

Joshua
Justice & Mercy
Joshua 6

Leviticus 18 and **Deuteronomy 12** list the great evil being committed by the inhabitants of Canaan.

The great conflict in Israel taking possession of the land was not an Israel-vs-Canaan thing based on ethnic identity.

The real battle was God's battle against human evil, Canaanite or otherwise, including Israel.

If the Israelites behave like the Canaanites, Yahweh will treat them as his enemy and inflict upon them the same punishment (**Deuteronomy 28:25-28**, cp. **Judges & Deuteronomy 9:5**)

Joshua 1:3, *Every place that **the sole of your foot** will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses.*

The foot mark was a well-known near-eastern symbol of ownership and the connection between people, the land, and the presence of a deity.

Stones were used to create the shape of a foot and around these stones the people would assemble to speak words of covenant, prepare for battle and observe rituals.

A Brazilian pastor first found what was later fully unearthed by archeologists—stones arrayed in the shape of a giant foot in Gilgal.

Joshua 6:1-2 *Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in. And Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor."*

Walled cities in Canaan were not large. Jericho is one of the oldest cities in history, dating back to 10,000 BC. By Joshua's day, it was about 250 yards long by 88 yards wide—a little over 650 yards in circumference.

Hebrews 11:30 The walls of Jericho came down by faith. The entire battle strategy is a case study in God acting through the active faith of his people, doing what must have appeared insane to unbelievers.

Joshua 6:3-14 Priests bearing the ark of the covenant, preceded by seven priests continually blowing ram's horns, with soldiers serving as a front and rear guard marched around the city, once-a-day for six days. No one was to speak a word.

In silence, with only the sound of the ram's horns, they just walked around the city.

Throughout the text, the prominence of the ark is clear. With the ram's horns blaring, the ark, and all it represented about God, was center stage.

The numbers are of great significance. The number 7 is the biblical number of perfection, so the 7 priests blowing ram's horns, and then, after 6 one-lap days, the all-important 7th day with 7 laps, is not incidental. After the 7th lap on the 7th day, the priests paused and then make a prolonged blast of the horns. At that point, all Israel was to break vocal silence and shout with a great cry.

This whole process is a dramatic reminder of the 6 days of creation followed by the 7th holy day. In this march, God put on graphic display that he is Yahweh Elohim, the Creator God (**Genesis 1** – Elohim) who in covenant love redeems people from the consequences of sin, and he's right here at Jericho!

The hope is, with all that the people of Jericho already knew about Yahweh (the same information Rahab had) they would believe like Rahab did. God gave Jericho 7 days to escape judgment by placing their trust in Yahweh, but they refused.

So, they would face God's justice—"devoted for destruction," the irrevocable giving over of people or things to Yahweh, often in their total destruction.

Joshua 6:15-21 Few stories in the Bible are as challenging and troubling to modern readers as God's command to the Israelites to do away with the Canaanites and take over their land. There are many layers to this very complex subject.

A Primer on Divine Violence in Joshua:

1. After patiently tracking the depth of perversion and debauchery in Canaan for over 400 years, the hammer of God's justice finally falls.

For Israel to survive as a nation through which the Messiah would come, these decadent societies must be completely removed from the land. Otherwise, Israel may assimilate into their decadence and face the same demise as the Canaanites. Thus the hope of salvation for the whole world, through Israel, would be jeopardized.

2. A close reading of the sweeping and intense language used to describe Israel's conquest, along with a comparison with other ancient near eastern battle narratives, shows that the author of **Joshua** employs these phrases as intentional hyperbole. (cp.

Joshua 10 & 15) The word “genocide” or “ethnic cleansing” is not accurate to describe these battles.

Any Canaanite was able to join the community of faith in Israel by placing their trust in Yahweh. Rahab and the Gibeonites were two examples.

3. While God commands Israel to devote places in Canaan to destruction, he follows that up with commands not intermarry with them or adopt their culture. Why would that be an issue if literal genocide took place?
4. This is a very unique time in redemptive history—Israel possessing the land and, at the same time, God judging the Canaanites was limited in time, locale, and scope. What Israel was commanded to do to certain Canaanite cities was NOT blanket permission to do so to any people they encountered at any time or in any place. Outside these simultaneous works of God, Israel was to seek peace with the nations around her.
5. The Larger Biblical Context: Israel’s physical inheritance of the Promised Land was as significant as our spiritual inheritance in Christ reserved in heaven. The wicked societies inhabiting the land were as necessary to remove as the corruption that remains in our old nature that God is unalterably committed to rooting out of us in our spiritual growth and transformation.

What Israel faced physically, militarily and geo-politically in the conquest of Canaan, we face spiritually in our Christian walk in our own souls. The great difference between the Church and Israel, is this: For the New Testament people of God, our struggle is NOT against flesh and blood. It’s NOT geo-political, as it was for Israel with the Canaanites. Ours is spiritual warfare with demonic forces in the spirit realm. Our weaponry as the Church is not political, military or physical, but spiritual in Christ (**2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:12-13**). It is NOT jihad but Jesus we follow in accomplishing the mission of the Church.

But in the future when Jesus returns, God’s kingdom on earth will be physical, geo-political and achieved through military might on a global scale that makes the violence in Israel’s conquest of Canaan tiny in comparison.

6. What about the small children? The tragic reality of life in this fallen world is children get caught in the wake of their parents’ evil. But I believe Scripture indicates there is an age of accountability, before which a child is not responsible before God for *original sin*. I believe the little ones who were caught in the wake of their parent’s evil and lost their lives that day in Jericho are in glory right now enjoying the bliss of heaven.

In the New Creation, when we see the reality behind human history and what may have appeared to us at the time to be unjust, we will be utterly overwhelmed by how just, merciful and wise God was in all that he did—perfect in every way.

What alarms us about Jericho is its destruction. What should alarm us is Rahab’s salvation. She was under the curse of Canaan like all her countrymen. But her faith in Yahweh changed everything.

When God’s wrath falls, it is only by faith in his provision of grace that sinners can be rescued. Israel learned that lesson on Passover night in Egypt (**Exodus 12:13**), and it’s being taught here again.

God saved Rahab by grace through her faith, just like us (**Ephesians 2:8-9**), and his grace did more than save her, it allowed her to be part of the lineage of Christ (**Matthew 1**). That’s the stunning thing about Jericho—the family that was saved, not those who were destroyed. They received justice. Rahab received grace.

Since God’s normal response to humanity is patient mercy, we become accustomed to his kindness and begin to presume on his grace. So, we are offended when God chooses to show justice.

When God warns, it’s not an empty threat. Case in point: **Joshua 6:26** and its fulfillment in **1 Kings 16:33-34**.

John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (pp. 108-109; 1986 printing)

R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (p. 158; 1985 printing)

At the cross, God finally got even with human evil, so anyone who turns to him and places their personal trust in what he provides in his Son, will be saved and live forever in his kingdom. The believer’s sins are forgiven and eternal life is granted as a gift of grace (**Romans 6:23**).

The world has been warned. All have sinned (**Romans 3:23**) and the wages of sin are eternal death. Judgment Day is coming,

2 Peter 3:9, “God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”