

March 10, 2024

Sermon Manuscript

Joshua 11:1-15, 12:7-24 (NIV)

11:¹ When Jabin king of Hazor heard of this, he sent word to Jobab king of Madon, to the kings of Shimron and Akshaph, ² and to the northern kings who were in the mountains, in the Arabah south of Kinnereth, in the western foothills and in Naphoth Dor on the west; ³ to the Canaanites in the east and west; to the Amorhorsesites, Hittites, Perizzites and Jebusites in the hill country; and to the Hivites below Hermon in the region of Mizpah. ⁴ They came out with all their troops and a large number of horses and chariots—a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. ⁵ All these kings joined forces and made camp together at the Waters of Merom to fight against Israel.

⁶ The Lord said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them, slain, over to Israel. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots.”

⁷ So Joshua and his whole army came against them suddenly at the Waters of Merom and attacked them, ⁸ and the Lord gave them into the hand of Israel. They defeated them and pursued them all the way to Greater Sidon, to Misrephoth Maim, and to the Valley of Mizpah on the east, until no survivors were left. ⁹ Joshua did to them as the Lord had directed: He hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots.

¹⁰ At that time Joshua turned back and captured Hazor and put its king to the sword. (Hazor had been the head of all these kingdoms.)

¹¹ Everyone in it they put to the sword. They totally destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed, and he burned Hazor itself.

¹² Joshua took all these royal cities and their kings and put them to the sword. He totally destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded. ¹³ Yet Israel did not burn any of the cities built on their mounds—except Hazor, which Joshua burned. ¹⁴ The Israelites carried off for themselves all the plunder and livestock of these cities, but all the people they put to the sword until they completely destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed. ¹⁵ As the Lord commanded his servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and Joshua did it; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses.

...

^{12:} Here is a list of the kings of the land that Joshua and the Israelites conquered on the west side of the Jordan, from Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon to Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir. Joshua gave their lands as an inheritance to the tribes of Israel according to their tribal divisions. ⁸ The lands included the hill country, the western foothills, the Arabah, the mountain slopes, the wilderness and the Negev. These were the lands of the Hittites, Amorites,

Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. These were the kings:

⁹ the king of Jericho, one; the king of Ai (near Bethel), one; ¹⁰ the king of Jerusalem, one; the king of Hebron, one; ¹¹ the king of Jarmuth, one; the king of Lachish, one; ¹² the king of Eglon, one; the king of Gezer, one; ¹³ the king of Debir, one; the king of Geder, one; ¹⁴ the king of Hormah, one; the king of Arad, one; ¹⁵ the king of Libnah, one; the king of Adullam, one; ¹⁶ the king of Makedah, one; the king of Bethel, one; ¹⁷ the king of Tappuah, one; the king of Hopher, one; ¹⁸ the king of Aphek, one; the king of Lasharon, one; ¹⁹ the king of Madon, one; the king of Hazor,

one; ²⁰ the king of Shimron Meron, one; the king of Akshaph, one; ²¹ the king of Taanach, one; the king of Megiddo, one; ²² the king of Kedesh one, the king of Jokneam in Carmel, one; ²³ the king of Dor (in Naphoth Dor), one; the king of Goyim in Gilgal one, ²⁴ the king of Tirzah one; thirty-one kings in all.

Joshua 24:1-12 (NIV)

24:¹ Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God.

² Joshua said to all the people, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods. ³ But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, ⁴ and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his family went down to Egypt.

⁵ “Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. ⁶ When I brought your people out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. ⁷ But they cried to the Lord for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the wilderness for a long time.

⁸ “I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land. ⁹ When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. ¹⁰ But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand.

¹¹ “Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. ¹² I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow.

John 18:33-38a (NIV)

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

³⁴ “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”

³⁵ “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

³⁶ Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

³⁷ “You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

³⁸ “What is truth?” retorted Pilate.

Israel's Conquest, Pt. 2: Toward Christ's Kingdom

Today we continue with a consideration of the account of Israel's conquest of the Promised Land in the book of Joshua. This comes out of a broader focus I've ended up taking this Lent on the Violence of God in the Old Testament. Many understandably question and are troubled by how our good and loving God can be associated with such gratuitous violence against humankind in some passages of the Old Testament. An example from our reading today being in Joshua 11:14, when the Israelites put to the sword everyone in the city of Hazor, and (quote) "not sparing anyone that breathed."

