

This morning I am in the sixth week of a sermon series I am doing on the Old Testament book of Joshua, the sixth book of the Bible. If you're unfamiliar with this book of the Bible, the historical context is that the Israelites, who were enslaved in Egypt, have been set free by God, using a man named Moses, with the plan of bringing them to the land of Canaan, a land which God had promised to their ancestor Abraham 600 years earlier. After the Israelites wander in the wilderness for 40 years as a result of their disobedience, Joshua leads the Israelites across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. There are essentially three parts to Joshua – the preparation for the Promised Land, the conquest of the Promised Land, and the division of the Promised Land. This week, we'll be in Joshua 9-12, looking at the last section of the conquest of the Promised Land. I don't plan to read the whole thing, just selected sections. My goal is to summarize what happened, and then to look at what this section has to teach us about the warfare we face today, which is spiritual in nature.

Joshua 9:1-2 - *Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things-- those in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Great Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites)-- ² they came together to make war against Joshua and Israel.*

So far, Joshua and the Israelites have destroyed Jericho and Ai, two military strongholds. As a result, the other kings are turning on them to wage war. One group, however, takes a different approach:

³ *However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, ⁴ they resorted to a ruse: They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. ⁵ The men put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy. ⁶ Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the men of Israel, "We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us." ⁷ The men of Israel said to the Hivites, "But perhaps you live near us. How then can we make a treaty with you?" ⁸ "We are your servants," they said to Joshua. But Joshua asked, "Who are you and where do you come from?" ⁹ They answered: "Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the LORD your God. For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt, ¹⁰ and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan-- Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth. ¹¹ And our elders and all those living in our country said to us, 'Take provisions for your journey; go and meet them and say to them, "We are your*

servants; make a treaty with us.'" ¹² This bread of ours was warm when we packed it at home on the day we left to come to you. But now see how dry and moldy it is. ¹³ And these wineskins that we filled were new, but see how cracked they are. And our clothes and sandals are worn out by the very long journey." ¹⁴ The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the LORD. ¹⁵ Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath. ¹⁶ Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them.

Remember, God has told them to destroy the idolatrous civilizations of Canaan so that they would not be a snare to them, leading them astray from God. Making a treaty with Gibeon goes against what they had been told to do.

Deuteronomy 7:1-4 - When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations-- the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you-- ² and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. ³ Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, ⁴ for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.

Why were they told that? Because they were to be destroyed because of their irredeemable wickedness.

The rest of the chapters recount battles against the various kings and armies

Joshua 11:18-23 - Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time. ¹⁹ Except for the Hivites living in Gibeon, not one city made a treaty of peace with the Israelites, who took them all in battle. ²⁰ For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²¹ At that time Joshua went and destroyed the Anakites from the hill country: from Hebron, Debir and Anab, from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua totally destroyed them and their towns. ²² No Anakites were left in Israelite territory; only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did any survive. ²³ So Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.

The Anakites mentioned in v. 22 are the ones that caused the original spies so much fear 40 years earlier, leading them to not enter the promised land. But in this passage, the author makes a point to say that they were destroyed. The Israelites take the land, and rested from war.

For those of you who struggle with the war element of this, and with God basically commanding Israel to wipe out the people of this region, I hear you, and I addressed this in depth two weeks ago. The quick summary is that:

1) God's judgment is not based on ethnicity but wickedness

In Genesis 15, God told Abraham that they would come into the land when the “sin of the Amorites will have reached its full measure.” When the inhabitants of Canaan reached a level of wickedness from which they would no longer repent, God would use the Israelites to bring His judgment on them, much like a surgeon removing a cancer from a body. Remember how Moses put it:

Deuteronomy 9:4-5 - After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. ⁵ It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

2) The goal was removing a wicked, idolatrous identity, not an entire people

The Bible uses “non-literal hyperbolic language,” where we read that a people are utterly destroyed, but then you find the people still living a few chapters later. The language is much like saying that “the Patriots completely destroyed the Jets” – it’s not meant to be taken literally. The goal was to wipe out an idolatrous identity so that it would not be a snare to them and disrupt the plan of salvation.

3) God has the right to take life, and death is not the end

God is the author of life and has a rightful claim on it as Creator. Therefore, humans can make no demands on how long a person ought to live on earth. In fact, our objection to people’s deaths

4) It is not a model to follow but is limited to a particular time and place in salvation history

Throughout the Bible, God's typical command to Israel was to pursue peace with other nations. But for a specific, relatively short, and strategic period, God sought to establish Israel in the land of Canaan, with a view to fulfilling His long-term, global plan of redemption. God would simultaneously punish a wicked people ripe for judgment. Not doing so would have erased humankind's only hope for redemption.

