

Not
one
Failed
Promise.

Life Group Study Series

Joshua: Week Nine

19th March 2017

Bible

Joshua 11:1-23 (NIV)

Northern Kings Defeated

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 Amorites, 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.

16 So Joshua took this entire land: the hill country, all the Negev, the whole region of Goshen, the western foothills, the Arabah and the mountains of Israel with their foothills, **17** from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, to Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings and put them to death. **18** 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.

Sermon Summary

Joshua 10:16-12:24 completes our examination of the conquest narrative but also brings us face to face with the violence of God in the Old Testament. How are these passages – which describe the total destruction of the Canaanites, at the command of the Lord and with His help – related to the teachings of Jesus that we should love our enemies?

This is an important issue for us to look in the face, for if we do not, we can either be left with whole sections of Scripture that we ignore (at our peril – see 2 Timothy 3:16-17) or a loss of confidence in our view of God because we cannot answer the question!

To understand this mystery we need to consider the wider context of Joshua and attempt to make some sense of how these passages are consistent with God's character in Christ. Perhaps the first thing to acknowledge is that in Christ it was God's plan to restore and renew all things; to bless the whole world. Keep this in mind as we dig into Joshua.

Second, it is worth recognising again that Joshua 9-12 is a conquest narrative and that it is unique in Scripture. There are other battles in the Bible and passages that are far gorier than we find here, but nowhere is there quite the same concentration of violence. This reminds us that the total destruction strategy was only in play during the conquest and was not business as usual for the people of Israel. It is also worth remembering that ancient conquest narratives used hyperbole and that we may have some here too.

Third, there are a number of parallels between Joshua and Exodus that suggest that these are meant to be read as two parts of the same story. The parallels include the encounter with God, parted waters, Passover and circumcision and hard hearts. These two stories – of salvation and conquest – are two sides of one story; the story of God's faithfulness to his promises. These promises were made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and were made in order that God might bless all nations through Abraham (Genesis

12:1-3). God desired to bless the world through the people of Israel. To do that, they were to live as a display home among the nations; a living breathing example of what it looked like to be in relationship with God. And this is one reason why the Canaanites were to be destroyed. As it says in Deuteronomy 7, if the Canaanites remained, the Israelites might worship their gods and become wicked and no longer be a blessing. This means that some of the destruction of the Canaanites was judgement (which is not contradictory with the character of God) and was designed to enable the blessing.

And recall the Gibeonites – referred to here again – as the ideal conquest! They reached out to God and made a treaty of peace with Israel and were incorporated into the people. This is what God wants, but when the nations harden their hearts to His work He uses this to drive them to judgment. (This is the centre of the mystery of hardened hearts – one that the Bible doesn't answer).

The relationship between these passages and Jesus' teaching is that they are both concerned with the restoration of all things and the blessing of God. This draws these two passages together and binds them in the character and motivation of God.

The context has changed. The times have changed. But God's motivation and desire have not.

And we, as His people, are called to be a blessing to those around us! To be careful of the wickedness of our society and separate ourselves from it, but to be a blessing nonetheless.

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a LifeGroup discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: Some of the content of this passage is for many, a challenge to resolve. Take some time to share with the group any thoughts or concerns you might have, when considering God's command to bring destruction to the Canaanites. Allow the tension to sit with the group, don't try to explain away or excuse your thoughts and feelings at this point, the rest of the study will help you explore them.
2. Take some time to read Joshua 11. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging, allowing God to show you something new from a text that might be familiar). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
3. Have you ever had someone reject Christianity on the basis of the violence of the Old Testament? If so, how have you tried to answer their concerns? If you haven't found yourself in this situation, how might you try to answer them?
4. The blessing of God through Israel, was to be an example to the world of what it meant to live in relationship with Him, a "display home." This meant that any threat to

that purpose had to be eliminated, and as we see here, resulted in the destruction of the wicked nations. How have things changed in Jesus?

5. Having considered in more detail God's actions in this passage, how do you now understand judgment as being consistent with God's character?
6. We are invited to participate in God's plan to be a blessing to the world around us, how are we as a group, and as individuals, engaging in this mission?

Prayer

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 6, then join together in prayer, asking God to lead you more fully into His plans and purposes.