

The Conquest and the Judges (Joshua, Judges)

Definition: the subjugation and assumption of control of a place or people by military force.

1) Taking the land.

The conquest is not God sending a nation to go and be nasty to other nations and destroy them. It is nasty nations coming under God's judgement and God using Israel and his army for this judgement.

¹⁶ In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." Genesis 15: 16

⁴ After the Lord your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you. ⁵ It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ⁶ Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people. Deuteronomy 9: 4-6

It is on the basis of God's judgement that one must read the narratives of the invasion.

Reflection: does humanity exist by itself and does what she wants or are humans accountable to a creator?

- Regulated conquest

Nations that are not under the judgment or nations that are not part of the inheritance that God is giving to the Israelites, are to be treated differently. They are to be offered terms of peace. Deuteronomy 20:10-15

Second attempt conquest

This is not the first attempt of the conquest. 40 years earlier under Moses they failed to take possession of the land.

The conquest began with a great victory over a fortified city that came down after God's strategy for war.

Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.

² Then the Lord said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. ³ March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. ⁴ Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. ⁵ When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in.” Joshua 6: 1-5

Before engaging in this first episode of the conquest, something important happened in chapter 5. The Israelites renewed the covenant with God by observing the circumcision.

² At that time the Lord said to Joshua, “Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again.” ³ So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.^[b]

⁴ Now this is why he did so: All those who came out of Egypt—all the men of military age—died in the wilderness on the way after leaving Egypt. ⁵ All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness during the journey from Egypt had not. ⁶ The Israelites had moved about in the wilderness forty years until all the men who were of military age when they left Egypt had died, since they had not obeyed the Lord. For the Lord had sworn to them that they would not see the land he had solemnly promised their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁷ So he raised up their sons in their place, and these were the ones Joshua circumcised. They were still uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way. ⁸ And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed.

⁹ Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” So the place has been called Gilgal^[c] to this day. Josh 5: 2-9

Application: In our Christian walk, there are things (bad habits, anxiety, fear, insecurity ...etc) that need conquering for God’s glory. We will need total dependence on God to conquer those.

There have been two major excavations at Jericho that uncovered a collapsed double wall and an occupational layer indicating a destruction by fire. The two excavations raised opposing views as what era the finding could be attributed to.

2) Distribution of the land

There have been challenges throughout the conquest but over all Joshua has been successful in his campaign to take the land.

Most of the lands were distributed to the different tribes and clans. Though some of the lands were not conquered, they were left to individual clans to process them.

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. Joh 11:23

Couple of things to mention in the tribal allotments:

- Towns for persons fleeing from blood vengeance or cities of refuge.

Then the Lord said to Joshua: ²“Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed you through Moses, ³ so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood. Josh 20: 1-3

- Towns for the Levites from the tribal allotments as the Levites didn't receive allotments of their own.

⁸So the Israelites allotted to the Levites these towns and their pasturelands, as the Lord had commanded through Moses. Josh 21: 8

Application: As the vulnerable have special place in God's heart, we must remember to care for the vulnerable in our local communities. (a little goes a long way)

3) Keeping the land

Settled in their respective allotment, the Israelites organised themselves in tribal leagues. This political structure was already stipulated in the law.

Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly. ¹⁹ Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the innocent. ²⁰ Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the Lord your God is giving you. Deut 16:18-20.

The role of the judges was to maintain harmony in the communities by presiding over civil disputes and criminal charges. The judge was also a warrior mobilising the people against the enemy.

Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. Judges 2:18

Altogether, there were twelve judges, some mentioned briefly, some described in detail.

- Failure to keep the land

Though the judges were raised by God, this period of the tribal league reflects a moment of theological failure of Israel.

They went through a repeating cycle of apostasy >>> oppression >>> repentance >>> deliverance >>> and temporary peace. This is because Israel has failed to be faithful to God.

“The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. ¹⁰One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised. ¹¹So be very careful to love the Lord your God.¹² “But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them,¹³ then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the Lord your God has given you. Joh 23: 9-13

They took pleasure in breaking the covenant with Yahweh.

⁵The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁶They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

⁷The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord; they forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asherah. Judges 3: 5-7

Canaanite religion was obsessed with ritual sex. Their mythological belief was establishing that the storm god Ba'al mated with Asherah, the fertility god. The ritual prostitution that plagues these cities was the result of mimicking the mating of Ba'al and Asherah.

One of the most common findings in Palestinian archaeological excavations are cultic figures of Asherah with exaggerated sexual parts.

Israel went from being God's nation called to influence other nations to be like the nations they were supposed to influence.

"Israel did evil in Yahweh's eyes" (3:7-8, 12; 4:1-2; 6:1; 8:33-34; 10:6-8; 13:1), becomes a descriptive phrase that marked the periods of the judges.

“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” (21:25).

The period of conquest and the period of the tribal league demonstrate the blessing and curse, stipulated in covenant.

¹³ So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul— ¹⁴ then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and olive oil. ¹⁵ I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.

¹⁶ Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. ¹⁷ Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and he will shut up the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you. ¹⁸ Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Deut 11: 13 -18

Application: when God gives us victory in areas of our live, we have responsibility to protect and preserve the victory, else the enemy comes with a strategy to steal the victory.