

## **Divine Judgment Joshua 10:16-43**

This passage – indeed, the entire book of Joshua – raises troubling issues about divine sanction for war and violence. History demonstrates conclusively that humans are a murderous race: it has been said that we are the only species that kills for the sport of it. Rarely does a decade go by without a new and egregious demonstration of that sad reality. But it is all the more disturbing to consider the prospect that God sanctions such violence. We are rightly unsettled by Muslim militants who invoke Allah to justify murderous ways. Is the book of Joshua guilty of the same?

### **Day 1: Joshua 10:16-43 We cannot legitimately hide from the issue**

We cannot readily hide from this issue when reading the book of Joshua, much less, when reading these particular verses. Ten times in fewer than 30 verses, we read that Joshua killed every living thing in various cities: vv20,26,28, 30,32,33,34,37,39. Six times the text ascribes Israel's victory to the Lord (vv19,25,30,32,40), culminating in v42: "All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered in one campaign, because the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel."

In subsequent readings, we will address the challenge posed by this theme. For today, though, we draw an important lesson for the contemporary church from the simple fact of these statements. Academic sociologists and social anthropologists who study contemporary Christianity – even conservative churches – note that we have largely become squeamish, and often entirely silent, about divine judgment.

God is now more commonly a friend, a lover, even a therapist: he cares about us, is deeply devoted to us, listens to our sorrows and heals our pain. All this is true, at least to some extent, but it is neither a complete nor balanced portrait of God. Scripture, including Joshua and not least this portion of Joshua 10, insists that God is more ... that he holds accountable, that he often punishes the guilty, and that he sometimes inflicts even ultimate sanction, as he deems appropriate.

We consider some of the justifications for this in subsequent days. For today it suffices to note that the Bible is not squeamish about this reality. In fact, it broadcasts the point clearly, loudly, repeatedly. If we have a problem with it, we may be worshipping a different God than Scripture proclaims.

### **Day 2: Genesis 15:1-21 This is not genocide (part 1)**

Genesis 15 records Abraham's second encounter with God. The first came in

Genesis 12:1-3, when God made him three promises: (a) innumerable descendants, (b) a land of their own, and (c) through him to bless the rest of the world. Here Abraham seeks confirmation of these promises. In vv13-16, God explains that they will not receive the land yet, and explains why. They will live as immigrants and slaves for four hundred years. Only then will God deliver Israel from Egyptian captivity and settle them in Canaan. Why the wait? Because “the sin of the Amorities has not yet reached its full measure.”

This tells us two things. First, the conquest is not genocide. God does not command that Joshua kill the Canaanites because of their ethnicity. Instead, it is divine judgment: God decrees their destruction due to their sin. Whenever the Canaanites come up for mention in the Old Testament, they are characterized as a wicked people (e.g., Leviticus 18:24-25; 20:22-24; Deuteronomy 18:12; 1 Kings 14:24). In particular, their worship of their gods was especially abhorrent, including both ritual prostitution and child sacrifice. God removes them from the land as judgment.

Secondly, this passage underscores God’s mercy and patience, even with the despicable Canaanites. He gave them an additional four hundred years to repent, before he determined to wipe them from the face of the earth. Moreover, during those four hundred years, his own people languished in exile and oppression for lack of a country to call home. On both counts, God demonstrates his patience and mercy toward the Canaanites. So this is not vicious genocide ... it is well-deserved judgment held off by incredible patience.

### **Day 3: 2 Peter 3:3-9 A lesson for those who do not know Christ**

A millennium later, the apostle Peter made a similar point to his own generation, in the first-century AD. Jesus had warned – and the church had preached – that he would return in judgment. When that return delayed four decades or more, many mocked the threat: “Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything does on as it has since the beginning of creation” (3:4). Peter responds, first, that the Creator God has already destroyed the world once, in the days of Noah (3:5-6). And so he can be counted upon to do so again, destroying the wicked (3:7). The delay is not evidence that this claim is false; it is evidence of God’s extraordinary patience: “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

God’s patience with the Canaanites lasted four hundred years, but eventually it came to an end in their destruction. So far, his patience has lasted two thousand years since the crucifixion of Christ. The length of this delay is a measure of his extraordinary patience, providing opportunity for repentance. But let seekers and non-believers note: that patience has a limit; it will not

endure forever, but will end in the destruction of the unrepentant.

#### **Day 4: Leviticus 18:21-24 (cf. 20:1-5) This is not genocide (part 2)**

In addition to yesterday's reading, a second line of argument clearly demonstrates that the destruction of the Canaanites was an act of judgment, not genocide: God threatens the same judgment against his own people if they commit the same sins.

After a long list of prohibited practices, God warns Israel not to commit the same sins. It was due to such wickedness, he explains, that he drove the Canaanites out of the land. If Israel does similarly, so will God: "If you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you."

This is exactly what happened to Israel, twice. In the midst of political turmoil, the nation split in two, with ten clans forming the northern kingdom of Israel, and two clans, the southern kingdom of Judah. Both north and south drifted away from God, and into sin. God sent his prophets to the north, to call the nation back to holiness and justice, but they refused. So in 722BCE, God summoned the Assyrian army to destroy the Israel and to drag its people into exile. God sent his prophets to the south, to call the nation back to holiness and justice, but they, too, refused. So in 586BCE, God summoned the Babylonian army to destroy Judah and to drag its people into exile.

God did not destroy the Canaanites because of their ethnicity, nor did he save Israel despite its ethnicity. He judges sin, whether the sinner be ethnically Canaanite or Israelite. God is righteous, not racist.

#### **Day 5: Romans 8:12-14 A lesson for those who profess Christ**

We do well to heed God's warning to the Israelites. Somehow the idea has circulated widely that so long as we believe in Jesus, then he forgives our sin, and we can live pretty much as we want with impunity. (This is never, of course, advocated as the ideal state, but it is often presented as a tolerable state.)

To the contrary, Scripture teaches that the grace of God is two-fold. For one, Christ did indeed die to atone for our sins, taking the judgment due us. For the other, Christ gives us his Spirit to transform and empower us in the battle against sin.

So in one respect, our situation is comparable to ancient Israel's: if we live like the Canaanites/the world, we will die with the Canaanites/the world: "If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die."

At the same time, our situation is decisively different from theirs: they were not transformed by the Spirit, but we have been. So we have a powerful asset in the battle against sin that they lacked: "If by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13).

**Day 6: Romans 5:6-10 This is judgment ... but it need not be!**

So we see that God does not condone genocide; he judges sin. In judging, he is just: he does not favor one ethnicity or people over another. He requires the same of all: that they worship him and treat others rightly. And he is consistent: he requires the same in the Old Testament as in the New. He requires the same of Israelites as of Canaanites; the same of Christians as of agnostics and atheists.

Yet while the first Joshua brings only judgment in chapter 10, the second Joshua ("Jesus" is the Greek version of the Hebrew name) brings opportunity for salvation. Jesus comes the first time, not to judge, but to atone for sin and to offer salvation – with transformation – to sinners.

But this helps only those who are aware of it, only those who hear the message. There remain a great many people today in much the same predicament as the Canaanites, both in this country and even more overseas, people who neither worship God nor live rightly. God holds off judging to provide them opportunity to repent. But for them to repent, they must hear the gospel. And for that to happen, someone must speak.

Someone like you.

Perhaps even you.