

Christ Community Covenant Church
Joshua—The Battle Begins
Joshua 1:1 – Judges 2:10
Pastor Mike Brown - October 23, 2011

Opening Prayer

Introduction—*Ushers distribute Bibles*

Today we will be talking about chapter 7 of The Story—Joshua and the Israeli's Battle for the Promised Land. I want to take a moment and remind us of the importance of stories. We seem to have an intrinsic desire to know from where we came; the increasing popularity of discovering our genealogy and web sites like Ancestry.com testify to that. Perhaps you know something of your lineage or a story about one of your parents, grandparents, or an ancestor farther back in your past. It seems important for us to know our stories because they tell us something of who our ancestors were and who we.

These stories we have been reading for these seven weeks are not simply stories of some foreign people and ancient history. They are our stories; for everyone who is a follower of Christ, they are stories of our ancestry, too! In Romans, chapter 11, Paul reminds us that we are grafted in to the line of Abraham. So, these are our stories, they tell us who *we* are, who our family members are, through them we come to know about our real Father—God—and who He is.

Caution: There is something about stories that make them especially hard to tell in this setting lecture; you see, stories are to be told and not lectured. Stories are to be wondered about, imagining what it must have been like, marveling at the deeds of our ancestors and of God. Above all, they are to engage us in a way that goes beyond simply knowing the facts...and that is hard to do in this format. That is one reason why it is important to let these stories engage you in a smaller setting.

So, let's very quickly review the stories we have heard and get ready to hear another one.

Review--Video

Review: [In the beginning, God created...then human-kind got radically anti-God, so God destroyed them with a flood, all but Noah, his three sons, and all of their wives. Some time later, God chose an obscure shepherd, Abram, and his wife Sarai, to have a child, Isaac, in their old age. And then that son had twins; God chose the youngest, Jacob, as heir to the promise. Jacob had kids by four women, two who were his wives, and from these kids came the twelve tribes of Israel. Because of the treachery of some of these kids, one of the brothers became second-in-command of all of Egypt. And he brought his family to live with them. Sadly, in time they became a threat to Egypt and Pharaoh enslaved them. After some 400 years, God sent Moses to lead them out of slavery. And this is known as the Exodus—it should be as important to us as it is to the Jews.]

As we heard last week, because they didn't trust God, the Hebrews wandered the desert for 40 years until Moses, Joshua, and Caleb were all that were left of the adult generation that had mistrusted God. Now, we pick up the story with the Jews poised to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land...and their leader, Moses, dies.

Joshua Takes Command

This has to be a bit disconcerting for Joshua. Maybe this comparison will help:





Moses would be known as the Jew's greatest prophet; he was God's friend. Joshua, as good as he was, was also "the guy after Moses."

God told him to be "strong and very courageous," and Joshua was. So, the Jews followed Joshua across the Jordan and into battle for the Promised Land.

God was immediately present to help because He stopped the flow of the Jordan River so that the nation of Israel could cross. Then Joshua, true to his life-long character, immediately stopped to build a memorial to God out of twelve stones.

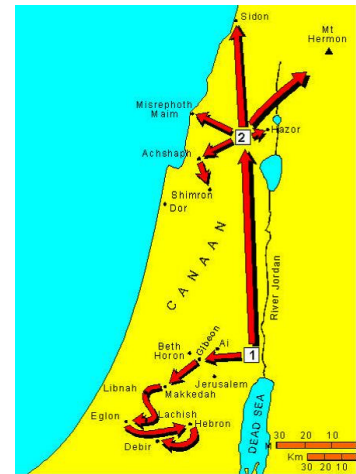
Next, he ensured all males were circumcised as commanded by God to Abraham as a sign of the covenant between God and his people.

