

Joshua – Jericho

Joshua 5:13-6:27 (ESV)

Questions concerning God:

- Where does God get off commanding the death of men, women, and children?
- How could a loving God order the elimination of whole groups of people?
- Isn't God guilty of genocide in the case of the conquest of the Canaanites?
- What kind of a moral monster is this God of the Bible?

Christopher Hitchens: “The Bible may, indeed does, contain a warrant for trafficking in humans, for ethnic cleansing, for slavery, ... and for indiscriminate massacre, but we are not bound by any of it because it was put together by crude, uncultured human mammals.”

Richard Dawkins: “The ethnic cleansing begun in the time of Moses is brought to bloody fruition in the book of Joshua, a text remarkable for the bloodthirsty massacres it records and the xenophobic relish with which it does so.”

This question of God's involvement in the conquest of Canaan is of significant importance to answer non-Christians concerns, to defend God's glory on the earth, and to strengthen the faith of those who have entrusted their lives to this God.

The Appearance of God's Messenger

Joshua 5:13-15 (ESV) [13] When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" [14] And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" [15] And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

Three reasons why this is the second member of the Trinity:

1. Joshua worships the person
2. The person receives Joshua's worship
3. Holiness is a manifestation of God's presence

The battle is the Lord's

- This is a continuation of the Jericho narrative – this introduces the story after the covenant renewal of chapter 5
- God would be fighting this battle, leading the armies of heaven against Jericho and the rest of the Canaanites
- The underlying and overarching cause of the victory in Canaan and the fulfillment of God's promises would be the work of God on behalf of His people
- This is a beautiful picture of our salvation. Our salvation is wholly and entirely caused and brought about by God through His Son, Jesus Christ.
- This appearance of the second member of the trinity reminds us that our salvation was planned by God, our salvation was secured by God, and all glory for it goes to God

The Strangeness of God's Method

The strategy is suspect:

- A parade of sorts led by armed men, followed by seven priests with ram's horn bugles, followed by the Ark of the Covenant, followed by the rearguard.
- The people silently circled Jericho for 6 days while the priests blew on their horns. They marched around this great city; once a day for 6 days.
- On the seventh day they marched around the city seven times, the priests blew a blast on the ram's horn, the people screamed, and then they would conquer the city.
- The strangeness of the strategy points to the importance of God in this battle.

The battle is the Lord's

The strange action of the people has a minimizing effect; the results were not due to their antics.

The presence of God, highlighted in the Christophany of chapter 5, is emphasized in chapter 6 by the continual and repeated references to the Ark of the Covenant.

The ark is mentioned 10 times in this story – thus pointing towards the presence of God being the important factor of this battle.

The presence of the pre-incarnate Christ, the absurdity of the actions of the Israelites leading up to the battle, and the priority placed on the Ark of the Covenant all point to a prophetic proclamation of the book of Joshua: the battle is the Lord's.

If the battle is the Lord's then we have some explaining to do! With these events ultimately being attributed to God in both their planning and execution, the questions mentioned at the beginning of the sermon rise to the surface.

An Explanation of God's Actions

Joshua 6:21 (ESV) [21] Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword.

Three foundational truths for understanding and answering these objections:

1. As the all-powerful and entirely sovereign Creator, God has absolute rights of ownership.
 - a. **Genesis** – God created all things – **Psalm 24:1(ESV)** The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein”
 - b. God, as God, can do as he wishes – **Psalm 115:3 (ESV)** Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.
 - c. **Isaiah 64:8 (ESV)** But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.
 - d. **Romans 9:21 (ESV)** [21] Has the potter no right over the clay ...?
2. God is just and righteous in all that he does
 - a. **Genesis 18:25 (ESV)** [Abraham asks] “ ... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” [the implied answer is YES!]
 - b. **Romans 9:14 (ESV)** [14] What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!

- c. Even the question “Is God just in having the Canaanites destroyed?” does not make any sense.
 - i. God is the standard of goodness, righteousness, and justice. There is no external standard which we can apply to God to see if He measures up.
 - ii. If God does it, it is good! If God does it, it is just! If God does it, it is righteous! This is true despite what our human inclinations and sensibilities suggest to us.
 - iii. To think otherwise is to elevate yourself above Scripture and thus elevate yourself above God

- 3. All of us deserve God's just punishment; none of us deserve His mercy.
 - a. **Romans** – “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”—“None is righteous, no, not one”—and “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 3:23; 3:10; 6:23).

 - b. **Wayne Grudem** – none of us get what we deserve, we get grace
 - i. Hear – birds chirping or coffee percolating vs. gnashing of teeth and screams of pain

 - ii. Feel – the softness of a blanket or the warmth of your spouse vs. searing pain of burning flesh

 - iii. See – a beautiful sunrise or a colourful bird vs. flames, fire, darkness

 - iv. Smell – lilac bushes or freshly baked muffins vs. sulphur and burning flesh

John Piper: God gives life and he takes life. Everybody who dies, dies because God wills that they die.

God is taking life every day. He will take 50,000 lives today. Life is in God's hand. God decides when your last heartbeat will be, and whether it ends through cancer or a bullet wound. God governs.

So God is God! He rules and governs everything. And everything he does is just and right and good. God owes us nothing.

If I were to drop dead right now, or a suicide bomber downstairs were to blow this building up and I were blown into smithereens, God would have done me no wrong. He does no wrong to anybody when he takes their life, whether at 2 weeks or at age 92.

God is not beholden to us at all. He doesn't owe us anything.

Now add to that the fact we're all sinners and deserve to die and go to hell yesterday, and the reality that we're even breathing today is sheer common grace from God.

Three truths specific to the situation in Joshua for answering these objection:

1. The Canaanites were enemies of God who deserved to be punished
 - a. Canaan was not full of innocent or even neutral people – they were enemies of God
 - b. **Genesis 15:12-16 (ESV)** [12] As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. [13] Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.

[14] But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. [15] As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. [16] And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

- c. Iniquity of the Canaanites – **Numbers 33:50-52 (ESV)** [50] And the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, saying, [51] “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, [52] then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you and destroy all their figured stones and destroy all their metal images and demolish all their high places.
2. Canaanites needed to be removed from the land to preserve God's people
 - a. **Deuteronomy 7:1-4 (ESV)** [1] “When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, [2] and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. [3] You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, [4] for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.

3. This situation was specific to the time and is not reproducible
 - a. Israel lived in a theocracy in which there was no division of church and state
 - b. A citizen of the nation must remain true to the covenant – purity was essential for the people and for the land
 - c. We are no longer a theocracy – According to 1 Peter 2:11 we are pilgrims and exiles
 - d. Nothing like the conquest of Canaan is permissible as commissioned by God for today