So Joshua 9-12 is a historical account of the taking of the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. But on this side of the resurrection, we do not live in a kingdom like Israel with the threat of warfare on every side. As Jesus said:

John 18:36 - Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

We do not belong to a kingdom like ancient Israel, but to a spiritual kingdom that transcends time and place. For this reason, I think it would benefit us the most to consider the wars we do fight, which are spiritual in nature, and what this passage has to teach us about that:

1) We are in a spiritual battle

In Joshua 9, the kings and their armies are all focused on destroying Israel. And God has told them from the beginning, do not play around, do not tolerate them, but destroy them, or they will lead you away from the one true God.

We may not be facing actual armies, but our battle is a spiritual one:

Ephesians 6:10-12 - Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Anyone feel like life is a struggle? There is a reason for that. There is an enemy, the devil or Satan, and there are demons, his fallen angels:

1 John 5:19 - We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

So do not be surprised that this life is hard! This is not a country club; it's a battleground.

1 Peter 4:12-13 - Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Why is life so hard? Because it is a battle. And there is one whose desire is to destroy you. We are in a battle.

This means that even when we are in an argument with another person, or when someone else is hurting us, we need to recognize that behind that is the work of the devil, doing his best to steal, kill, and destroy. And this means that our fight is not going to primarily involve the weapons of this world, but spiritual means.

2) Be alert, fighting with the gospel, prayer, and God's Word

1 Peter 5:8-9 - Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

The devil tries to get your eyes off the Lord. He is master of deception, an expert liar.

*John 8:44 - You belong to your **father**, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he **lies**, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the **father of lies**.*

In the beginning, he deceived Adam and Eve. And in Joshua 9, the Israelites are deceived by Gibeon into making a treaty. Why?

¹⁴ The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the LORD.

Satan doesn't try to destroy through frontal attack. He is much smarter than that. You can never take for granted that the enemy is done attacking you.

2 Corinthians 11:14 - *And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an **angel of light**.*

Satan is a master deceiver. Convinces you that God is not good, or that God is not real. Convinces you to spend your time on anything other than God, that other things will give you the joy, the satisfaction, and the meaning your heart is looking for.

He also accuses, which is a variation of the lying.

Revelation 12:10-11 - *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the **accuser** of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. ¹¹ They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death*

He tries to pull you away from God by accusing you.

And he tempts, which is yet another variation on lying.

Matthew 4:1-3 - *Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be **tempted** by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The **tempter** came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."*

This is a battle. God's command to Joshua, to completely destroy all who were wicked and irredeemable, because if he did not, then they would lead the people away from God, is still applicable today, even if our battle is spiritual. Do not entertain evil, do not listen to the lies, do not entertain the deception of the enemy, who masquerades as an angel of light, tempting, accusing, lying.

How do you survive the battle? Be alert, with your eyes on the Lord and His truth.

2 Corinthians 10:3-4 - *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.*

Be alert. Be dressed for battle.

Ephesians 6:10-18 - Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Stand on the gospel truth of who you are in Christ. And pray:

Matthew 26:41 - "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Pray – be vigilant, be in constant communication with the commander.

Know the truth – Jesus fought the enemy by saying again and again, “It is written.”

Romans 12:1-2 - Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Know the truth. Pray His Scripture. Declare it aloud as you resist the devil and submit to Jesus. Nothing can separate you from the love of God. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy, but Jesus has come that we might have life to the fullest. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, He has overcome the world. God is always working all things together for good for those

who love Him! Know the truth! Surround yourself with people who know the truth and can encourage you and pray for you! Stay alert and keep your eyes on the Lord!

3) Trust God to win the battle

Without fail, every time they trusted in the Lord, He won the battle for them. Even when it took a miracle.

We fight knowing that He has already won the battle:

Hebrews 2:14-15 - *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

1 John 4:4 - *You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*

John 16:33 - *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

And he has made a way for you to win the battle:

1 Corinthians 10:13 - *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

Not every battle will be won this side of heaven. But the ultimate battle is won, and there will be a final rest.

Revelation 14:12-13 - *This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. ¹³ Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."*

Revelation 20:10 - *And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

Revelation 21:1-5 - *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

The world is a battleground, so stay alert and trust the Lord to win the battle.