Only then were they ready for battle, which took the form of two distinct campaigns. Let's look at how it went:

The Battle Begins



- **Palestine before Joshua**



- **Southern campaign**
 - **Jericho**
 - **Ai**
 - **Achan's sin & punishment**
 - **Treaty with Gibeonites**
 - **Battle with the five kings**
 - **Conquest completed**
- **Northern campaign**

- **God apportions the Promised Land**



- **Israel stops short**

- o **Joshua commands tribes to finish the job and they don't**
- o **Continued disobedience is the beginning of so much trouble!**
- o **Joshua dies**

Well, there you have it: the Battle for the Promised Land. It was never really much of a contest; the Israeli's had God on their side. Earlier I said that from these stories we learn about who God's people are—and that includes us—and who God is.

Knowing God—Lower Story View

On the surface this story is pretty simple. God spoke and His people responded well, aside from a few stumbles...oh, and that rather large mistake at the end about not finishing well, which will plague the Israeli's throughout their history, as we will see beginning next week.

In this chapter we see many people killed, including old people, women, and children...God even directs that the animals be killed (e.g., Joshua 6:17, 21).

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

This seems to fly in the face of what we know about modern combat, after all, there is the Geneva Convention which sets forth how we are to treat non-combatants, right? How can we reconcile God's love with God's wrath so clearly on display in this story?

Several explanations have been offered for what seems like an ethnic cleansing by God, let's look at a few.

1) Explaining (or Defending) God's Actions¹

a) Patience of God

Recall in Genesis 15:16, God knew more than 600 years earlier that the Amorites would continue to sin against Him. We read these verses through the eyes of middle-class Americans who are exposed to little violence. The ancient accounts of cultural depravity, particularly concerning human sacrifice are too graphic to read here...the graphic violence on TV pales in comparison; our modern sensibilities would be too offended to hear. At some point it seems a culture is too far gone to respond to God (see Romans 1:18-32; they are worthy of death). Perhaps this explains the necessity of the flood, too.

b) Exaggerated rhetoric

Ancient texts of the time suggest that the phrasing used in Joshua was common at the time and understood to be hyperbole used to convey that the enemy was roundly defeated. We see an indication of this in Deuteronomy 7:2-5 where God tells Israel that they should "utterly destroy" the Hittites and in the next breath warns Israel not to intermarry with them. In Exodus 34:12-13 God's emphasis is on destroying the artifacts of the pagan religions and not the people themselves. This might also be the case in the Promised Land.

c) The cities mentioned in Joshua were military garrisons

Archeological digs show no evidence of civilian populations at Jericho or Ai. Again, the rhetoric was often hyperbole. In addition, archeological finds reveal no widespread destruction of cities; rather, it seems to indicate that the Israelis generally drove out inhabitants, infiltrated their land, or simply occupied the land (E.g., Judges 13:1-7; 16:10; 17:12).

d) We should want a God of wrath

Recall some of the leaders of atrocities in our time, the real ethnic cleansing in some of the African and Eastern European nations. We want punishment for those people! Our sense of justice demands a God of wrath. Without judgment there is no justice. So, if the people were as bad as some evidence suggests, then we should want God's justice, which means God's wrath.



So perhaps these reasons help us better understand God's actions in these battles. But, wait! When we really stop to think about it, wasn't it God who created these people that He then killed for their pagan

¹ See Paul Copan's *Is God a Moral Monster?* for more on this.

ways. Moreover, what about the all those seemingly innocent people who have suffered throughout the ages, and what about the world today...including many of us? Suddenly, our explanations become a little less satisfying, and our questions get deeper and more personal.

2) Deeper Question about God

Let's look at a deeper question:

a) Shouldn't God be able to stop evil/suffering?

I'm sure you have heard this statement; perhaps you've even said it yourself. The argument is generally framed this way:

- God is all powerful (omnipotent) and should have the power to stop evil/suffering;
- God is all knowing (omniscient) and should know how to stop evil/suffering;
- God is all caring (omnibenevolent) and should want to stop evil/suffering.

Since God doesn't stop evil/suffering, the argument goes, then He must not exist.

Well, hang on to your seats while I dispel a myth about God. While He is indeed omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, He cannot do just anything He pleases. We do God and others a disservice when we casually throw around the phrase that God can do anything He pleases. It is simply not true. For example, He cannot act against His nature; so, God cannot lie. Neither can God make a square circle. And, it seems that logic, which is also from God, tells us that God cannot make free moral agents, like us, without also allowing the possibility for us to choose against Him (sin). This is the so-called "free will" defense of God and is actually a well-accepted argument in the world of philosophy.

