

## Before the King – Joshua, Judges & Ruth 2016

*Before the King – Joshua, Judges and Ruth:* Have you ever wondered what it would be like to live under a theocracy - a state ruled by the law of God? Why did God require the ancient church (children of Israel) to kill the inhabitants of the land of Canaan before taking possession of the land? Who was Ruth, and why is she important among personalities of scripture? These questions and more will be some of the topics that we explore together in the age before the king.

The objective of this class is: to gain a deeper understanding of the historical redemptive plan of God through the period before the Israelite Monarchy, and apply principles as revealed in three historical books to everyday Christian living.

*Deceit & Conquest* – Immediately following the scenario of the two mountains in which the blessing for obedience was pronounced on Mt. Gerizim and the curse on Mt. Ebal, the people of Gibeon reached out in deceit to the congregation of the Lord with a request for solidarity. Even though making an agreement with the inhabitants of the land was strictly forbidden, and Joshua and the elders made such an agreement in error, the agreement served as a divine catalyst from which cascading events leading to the conquest of the land would transpire. In this lesson we turn to examine chapters nine through twelve of Joshua and the various elements associated with the conquest of the land.

Part One: By Sight, not by Faith – The story of the deception of the Gibeonites is really a lesson in walking in light of our own human understanding instead of faithfully looking to God for his guidance and leading. It is interesting to note that the men of Gibeon had an opportunity to join confederacy with surrounding kings who were already mustering their troops for battle (9:1), but chose to seek solace in the house of the enemy (the people of God) instead. The scripture is clear that what motivated their actions was fear and faith. Fear because they saw what the people of Israel did to the cities of Jericho and Ai, and did not want their own fate to be the same as theirs. Faith, because they believed that the covenant keeping God who redeemed his people from Egyptian slavery and parted the waters of the Red Sea and the Jordan River would surely deliver even their own confederacy of kings into the hands of his people. The text reads, *“But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they on their part acted with cunning and went and made ready provisions and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, with worn-out patched sandals, and worn-out clothes. And all their provisions were dry and crumbly. And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, “We have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us” (9:3-7).* They were seeking a covenant that would by extension bring them under the protective oversight of the covenant God had made with his people. The reason for their request was later explained to Joshua in the following manner when he asked from where they came, *“They said to him, ‘From a very distant country your servants have come, because of the name of the Lord your God. For we have heard a report of him, and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan...” (9:9-10a).*

It is noteworthy that the reason they give for seeking to make a covenant with the people of Israel is because they heard of the name of the “Lord your God”. In Hebrew, they used the covenantal name of YHWH to refer to God. This shows that they were familiar with the unique covenantal relationship between Israel and God, and believed in the protective characteristics of this covenant. It is possible that their familiarity with the covenantal process which was one that was known at large throughout the ancient near east, gave them hope that they too would become a subsidiary to the covenant, and thereby be delivered from destruction. This is, in essence, what occurred. In verses fourteen and fifteen of our text we read, *“So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel of the Lord. And* Baney, Lesson 5 Winter/Spring 2016

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*Joshua made peace with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them”* (9:14-15). The key statement here is, “...but did not ask counsel of the Lord.” As people of faith who had journeyed forty years in the wilderness and had seen the marvelous hand of God working on their behalf, they might rightly be reprimanded for not first seeking counsel from God, but not by us. Who among us has not fallen prey to the same tactic of the enemy of our soul? When it appears we have every reason to trust our own instincts or senses about something, we too fall into the snare of walking by sight instead of by faith. Though we are not qualified to reprimand the OT people of God for this oversight, the scriptural account does reprimand us.

Proverbs 3:5-6 is very informative for the believer. Here we read, “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*” This timeless truth is just as critical a lesson to be learned for the modern people of God as it was for the generation of conquest. We are to walk by faith, and not by sight, because things are not always as they seem. However, it should also be noted that though they were spared from death and destruction, the people of Gibeon were required to be slaves to the tabernacle of God, serving before his altar by drawing water and hauling wood to be used in sacrifice (9:27). Later, there was an attempt under King Saul to slay the Gibeonites; consequently, the judgment of God was brought upon the kingdom of David until he executed justice on their behalf (2 Samuel 21:1-9).

