

The Conquest Era

(Joshua)

After the Exodus, the circumstances were perilous for the Israelites. They had wandered in the wilderness for forty years because of rebellion and unbelief at Kadesh-Barnea. Now they were at Jericho, and the test was the same. Would they resolve to forge ahead, or would they shrink from the circumstances as their fathers had done? The task of rallying and leading people fell to Joshua. Moses, the great leader of the last forty years, was dead. Would the people galvanize behind Joshua? Or would they refuse his leadership?

Story Line Summary: *Joshua leads the conquest of the Promised Land as the LORD fights for His People.*

Expansion: There are four main events in the Conquest Era: Jordan, Jericho, Conquest, and Dominion

Jordan: A Miraculous Parting of Water (Joshua 1-5)

Moses dies, and God hand-picks Joshua to succeed him. Joshua's first challenge is to cross the Jordan River at flood stage. God commands him to prepare the nation for a ceremonial procession and to begin walking, priests first, toward the Jordan River. When the priests touched water, God would part the water for them. (This is the second *miraculous "parting of water"* that God performed for Israel. The first was the parting of the Red Sea.) The people respond, and God parts the Jordan River for a distance of about twenty miles. They cross without incident, and the water begins flowing again.

Jericho: A Miraculous Conquest of a City (Joshua 6)

The city of Jericho, a small oasis on the west side of the Jordan River near the Dead Sea, is not only the eastern gateway to the Promised Land, but it is also a fortified city and poses a threat to the welfare of Israel. Joshua is a brilliant military strategist, so much so that his campaigns in the Bible are still studied in the Army War College today. As he stands overlooking the city, contemplating how to conquer it, the angel of the Lord appears to him and instructs him to march around the city once a day for seven days. On the seventh day, he is to march around it seven times and the people are to shout. The city wall will fall down. They did, and it did...*a miraculous conquest of a city!*

Conquest: The Defeat of Canaan (Joshua 7-12)

The Canaanites are united in their hatred of the Israelites, but not in their military opposition to them. Primarily, the region is characterized by individual kings, each with his own country and surrounding country. Joshua cuts through the midsection toward the Mediterranean Sea. Having divided the land, he then begins to conquer, from South to North. In about seven years, the initial *defeat of Canaan* is complete.

Dominion: Finalizing Dominion (Joshua 13-20)

Each of the twelve tribes of Israel is given a land area by lottery and is responsible for *finalizing dominion* over that area. All twelve tribes inhabit their areas and form a loose federation with the other tribes.

The Destruction of the Canaanites

The account in Joshua presents the sensitive reader with a deep problem, namely, the apparent wholesale slaughter of the indigenous Canaanite population in order to allow the people of Israel to occupy their land. How did Israel have any right to seize that land? And how can it be God's will for them to spare none of those who resisted them in defense of their own land? Could this be a level of barbarism that God tolerated in the OT but now forbids in the NT? Certainly people hostile to the Bible decry ancient Israel for its "ethnic cleansing," and many sensitive Christians find this deeply troubling as well. To handle the topic thoroughly would take a longer essay, but the discussion here can guide thoughts for fuller reflection.

One must begin by acknowledging that the questions are legitimate. Christians rightly condemn this kind of behavior in other circumstances, and there is no warrant today for nations to destroy other nations in order to take their land. But there are special features of the command to Israel that both make it unique (and therefore not open to be imitated) and allow it to be seen in a moral light. This command is one reason Exodus records the call of Moses in such detail (Ex. 3:1-4:17; cf. Num. 12:1-15): Moses is God's unique choice to be the lawgiver for his people, and the commands given through Moses

come from God's own mind (cf. Deut. 18:15–20). Believers accept God's appointment of Moses to speak His will. Without this command from God as delivered through Moses, Israel would have had no right to the land.

A second point to clarify is that the Pentateuch sets out laws of warfare, distinguishing between battles fought against cities outside the Promised Land (Deut. 20:10–15) and those fought against cities inside the land (Deut. 20:16–18). It is only the latter case that requires Israel to spare no one (“you shall devote them to complete destruction”); see the notes on Deuteronomy 20:1–20 and 20:16–18. The law appears to be unconditional and implacable. With these clarifications, one can now outline why this command is not an unsolvable “problem.”

(1) A fundamental OT conviction is that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the Creator of all there is, and therefore the owner of all lands. He has the right to distribute territories according to His good and holy will (cf. Ex. 19:5; Ps. 24:1). As the universal Creator, He is also the universal Judge, to whom all people everywhere are accountable: cf. Genesis 6–8 (the flood story affects all kinds of people); Genesis 11:1–9 (the Tower of Babel); Exodus 12:12 (judgment on the gods of Egypt); the prophetic oracles about the nations. The NT shares this basic conviction: cf. Acts 14:15–16; 17:24–31. This means that God has the ultimate rights over the land of Canaan, and that He has the right to bring the Canaanites to judgment for their moral condition and deeds.

(2) Since all people are sinners, all are rightly subject to God's judgment. The Pentateuch gives a moral rationale for the removal of the Canaanites, seeing it as divine judgment for their iniquities (see note on Gen. 15:13–16; cf. Lev. 18:24–30; Deut. 9:5). This action against these peoples, then, is an expression of God's judgment on them through the agency of Israel. This judgment therefore announces the moral nature of God to the whole world for their instruction (that announcement in all its clarity is itself part of the blessing that Israel is to bring to the whole world). In ways that are not entirely clear, the faithful will participate with God in carrying out the final judgment (1 Cor. 6:2; cf. Ps. 149:6–7), and Israel's bringing of judgment on the Canaanites foreshadows that great responsibility as well (see note on Josh. 6:17).