But, this only leads us to another, deeper question.

b) Why this way, God?

Here we confront the deepest question that, if we are attentive to ourselves, nags at us all. Why, God? Why this way of pain and suffering? Couldn't You have come up with a better way? It is as much pleading as questioning...

If we are honest, we admit that our best efforts at explaining God's actions whether in this story or in the world around us and, most importantly, in our own lives leaves us feeling unsatisfied deeply within ourselves.

3) The Problem with the Lower Story Approach

Here is the problem, as I see it. Reasoning *to God from* what we see can lead us to a dangerous place; it is a lower story approach to God. C.S. Lewis once wrote of us putting God in the dock, the British term for the place the defendant stands during a trial. Lewis was concerned that we tend to look at the God of history, the world around us today, and the state of our lives and then *we judge God* and His worthiness to be God based on our standards.

You must hear the hissss of the snake in this (Genesis 3:1-5); we suffer from wanting to be God, remember? With that we wanted to determine right and wrong, remember?

The problem with trying to *reason to God* is that all of the atheists and all honest Christians among us will admit that our best efforts to explain God's actions of allowing evil and then killing the participants in it often leave us deeply troubled. At best our answers are incomplete.

But we continue to try because we don't want to face the fundamental reality that we reenact Adam and Eve's of distrusting God every day in our own lives. So, rather than us judging God and grumbling to Him for this world, God has every right to look at us and ask, "You got what you wanted. So, how's it going for ya?" Thankfully, He offered us a way, the Way—Jesus.



Knowing God—Upper Story View

How do we proceed? We must mount the stairs and try to look at the story of Joshua and the conquest so the Promised Land from the upper story, from God's perspective. You see, the Bible doesn't try to prove God; the Bible presupposes God—and here is what these seven chapters of His story tells us about Him so far:

1) Reasoning from God (upper story view)

a) God is Sovereign

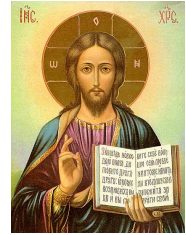
Deeper Questions

•Shouldn't God stop evil/suffering?

•Why this way, God!

Knowing God—The Upper Story

- God is Sovereign
- God created
- God has a plan
- God owns the land
- God is long suffering
- God chooses who He chooses



i) Genesis 1:1—In the beginning God created...

We are His image. He knowingly created us with the foreknowledge that we would sin. Remember in Genesis 1 when again and again during the creation process, God says, "It is good." At the end of the of the final creative act on day six, He proclaimed what He made "very good." The Hebrew word for "good" can mean "pleasing" or "appropriate." In either case, God is pleased with His creation; in other words, even knowing what was to come through Adam and Eve, He created what He intended to create.

ii) Genesis 3:14-15—God has a plan

Even before God pronounced the curse on humankind, He announced His plan for redeeming us to Him; the rest of the Bible is the outworking of His plan.

iii) Genesis 12:7—The land is God's to give and take

God promises to Abram land occupied by other people.

iv) Genesis 15:16—God is long suffering

God waited more than 600 years before initiating this battle to route paganism among the Amorites.

v) Deuteronomy 7:7-9—Nothing special about the Jews, God chose them

God chooses whom He chooses for His glory (see Romans 9:9-26).

b) God is Faithful

In the past weeks you have heard the attribute of "withedness" applied to God. God with us. We have seen it throughout these seven chapters. I think this chapter expands our understanding. It is possible to say you will be with someone and do so, but be of no benefit or even be an impediment (do we sometimes think this of God?). Not only was God with Joshua and the Jews, but He was with them in the exact way He promised He would be. Joshua says this (Joshua 23:14; pg 100):

And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you.

God was not only with Israel, but God kept His promises.