Although the people of Gibeon would never become fully assimilated into the congregation of Israel as did Rahab and her house, the truth remains that they were embraced by the Lord God of Israel under whose wings they had come to confide. During the lifetime of David, he placed the tabernacle in the city of Gibeon, the home of the Gibeonites. It was here that they lived along with the priests and served God in the capacity covenantally mandated by Joshua. Centuries later when Judah returns from Babylonian captivity and rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah’s leadership, the Gibeonites were present helping to rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 3:7). Schaeffer is correct when he states, “If the Gibeonites could rely on an oath the Israelites made in the adverse circumstances of the Gibeonites’ deception, when the Israelites did not even ask God’s counsel, how much more confident can we be in God’s oath to us?”<sup>1</sup>

Part Two: A Day of Faith – After the Canaanite confederacy heard that Gibeon had joined solidarity with the people of Israel, Adoni-zedek the king of Jerusalem, initiated a call to form a federation with the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish and the king of Eglon and planned to attack Gibeon. When these five kings launched their attack against the Gibeonites, they sent to Joshua and said, “*Do not relax your hand from your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the hill country are gathered against us*” (10:6). Now, it would have been natural for Joshua to have seen this as providential: God had corrected his mistake. Why go up to help these people? A federation of Amorite kings would destroy them, and he would be free from violating his promise. However, this was not his response. Instead, Joshua went up and all the men of war with him to protect the Gibeonites. The Lord God promised that he would deliver the five armies of the Amorites into Joshua’s hands.

When one considers the providential occurrence of the events that followed immediately after Israel’s mistakes, we witness how God used his OT church in spite of their mistakes and even because of their mistakes in order to advance his kingdom. Would the five kings of the Amorites have formed a federation and attacked the people of Israel head-on if the people of Gibeon had not joined with Israel?

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<sup>1</sup> Schaeffer, Francis. *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History*. Pg. 162  
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Were the Amorites taking this course of action to prevent from being plucked off one at a time? In either case we know that God delivered the armies of five kings into the hands of his people at one time, and the context in which this deliverance occurred was the attack against the Gibeonites. There is a pastoral application that can here be made for the people of God. When we follow God and are faithful to the commitments we make in our life, God graciously and sovereignly works the mistakes we make into his plan of redemption for us and the truth of the gospel shines bright in spite of if not because of poorly made decisions. Now allow me to say with the Apostle Paul, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!” (Romans 6:1-2a).

There are at least two miraculous occurrences that made the destruction of the five armies possible. First, when the armies fled before the people of God, God sent giant hail stones upon them that killed them in their flight. Joshua 10:11 states, *“And as they fled before Israel, while they were going down the ascent of Beth-horon, the Lord threw down large stones from heaven upon them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died because of the hailstones, than the sons of Israel killed with the sword.”* Again, the destruction of the five armies cannot be attributed to the superior military ingenuity of Joshua, but rather to the divine presence of a covenantal God.

Secondly, when Joshua was in the process of pursuing the enemy but was running out of time because of the setting sun, he did something quite unique in the story of scripture: *“At that time Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, ‘Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the valley of Aijalon.’ And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies”* (10:12-13a). This should not crowd the boundaries of our faith as something impossible to believe if we truly believe that the one who created the sun and moon *ex nihilo* upholds them by the word of his mouth. Should it be considered impossible that the one who created all things and continues to sustain and oversee his creation could tweak every law of the universe at his sole discretion? Of course, this would not be normative, but nothing about the book of Joshua is normative. There is a certain flow to God’s redemptive historical work in scripture, and divine intervention into the created order should be considered no less possible today as then. God is still omnipotent; he can still do all things. May our prayer lives be ever flowing with the awareness of his limitless power.