God's judgment allows no double standard: He did not base His choice of Israel on any merit of theirs (Deut. 7:6–9), and He calls them to embrace His love faithfully. Unfaithfulness will lead to judgment upon Israel itself, whether at the level of the individual (Ex. 22:20) or the whole people (Josh. 7:11–12; Mal. 4:6; cf. Lev. 18:28). This cannot be called “ethnic cleansing,” since the treatment is just, regardless of ethnicity.

(3) Further, the Sinai covenant sets up Israel to be a “theocracy,” a unique combination of what is now called “church” and “state.” Membership in the people is both political and religious, and thus “citizens” are under obligation to be faithful in observing the covenant. Those who carry out egregious violations must be removed (e.g., Deut. 13:5; 17:7; etc.), and if Israel were to allow unrepentant Canaanites to remain in the land, they would drag the whole people down into idolatry, injustice, and evil (e.g., Deut. 7:4; 12:29–31), which, sadly, is just what happened. Christians are not to carry out this kind of warfare, because the people of God are no longer identified with a particular nation-state.

(4) Finally, even though the laws about destroying the Canaanites are stated in an uncompromising and unconditional way (in keeping with the rhetoric of ancient Near Eastern conquest accounts, which allows for this kind of unqualified statement), the way Israel applied those laws apparently made room for some of the Canaanites to surrender and survive, particularly if they professed faith in the one true God (see note on Josh. 2:9 for Rahab and her whole family; see note on 9:1–27 for the Gibeonites; cf. 11:19). This means that the appearance of implacability in these laws is just that, an appearance, and there is an implied allowance for exceptions. This is another point showing that, strictly speaking, the command given to Israel is nothing like “ethnic cleansing,” since ethnicity itself is not the reason for the action.

These factors—God's right to allocate land and judge the world with perfect justice; the need to protect the purity of the Israelite theocracy; and the provisions for even Canaanites to be saved—all illustrate the justice that lies behind these provisions. At the same time, it is also clear that the practices known as genocide and ethnic cleansing are indeed evil, and the Israelites were not commanded to commit them. These factors were a unique part of Israel's mission; no people today have any right to use them as a warrant to support injustice (copied from the Intro to Joshua, ESV Study Bible).

Name _____ Date _____ (3 points each) Score _____

Conquest Era Homework

_____ dies in Deut. 34 and God commissions _____ to lead Israel into the Promised Land.

_____ is a type of _____ leading his people into the Promised Land in fact in the Greek the name Jesus has its origin in the Hebrew word for Joshua.

This is the land God first promised _____ in Genesis 12.

The _____ river runs north to south and divides the land from east to west.

Most of the tribes will occupy land on the _____ side of the river.

Before Israel can occupy the land the _____ must be defeated.

The first walled city that must be destroyed is _____.

God is using the Israelites to judge the occupants of the land because of their _____ with particular focus on their idolatry.

(5 pts.) Summarize the four reasons why the author of the essay on "The Destruction of Canaanites" does not believe what Israel did was ethnic cleansing:

Why were the Israelite males in need of being circumcised if they were supposed to be circumcised on the 8th day of their life (Josh 5:4-7)?

Circumcision was a _____ of the covenant God made with _____ (Genesis 17).

What is the purpose of setting up the memorial stones in Joshua 4?

What led the Israelites across the Jordan River? _____

What was kept inside this wooden box? _____ (Deut 10:2)

What two tribes received a portion of the land were not sons of Jacob? _____ & _____

The _____ were not given a sector of land; instead they ministered to all the Israelites from cities located throughout the land (Joshua 14:4).

What was the purpose of a city of refuge? (Read Numbers 35:6-12 and Joshua 20:1-6)

What one word best describes the kind of government Israel had under Joshua's leadership? _____

What is Rahab the Harlot known for doing and what was her reward? (Joshua 2)

When Israel destroyed Jericho some of the Israelites did not obey Joshua's commandments completely what did they do wrong? (Joshua 6:24ff and 7:10ff)

What amazing supernatural miracle occurs in Joshua 10?

Joshua chapters 13-21 are devoted explaining how Joshua divided the _____ among the tribes.

At the age of _____ Caleb (the only other spy who believed God would give them the land) asked Joshua to give him the hill country where he could drive the inhabitants out by the strength God gave him (Joshua 14).

In Joshua 23:12ff, Joshua is concerned that the people will _____ the Canaanites and this will lead to disobeying God's commandment to drive the inhabitants out of the land.

What sin does Joshua tell the Israelites will anger the LORD and cause him to drive them out of the land? _____

Upon his death Joshua calls upon the people to _____ whom they will serve.

In Joshua 24:16ff the people make a commitment that they will _____ the LORD their God.

Joshua was _____ years old when he died.

What did Joshua expect Israel to study and obey? _____

What is the significance of the reference to Joseph's bones being buried in the Promised Land? (see Genesis 50:25)

(5 pts.) What is the significance of Joshua 24:22 with particular focus on "witnesses against yourselves"?