Well, on our first Wednesday night Lenten teaching, I introduced a framework for grappling with the violence of God in the Old Testament derived from the work of theologian Chris Green.¹ And to summarize Green's framework, He warns against just throwing out or avoiding scriptures that seem to depict God as violent (option A) and instead he recommends approaching these passages with the combination of three principles:

- Principle B: God is God and we are not, so we can trust that He is good and just even if it remains a mystery how
- Principle C: In Biblical history, God revealed himself gradually to humankind, and not in full until the life and teaching of Jesus.
- And Principle D: there may be something more going on in the passage that meets the eye, including that it may be intended to test us. So, if we are disturbed at the violence of God that we see in some scripture, this is actually good, because it indicates we're the love of Christ is having an effect on us.
- But because none of these three options are fully adequate on their own, what Green ultimately suggests integrating these three options, but with an emphasis on considering how it relates to Jesus and our life with Him.

And so, this is what I've been doing so far in my Sunday sermons in Lent.

- On the First Sunday of Lent, I tackled the most disturbing example of God perpetrating violence against human beings in the Flood narrative of Genesis 6 to 9, using Green's framework.
- Then, last Sunday we began looking at the account of Israel's Conquest of the Promised Land known as Canaan, which Joshua led in response to God's command to totally destroy the peoples there.² But, drawing from the study of Matthew Lynch, we saw how Joshua actually

Summary of Chris Green's presentation on Responses to the Violence of God in the Old Testament

- **OPTION A:** Tear It Out of the Bible [heretical option: Marcionism]
 - Ignore difficult Old Testament passages
 - Decide there is a mean Old Testament God and a separate, loving New Testament God. [Penal Substitutionary Atonement arguably does this]
- **OPTION B:** God is God and we are not.
 - God does what God does, who are we to question?
 - Weaker Version: God was good in it, but it is a mystery how.
- **OPTION C:** God revealed himself gradually in the Bible
 - Jesus is the fullness of God's self-revelation
 - In the Old Testament, God is showing *some* of Himself, but choosing to work with people where they are by letting them think what they do at that time and then later teaching better thinking (ultimately in Christ)
- **OPTION D:** More than meets the eye
 - The historicity or depiction of God in troubling Old Testament stories is not as important about what God is doing now, spiritually, in our relationship with Christ.
- **Option E (the Best):** Leave behind option A and integrate options B, C & D, with the weight on how it relates to JESUS.

¹ Video and manuscript at www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/ot-violence

² Deuteronomy 7:1-6, 21-26 (NIV)

(Moses said to the people of Israel) ¹ 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 children away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. ⁵ This is what you are to do to them:

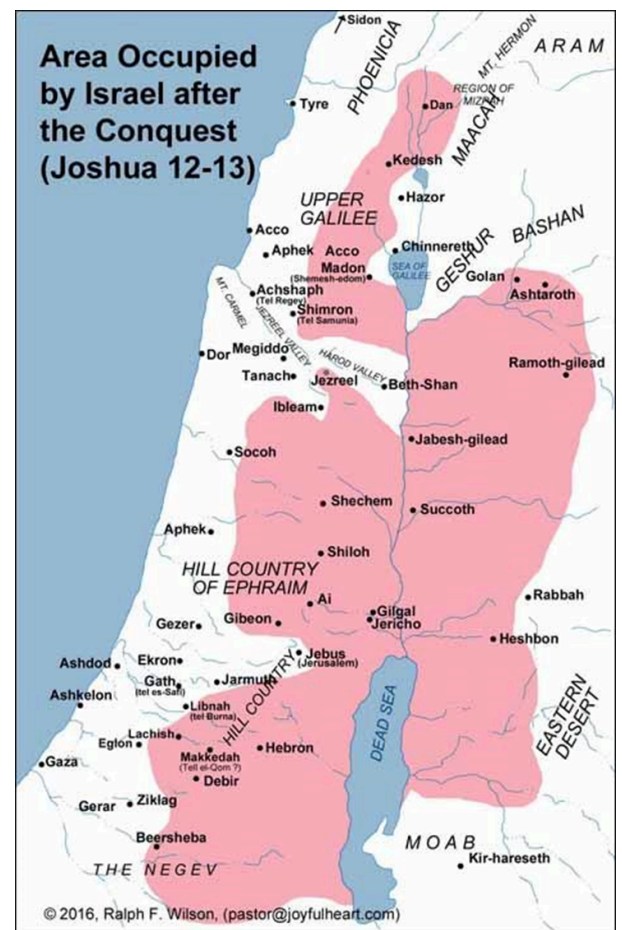
includes 2 accounts: the Majority Report and the Minority Report. The Majority Report's version includes accounts of the Israelites bringing about total destruction on cities like Jericho and Ai, and that's what everyone tends to imagine when they think of the conquest. But then there are other passages that comprise a different account - and paint another picture - that indicates the Majority Account is a bit more caricature than history. Some of the cities the Israelites had "destroyed completely" are described later as still being ruled by Canaanites; there are indications that Jericho might not have been much more than a military outpost with a hundred or so soldiers; and the driving out of Canaanites seems to have been very gradual and far from ever complete. But even if the violent Majority Report was a caricature of history, it still served an important purpose for the Israelites that the book of Joshua was compiled and edited for almost a thousand years later in exile: living in captivity in Babylon: encouraging them that God would fight for them and be faithful to His promises, and of the importance of remaining obedient to faithful to Him while living among worshippers of other gods. And the purpose of these two reports that are in tension - what it has to do with us following Jesus today is it can serve as a roadmap for us to navigate our continued struggle against sin and cooperate with Jesus' gradual plan to make us more like himself.³

So that should get us all caught up with where we've been so far in this series.

And today is part two on the Conquest, as I want to apply Green's framework and the studies of Matthew Lynch to reveal yet another layer of what the conquest has to do with Jesus. And to that end, here is the good news I want to unpack today: The good news is that with the conquest of Canaan, God was continuing to lead His people toward the opportunity that is now ours in Christ: to turn away from hoping in the imperfect ways of worldly power and *toward* learning to trust in the perfect love of Christ's kingdom.

What I want to show today is that, in addition to the tension in Joshua we looked at last week, between the Majority and Minority reports there are some further, significant hints that Israel's conquest of the Promised Land is not a story about the rise of yet another worldly kingdom or nation, like all the others that have littered history. And the two readings from Joshua that I chose today are meant to highlight how what God was doing with the Israelites was different.

The **first hint** that what God is doing through Israel is about something *other than* the exercise of worldly power is the way God focuses Israel's attention on the kings of royal cities. In the chapter 11 reading, verse 12 says "¹² Joshua took all these royal cities and their kings and put them to the sword." Now, what is this talking about? Well, you might be surprised to learn that during this period, the empire that really controlled the region of Canaan was *Egypt*. The Royal Cities in Canaan were basically



Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. ⁶ For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession...

³ You can find all of sermons and the homily mentioned above here: <https://www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/ot-violence>

administrative centers for a district - sorta like a county seat today - except they were each ruled by a warlord king, who would keep the district under control for Egypt. If you look at the map, before the Israelites showed up most of the cities it shows were run by one of these Egyptian-controlled warlord king. Well, that's sort of an issue - isn't it? - since you'll remember that in the Exodus God had freed Israel from slavery in Egypt - with Moses as His leader - through ten plagues and the parting of the Red Sea. And then Israel ended up having to wander in the desert for 40 years, but for all of that time the Exodus remained incomplete, because remember: the goal of the Exodus was for God to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land of Canaan. But if Canaan was being controlled by Egypt through these warlord kings, it would make little sense for God to have the Israelites live under them, right back under Egyptian control! The Egyptians had enslaved them, and what was to keep them from doing it again! So, this is God leads the Israelites on a conquest first foremost to conquer the warlord kings ruling over Canaan on Egypt's behalf. If you look back at the map, under Moses God had conquered these kings who ruled cities on the east side of the Jordan River. And then Moses had died, and now Moses' successor Joshua was completing the Exodus: He had led the Israelites across the Jordan River and was now systematically toppling these kings who ruled for Egypt on the west side.

