judgment on Canaanite wickedness.

Historical Context

The geographical scope—from Kadesh-barnea (southern border) to Gaza (southwest) to Goshen (probably a region south of Hebron, not Egyptian Goshen) to Gibeon (central highlands)—describes the area now comprising southern Israel. Archaeological surveys show numerous Late Bronze Age destructions in this region, though precise dating and attribution to Joshua's campaign remain debated among scholars. Sites like Lachish, Debir (Tel Beit Mirsim), and Hebron show destruction layers from this period.

The phrase "at one time" (pa'am achat, פַּעַם אַחַת) indicates a single unified campaign rather than decades of gradual settlement. This accords with the book's portrayal of rapid initial conquest followed by extended mop-up operations and tribal allotments. The unified campaign was possible because the southern coalition's aggregation into a single force allowed Joshua to defeat them

collectively rather than engaging each city individually. Their strategic error (concentrating forces) became Israel's opportunity (one decisive battle).

The conquest's theological framework distinguished it from typical ancient Near Eastern warfare motivated by imperial expansion, economic gain, or glory. Israel entered Canaan not to build empire but to establish holy community in the land God promised Abraham. The herem restrictions—no plunder (initially), no treaties, no intermarriage—prevented Israel from benefiting materially from conquest, emphasizing that this was divine judgment, not human aggression. Later violations of these restrictions (Achan's theft, treaties with Canaanites, intermarriage) produced the corruptions that eventually led to Israel's own exile.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does understanding Canaan conquest as unique, unrepeatable divine judgment prevent misapplying these texts to justify violence today?
2. What does the emphasis "the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel" teach about attributing success to divine grace rather than human achievement?
3. How should the sobering reality of divine judgment on persistent, unrepentant sin affect our evangelism and our own pursuit of holiness?

Interlinear Text

וְהָנָה גִּבְ הַהָרִים כָּל אֶת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְכָה
smote **So Joshua** H853 H3605 **all the country** **of the hills** **and of the south**
H5221 H3091 H776 H2022 H5045

לֹא מַלְכֵיהֶם כָּל וְאֵת וְהָאֲשָׁד וְהַשְּׁפֵלָה
and of the vale **and of the springs** H853 H3605 **and all their kings** H3808
H8219 H794 H4428

הַהָרִים יָמָּה הַנִּשְׁמָה כָּל וְאֵת שָׁרִיִּד הַנֶּשָׁא יָרָה
he left **none remaining** H853 H3605 **all that breathed** **but utterly destroyed**
H7604 H8300 H5397 H2763

יִשְׂרָאֵל: אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה צִוָּה כְּאֵשׁ רָה
commanded **as the LORD** **God** **of Israel**
H834 H6680 H3068 H430 H3478

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org