Part Three: The Southern and Northern Campaigns – With the destruction of the armies of the five kings, Israel continued on to their cities and suburbs and completely destroyed every human being. In addition, Joshua fought with and destroyed Libnah, and Debir, two towns that were not part of the original five, but fell in the southern campaign nonetheless. As the text states, *“So Joshua struck the whole land, the hill country and the Negev and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but devoted to destruction all that breathed, just as the Lord God of Israel commanded”* (Joshua 10:40).

After the completion of the southern campaign, Joshua and all Israel returned to the camp at Gilgal; however, the greatest battles and exploits lay ahead. 11:1-5 states, *“When Jabin, king of Hazor, heard of this, he sent to Jobab, king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph, and to the kings who were in the northern hill country, and in the Arabah, south of Chinneroth, and in the lowland and in the Naphtoth-dor on the west, to the Canaanite’s in the east and the west, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivites under Hermon, in the land of Mizpah. And they came out with all their troops, a great horde, in number like the sand that is on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots. And all these kings joined their forces and came and Baney, Lesson 5 Winter/Spring 2016*

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*encamped together at the waters of Merom to fight against Israel.”* If there was ever a moment for Joshua to remember the words of Moses (Deuteronomy 31:7-8) it was now. The text describes the armies gathered to fight with Israel as being as numerous as the sand on the seashore. However, God was faithful. He assured Joshua, *“Do not be afraid of them, for tomorrow at this time I will give over all of them slain, to Israel”* (11:6). God was faithful to his promises, and delivered the great horde into the hands of his covenant people. Following this campaign, there were several kings and cities that remained against which Joshua fought. 11:18-20 reveals, *“Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. They took them all in battle. For it was the Lord’s doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the Lord commanded Moses.”*

Chapter twelve summarizes the list of kings and kingdoms that fell by the hands of the people of God. Verses one through six address the kingdoms of Og and Sihon on the other side of the Jordan, land that was given to Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh. Verses seven through twenty-four provide a list of kings that fell by the hand of Joshua and the people of God after crossing the Jordan. It has been noted that though the king of Jerusalem (Adoni-zedek) was killed by Joshua, the city of Jerusalem was not fully conquered until several generations later under the leadership of king David.<sup>2</sup>

Part Four: Conquest and Justice – It has not gone without observation that the divinely sanctioned conquest of the land of promise by the OT people of God would be considered unjust by most standards if it had happened in our own generation. After all, what separates the divinely sanctioned conquests of the Bible from the attempts at Jihad conducted by Muslim extremists of today? On what ethical basis are the two to be distinguished? If it would be unjust today for the church to forcibly require the conversion of all living within a specific locale and destroy all who refuse to do so (men, women and children), why was it not considered reprehensible to be commanded to do this very thing in the book of Joshua? To answer this question, we need to make the following points.

First, we should not make the mistake that some do when endeavoring to address this point by stating that the unique nature of God’s kingdom in the time of Joshua justified actions that would be morally condemned in our own day. Such a claim makes the moral law of God less of an eternal expression of his character and more of a temporal condolence of behavior acceptable within a specific epoch of time but unacceptable within others. This is simply not true. God’s law is a perfect and timeless reflection of his character. What is immoral today would have been immoral three and one half millennium past. Instead we should look to scripture itself for an explanation as to why this conquest was not only morally acceptable, but divinely commanded.

Secondly, to look at the Canaanites as undeserving of death (and the Israelites for that matter) is to ascertain an understanding of both the inhabitants of Canaan as well as all humanity that is simply untrue: that we are deserving of life. Indeed, in the grand courtroom of eternity there has never lived one descendent of Adam’s race (other than Christ) that is not deserving of death, else God would be equally unjust in allowing death to exist as he is perceived to be in commanding Israel to put the inhabitants of Canaan to the sword. As children of the enlightenment, it is difficult for us to see humanity in this way, but this is exactly how scripture sees us - as glorious ruins. Man is made in the image of God, but betrays that image with a heart inevitably bent on rebellion. The basis of human