So, in our first reading today, Chapter 11 verse 10 describes Joshua & the Israelites killing one of these kings - the king of Hazor (which is in the north, right above the Sea of Galilee). Then, we read in chapter 12, the list all the kings Joshua took out.⁴ And you'll note that the list includes the king of Jericho, the king of Ai, and so on. And in our psalm today, verses 17 through 20 celebrate God smiting these kings in the same breath that it celebrates God overthrowing Pharaoh and leading the Israelites out of Egypt through the Red Sea in verse 15.⁵ It is all of one piece: the conquest is God's completion of the Exodus through the dismantling of Egypt's colonial power over the land of Canaan.⁶

So, in the Promised Land, the Lord was using Israel to topple empire - the cruel and enslaving rule of Egypt - and in doing so, the Lord is pointing forward to the coming of His kingdom, which was not going to operate on worldly power of violence and coercion at all! The good news is that with the conquest of Canaan, God was continuing to lead His people toward the opportunity that is now ours in Christ: to turn away from hoping in the imperfect ways of worldly power and toward learning to trust in the perfect love of Christ's kingdom. And the **second hint** that this is what God is up to is something God has the Israelites do after defeating the kings in chapter 11. These kings came against Israel with a large number of chariots & horses. But in verse 4 God tells Joshua that, after Israel defeats them, they

⁴ Joshua 12:1-6 lists all the kings that Moses took out on the east side!

⁵ PSALM 136:15-22 (The New Coverdale Psalter - BCP 2019)

¹⁵ But as for Pharaoh and his host, he overthrew them in the Red Sea, *
for his mercy endures for ever.

¹⁶ Who led his people through the wilderness, *
for his mercy endures for ever.

¹⁷ Who smote great kings, *
for his mercy endures for ever;

¹⁸ And slew mighty kings, *
for his mercy endures for ever;

¹⁹ Sihon king of the Amorites, *
for his mercy endures for ever;

²⁰ And Og the king of Bashan, *
for his mercy endures for ever;

²¹ And gave away their land for an inheritance, *
for his mercy endures for ever;

²² Even for an inheritance for Israel his servant, *
for his mercy endures for ever.

⁶ And Lynch suggests that many of the local Canaanite peoples probably would've been quite glad to be freed from the Egyptians' stranglehold occupation.

are not to take these weapons of the Imperial war machine to use themselves. Instead, God tells Joshua to “hamstring their horses and burn their chariots”! He wants Israel to be rid of them. And, in 11:9, they do just that! God is not seeking to build the Israelites into a worldly empire.

In addition to this, a **third hint** is that throughout the conquest, the Israelites’ battles are not focused on unwalled villages or settlements, but on walled cities⁷ - like Jericho - fortifications of military strength, but on destroying them - right? the walls of Jericho come tumbling down - rather than having Israel re-appropriate them. The good news is that with the conquest of Canaan, God was continuing to lead His people toward the opportunity that is now ours in Christ: to turn away from hoping in the imperfect ways of worldly power and toward learning to trust in the perfect love of Christ’s kingdom.

Now, these factors do not erase the fact that the Israelites’ were still using violence. Fourteen times Joshua says that Israel struck down their enemies (quote) “by the edge of the sword”.⁸ And yet, look at what God says in our second reading. In chapter 24, in verse 11 God has been recounting through Joshua how He gave the various peoples into the Israelites hands, and in verse 12 God even speaks of sending a “hornet” ahead to drive people out! Those of you who were here Wednesday night recall me talking about Hebrew words we still don’t know the meaning for? This is one. Some translators think this Hebrew word means something like a supernatural hornet, while others think the word means ‘terror’ or ‘panic’. But, whatever it was, God sent it and it helped the inferior Israelites prevail⁹ which is what I want to get to in the final line, where God says of all these victories, “You did not do it with your own sword and bow.” Now, God isn’t saying the Israelites didn’t kill some folks with their weapons, but what He is saying all of that was just window-dressing for the reality that He - God - is the one who really “drove out the (more powerful) Canaanites by his own power.”¹⁰ So, again, the conquests did involve violence, but this is a **fourth hint** that God is pointing forward to the coming of his kingdom in Christ where such worldly means of power will be traded in for sacrificial love: for God’s power to be made perfect in our weakness!! The good news is that with the conquest of Canaan, God was continuing to lead His people toward the opportunity that is now ours in Christ: to turn away from hoping in the imperfect ways of worldly power and toward learning to trust in the perfect love of Christ’s kingdom.