- o Withedness + kept promises (trustworthy-ness) = faithfulness.

c) God is Wrathful

We have had glimpses of God's wrath in the preceding chapters, particularly with the flood that wiped out most of humanity. It seems more in our face here, and it will be a big part of what is to come in subsequent chapters, including the final chapters when God returns for final judgment.

d) And We Know Jesus

When we read this battle we have Jesus and the Holy Spirit. ***I am one with the Father by the power of the Spirit who unites me with Christ.*** This means that:

- o We repent of our sins ***in Christ*** because we cannot adequately do it ourselves, He did it for us (Luke 3:3, 21)
- o We are forgiven ***in Christ*** because He paid the price for my sin that I cannot pay even over an eternity 2Corinthians 5:21);
- o We fulfill the requirement of the Law ***in Christ*** because He fulfilled the Law for us (Romans 8:3-4);
- o We have hope ***in Christ*** of continued life, which gives ultimate meaning to life now (1Corinthians 15:12-19).

Therefore, it is only in Christ that we can read His book.

Sadly, our unbelieving relatives and friends can only understand God through the first set of arguments I gave, the lower story view. It is all they have. This stuff of Christ is foolishness to them (Psalm 14:1; 1Corinthians 15:18-25).

Knowing God—The Upper Story

- *God is Faithful
- *Withedness + trustworthiness = faithfulness
- *Joshua 23:14

Knowing God—The Upper Story

- *God is Faithful
- *Withedness + trustworthiness = faithfulness
- *Joshua 23:14
- *God is Wrathful

Knowing God—The Upper Story

- *Jesus and the Holy Spirit
- *In Christ we can repent of our sins
- *In Christ we are forgiven
- *In Christ we can fulfill the law
- *In Christ we have hope
- *In Christ we experience the love of our Father

Our Response

In his farewell address to Israel (101, Joshua 24:14-15, ESV), Joshua said this:

Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your

eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

And the people answered (101, Joshua 24:16-18):

Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods, for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. And the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God."

But Joshua knew them better than they knew themselves. Just as in Moses' farewell address (Deuteronomy 31:14-32:47) Joshua knew the people would ultimately fail (Joshua 24:19).

You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins.

This chapter of *The Story* is entitled, "The Battle Begins" and the lower story reference is to the battle for the Promised Land. The upper story reference is to the spiritual battle for our hearts and minds. Joshua knew his people and knew they would fail. Most would never come to understand that God wanted their hearts and not their sacrifice (Psalm 51:16-17).

I used to say that God never answers that fundamental question of "Why?" I now believe that God does answer the "Why?" question, and He answers it every day. When we ask the "Why?" question, God doesn't answer in words; rather, again and again He shows us Himself as he has done repeatedly to these Israelis.

"Why?" we ask, we plead. God replies, "Because I Am Who I Am" (Exodus 3:14). What bothers me is how I often do not like that answer. But this story and the rest of Scripture refuses to let me hide from this battle within my very soul. The writer of Hebrews says:

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:12-13, ESV)

My response to God's story forces me to choose: will I stand before Him, naked and exposed, crying out, "I believe. Help me with my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). Or, like Adam and Eve, will I attempt to hide my nakedness with a fig leaf of my own construction. Through these stories the choice is ever before us. And through these stories, God is continually calling to us, "Choose life!" (Deuteronomy 30:19; Luke 13:34).

Silence

Perhaps you, like me, struggle with what Scripture reveals about your own heart. Our only answer is to choose God and stand before Him in humility, naked and exposed. I'm going to ask you to take a couple of minutes and stand before God with whatever it is that He wants to expose in you. Have the courage to stand before Him as you are in your nakedness and say simply, "Here I am, O Lord. Thank you for loving me."

Song

We are going to sing, "How Deep the Father's Love for Us." Listen to the upper story perspective...

Offertory Prayer

"Why should I gain from His reward? To this I have no answer."

Benediction

Joshua 24:15

Last week we passed out blue pledge cards for you to consider. If you didn't get one, they are in your bulletin again this week. I'm not going to ask you to give them to us; rather, I'm going to challenge you to give them to each other in your small group, or to another trusted Christ follower.

Dare to say to another person, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Hold me accountable to that vow." And then begin a life of real joy, a truly abundant life in Christ.