



+

This week at MRC, as we reached chapter 6 in Joshua, we did something slightly different and pressed pause to consider an apologetic issue that has been under the surface for the majority of this book. That is, the charge that God commits **genocide**. Before we got into the chapter we considered firstly why this is a particular issue for our culture and our time, next we made some more broad, general observations from the bible and finally we zoomed in on the book of Joshua itself.

- 1) We noted that it is an issue for our culture and time for at least 2 reasons:
 - a) because of the charge of the '**New Atheists**' and especially words from Richard Dawkins. Because of his 'charge' against God as being genocidal, in 2011, he refused to debate William Lane Craig in Oxford.
 - b) because of the rise of '**Militant Islam**'. On the news we see people willing to murder others, taking their inspiration from religious texts. Is this what we see happening in Joshua?
- 2) Some broad biblical observations then included the idea that God MUST be just. True love cries out for justice. Sin in front of a holy and good God must be dealt with. We noted that in the bible the way this is worked out changes slightly as the story progresses:
 - a. In the Old Testament it is usually seen (after warning and patience from God) in a 'there and then' manner. God's justice is meted out. Very often this is upon his wayward people, but sometimes (as in our situation here) through his wayward people upon others. War is uncommon but it is a means that is sometimes used (with rules eg Deut 20).
 - b. In the New Testament it is unusually seen in the 'there and then' manner (eg 1 Cor 11 and Acts 5). Usually God's anger and justice is seen either at the cross with Jesus as **Saviour** or looking ahead to Jesus coming back with him as **Judge**.
- 3) Some specific Joshua comments and questions:
 - a. **Good news for the nations?** We noted that the broad flow of the bible is that God uses his people to show the world what he is like and so the nations come in and are blessed (eg Abraham, Ruth, Rahab, as

the people left Egypt, Queen of Sheba, Jonah etc etc). In one sense accounts like this go against the flow of scripture.

- b. **The context of Canaan?** We must not think that Canaan was neutral - quietly minding their own business and then Israel came and removed them from their land. Canaan was a horrible place (for example the reality of child sacrifice, incest or bestiality common in the worship of their 'gods') Leviticus 18 describes their land as vomiting them out because of their disgusting behavior. We also noted that there's good archaeological evidence for Jericho and Ai being primarily military towns thus minimal civilian casualties.
- c. **A word about words?** Throughout passages like this one in the OT the language is one of totality (eg 10v40 or Deut 7) whereas what becomes clear is that not everyone was killed. This seems to be due to the fact that a kind of military rhetoric is being employed (in a similar way that we might say someone 'totally killed it') rather than a literal description of what happened.

And then the sermon started! We spent time in the passage noting various elements. Initially that to sing 'Joshua fought the battle of Jericho' is a slight lie. They didn't do much fighting, simply marching, trumpeting and shouting with the Ark of God going on before them. Just as in chapters 3-4 as they crossed the Jordan all they have to do is faithfully obey their faithful God and he 'fights' for them. The 2 caveats, both revealing something of his faithfulness are

- 1) they are to not take any of the devoted Canaanite worship items (v18-19) - see next week for how that one goes.
- 2) they are to spare Rahab and her family as promised (v17 and 22-25)

In application we focused in on the idea of God's holiness and how that relates to his people and the purity of their worship. The reason He doesn't want them to take the Canaanite worship items is because he knows their hearts and he knows they need to remain pure in their worship so that the nations might see what he is like.

++++

As always please feel free to adapt and use questions as needed for your group.

- Have you faced questions about this kind of episode?
- Do you have questions? What and why? Were you persuaded by the sermon?
- Look up Romans 6v23 - how does this verse shape the story of the bible? How does it help us in our questions about Israel sacking Jericho?
- What would you say to a Christian who took passages like this one to legitimize the Crusades? What is our battle against?
- How can we keep the reality of God's holiness and justice as part of our understanding of who God is? Do we need to? Why? Why not?
- Why do you think God is so anti-idolatry? Why does he ban his people from keeping the items of Canaanite worship?
- How does this apply to us? Why do we tolerate sin and idolatry so readily?