As Jesus would say to a sort of royal warlord king of the Romans in His day, Pontius Pilate, He said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight” would use violence and coercion - “... but... my kingdom is from another place.” Those of us who follow Christ are learning that the weapons of this world - whether its using power & coercion & manipulation in our relationships or the chariots & horses & drones & nukes of empire - all of these lack the power for bringing humankind to the true, eternal way of living we see in Jesus Christ; that only comes through forsaking the ways of the world and learning to follow in the ways *He* taught.

So, in our relationships, we can often struggle to even have an imagination for how to engage with others - especially those we love - apart from power and coercion. We talk a lot about love, but what we know is control and manipulation and quid pro quo and the brownie point system in our marriages. But, as Jesus told Pilate, those who wanna live in the truth listen to Him. And Jesus reveals these truths in places like His Sermon on the Mount of Matthew 5, 6, & 7; and we live into it by allowing Him to change

⁷ Hebrew: ‘*arim*

⁸ Counted up by Lynch: Josh 6:21; 8:24; 10:11, 28, 30, 32, 35, 37, 39; 11:10, 11, 12, 14; 19:47

⁹ Lynch: “The text states that God drove out the Canaanites by sending *tsirah* ahead of the people. Scholars debate whether this should be translated as “hornet,” “terror,” or “panic.” In any case, the force used to drive out the Canaanites is divinely appointed and contrasted with Israel’s own weaponry.

¹⁰ Lynch

our hearts to trust in Him and to be able to practice forgiveness and risk being vulnerable, rather than in fear.

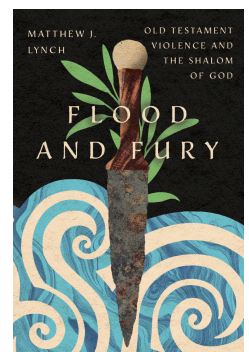
The good news is that with the conquest of Canaan, God was continuing to lead His people toward the opportunity that is now ours in Christ: to turn away from hoping in the imperfect ways of worldly power and toward learning to trust in the perfect love of Christ's kingdom. Will we allow Jesus to train us in His way of love - the true way - with the people He's put in our lives to love? That's the salvation He offers, not some ticket to heaven, but teaching us and helping us to truly live.

And then, politically, the way we engage the power of empire in the way of Jesus, is by not placing our hope in it, but fixing our hope on Him. We live in possibly the greatest worldly empire -there's ever been. And it should be said that there is a whole lot of good that the United States does and has done in this world. Not all worldly empires are created equal - and on the balance the United States is more virtuous than most empires past and present. But this is still all relative. No matter how much good a worldly kingdom can do, at the end of the day it still operates on violence and greed and advancing some lives at the expense of marginalizing others. That's what the four horsemen in Revelation 6 are teaching.¹¹ All worldly empires have a ceiling to how good they can be because ultimately they can only offer their citizens *illusions* of hope and peace. And so, thankfully Jesus has shown us this, if we're willing to listen; He has shown us the insufficiency of trusting in worldly power to get us to where we want to be and calls us instead to learn to live as citizens of *His Kingdom*.¹²

We have often been raised and trained by cable news and talk radio to engage worldly politics from a place of fear, basically to engage it as if God isn't gonna show up for us so we better get these worldly politicians to look out for us and protect our interests. But engaging worldly power like Jesus is to engage it with sacrificial love, as well. Jesus laid down His rights for our sakes, but the temptation for us is to still care more about our rights than exercising our rights - even the right to vote, which looms large this year - to benefit of *the least of these*, not the people who are necessarily like us, but those who are marginalized and dispossessed in America and around the globe.

The good news is that with the conquest of Canaan, God was continuing to lead His people toward the opportunity that is now ours in Christ: to turn away from hoping in the imperfect ways of worldly power and toward learning to trust in the perfect love of Christ's kingdom. To whom are we turning with our concerns and placing our hope in today?

In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.



¹¹ For more on the four horsemen of the apocalypse from Revelation 6 see the sermon from 11/7/21, manuscript now available at the bottom of <https://www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/revelation>

¹² Philippians 3:20-21 - "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." (NIV)