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<sup>2</sup> Boice, James Montgomery. *Joshua: An Expository Commentary*. Pg. 87  
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worth is that we are all created in the image of God, *and* God has covenantally condescended to enter into a relationship with us that will ultimately restore the fallen image marred by sin to the far superior image of Christ the eternal Son. This is not to say that those individuals who are not believers have no value, for they too are made in the image of God. It is to say that our deservedness of life is independent of ourselves. There is a sense in which all of creation is deserving of life solely because of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. He is the second Adam under whom every created thing is subjected (Romans 8:19-21, 1 Corinthians 5:27-28). He is redeeming all things. Again, this does not mean that all people will be redeemed, but rather that God responds to mankind (even the unbelieving) graciously. Theologians call this *Common Grace*. Common Grace preceded the coming of Christ and is part of the over-arching Covenant of Grace of which Christ is center.

Now, how does all the above affect our understanding of God's command to put the inhabitants of Canaan to the sword? Because they were not the unjust recipients of something they did not deserve. Think, for instance, of the difference between the Hivites living elsewhere in Canaan and those inhabiting Gibeon. Those living elsewhere were not protected by the agreement between the elders of Israel and the Gibeonites. The Hivites living in Gibeon were protected to the point that God brought judgment on the reign of King David because the covenant of protection had been violated. Were they members of the covenant community (worshippers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob)? We have no reason to believe they were at least not in the same way as was Rahab and later Ruth. However, they were protected from death and destruction because of where they stood in relation to the covenant.

So, if this is true, why were the Israelites allowed and even commanded to slay all the Canaanites? What qualified them to do so? Earlier we referenced what scripture has to say about the event. We read in Genesis 15 when God made the covenantal promise of the land to Abraham and solidified it with an unbreakable oath, "*And they (the descendants of Abraham) shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete*" (Genesis 15:16). We see here that God demonstrated his mercy to the inhabitants of the land of Canaan for a period of four hundred years. This is not a God of injustice, but a God of mercy.

Furthermore, Moses reminded Israel, "*Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them (The Canaanites) out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob*" (Deuteronomy 9:4-5). There are two reasons here given for the Lord commanding Israel to slay the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. First, they are being used as the executioners of his justice against the sins of the Amorites. Second, God has a covenant with them, the full ramifications of which allow for the means of atonement, making Israel not the object of judgement because another has borne judgment on their behalf. In a similar vein, the NT states, "*Whoever believes in him (Christ, the substitutionary sacrifice), is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God*" (John 3:18). So all with whom God does not have a covenantal relationship (both OT and NT alike) are under condemnation, and it is only due to the mercy of a gracious God that they are not judged forthrightly.

Finally, there remains one additional reason given in scripture for the commanded slaying of all Canaanites, one that will have more significance for us as we progress throughout the story of scripture. Baney, Lesson 5 Winter/Spring 2016

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Exodus 23:32-33 states, *“You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”* In other words, the purity of the OT religion would be at stake if the people of God did not drive out the inhabitants of the land. The threat to the covenant relationship between God and his people that would be posited by the presence of idols required mitigation, i.e. the destruction of the inhabitants of the land.

This does not mean that genocide can be hereby justified on the grounds of a worthier occupant (as has been erroneously argued in the past). Rather, judgment is now given to none other than Christ (John 5:22). He and he alone has the right as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords to execute judgment. Nor does this mean that warfare, the killing of another under the circumstances of a just war, is not allowable. We should, however, exercise much caution as to the specific “wars” we define as just for killing of any kind is a result of the fall, and not part of the divine plan of the Creator for mankind.

Conclusion: This week we have explored a great array of material ranging from the danger of walking by sight instead of faith, the graciousness of God’s working in our lives in spite of or with our shortcomings, and the miraculous testifying to God’s omnipotence. We have seen the promises made by a covenant keeping God fulfilled in the life of ancient Israel and have discussed the issue of injustice that is evoked by the discussion of the conquest of Canaan. May God take what we have learned and instruct us to be faithful witnesses for him in our own generation.