

ISRAEL: A HOLY NATION

Joshua 1:1–9; 3:1–5, 9–13; 5:13–15 • Brian Brodersen

Introduction: We are taking a Big Picture look at the Story of God and those Created in his Image (humans), from the beginning of Creation to the Full Realization of the New Creation. In other words, we are doing an overview of the teaching of the whole Bible.

Over the past few weeks, we've looked at the Story of God's covenant people, Israel. We saw how God rescued the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob out of slavery in Egypt. How he made a covenant with them at Mt. Sinai and gave them his Law.

We also saw how through his presence in the Tabernacle, God was dwelling in the midst of his people, yet their access was limited because of sin. To overcome the sin barrier, God established a sacrificial system mediated through a priesthood offering sacrifices in the Tabernacle to cover sin until the One to whom the sacrifices pointed would come and offer himself as the one sacrifice who would put away sin forever and permanently open the way into God's presence for all his people.

In our last teaching, we saw how the whole sacrificial system pointed ahead to Christ, who, according to John 1:14, was the Word that became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us. He is also our holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens High Priest according to Hebrews 7:26.

1. Exodus ends with the inauguration of the Tabernacle and the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle.
2. Leviticus gives detailed instruction concerning the offerings, the priest, ritual purity, and the moral and ethical conduct of God's holy people.
3. Numbers (in the wilderness) records the people's forty years wanderings in the wilderness for their unbelief and refusal to enter the land out of fear of its inhabitants.
4. Deuteronomy is a restating of the Law for a new generation that is about to enter the land.

It also records the death of Moses and the transference of the leadership to Joshua who will bring the people into the land that God promised to give them. This is where the people become a nation with their own land, handpicked and given to them by God.

Read: 1:1–9; 3:1–5, 9–13; 5:13–15

The Book of Joshua tells the story of the conquest of the land of Canaan by the Israelites. Four hundred years earlier, God had said to Abraham, "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

The long overdue judgment of the Amorites has come, and God is going to use his people Israel to carry out this judgment. The taking of Jericho will be the beginning of the conquest that will culminate with 31 Canaanite kings conquered and the land allotted to the tribes of Israel.

Toward the end of Joshua's life, when the people had settled into their tribal inheritance, Joshua gathered them together to renew the covenant and spoke prophetically to them of all that God had done.

"The Lord said, I gave into your hand the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites, and Jebusites ... I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.

Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” 24:14–15

“Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel ...”

Postscript

“After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals.” Judges 2:10

This is the story throughout the period of the Judges. Everyone doing what is right in their own eyes and things going from bad to worse until it almost seemed that Israel was about to self-destruct. Then God intervenes and sends them Samuel, and then David, through whom the Abrahamic covenant is extended and the nation restored and preserved from judgment for a season.

Big Picture Takeaways

1. Judgment, though delayed through God’s mercy, will inevitably fall on the unrepentant.

- a. The Amorites had been given 400 plus years to repent and refused. Through Joshua and Israel, God is going to judge them and drive them out of the land he had given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

A God who judges sin is one of the hardest pills for modern people to swallow.

As a matter of fact, some modern Bible critics go so far as to accuse the ancient Israelites of genocide and referred to them as “Nazis” for their destruction of the Canaanites. They also often conclude that, if God gave them a command to wipe out the Canaanites, he must be a moral monster, and anyone believing in him or worshiping him must be evil.

This is a classic case of a biblical illiterate culture using the Bible to critique a biblical illiterate church.

How do we respond? First, let’s put this in historical perspective.

Anyone calling this a genocide obviously doesn’t understand the historical context. The account of Israel defeating Jericho, for example, is really the first of what we might call “David versus Goliath” stories. The Canaanites were referred to by the surrounding peoples as the “invincible barbarians.” They were vicious, ruthless, murderous tribes who were completely given over to evil. If there were “Nazis” in the story, it was the Canaanites. Israel, on the other hand, were a people who had been enslaved in Egypt for 400 years, and now had just spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness. They were anything but a sophisticated well trained military power. Israel was the complete underdog.

As Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen put it in their book, *The Drama of Scripture*:

“The book of Joshua is the story of a group of people, few in number and almost unbelievably weak and fickle in their spiritual loyalties, battling against might forces which were degrading, seductive and ruthless.”

The whole point of God sending a ragtag band of soldiers with no military training and no sophisticated weaponry was to show that it was none other than God himself who was fighting against and driving out these powerful forces of evil.

Also, we need to be careful not to use modern terms like genocide, ethnic cleansing, or jihad to describe what happened. This was, from the biblical perspective, a judgment of God upon nations that had completely sold themselves to do evil. A judgment that the Israelites themselves would experience if they followed in the sins of the Canaanites, which tragically, they did.

2. **God often uses unconventional methods and unlikely people to accomplish his work.**

- a. Jericho: marching around the city and shouting to bring the walls down.
- b. Gideon: 32,000, 10,000, 300

3. **God's people are perpetually at war with God's enemies.**

- a. Just as Joshua spent his life fighting the Lord's battles, so Christians are in a lifelong battle against the powers of darkness.

Joshua's battles were against the flesh and blood enemies of Israel. Our struggle is not with flesh and blood (people) but with principalities and powers, the spiritual rulers of this present darkness. Since our enemies are spiritual beings, our weapons must be spiritual weapons.

Paul the apostle put it like this: "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." 2 Corinthians 10:3–4 *Gospel Proclamation, Prayer, Righteous Living*.

Personal Takeaways

1. **God Commissions Joshua**

- a. Be strong and courageous and careful to do all that is written in the law. Do not turn to the right or to the left. In every generation, it takes courage to follow the Lord. We'll be tempted to turn aside to the right or left, to compromise. But we, like Joshua, are called to be strong and courageous.
- b. "This book of the Law shall not depart from you lips, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous then you will have good success." 1:8

2. **Joshua's Instruction to the People**

- a. "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you." 3:5 They were to give themselves entirely to the Lord. We must do the same thing if we hope to see amazing things among us. Half-hearted devotion will rob you/us of the full blessing God intends.

3. **Commander of the Lord's Army**

"Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked 'are you for us or for our enemies?' 'Neither,' he replied, 'but as commander of the army of the Lord I have come.'" 5:13–14

- a. Whose side? Neither. God is for himself and his purposes. The Lord Jesus is marching throughout the world today, demolishing the works of the devil and advancing his kingdom through the Gospel, and we are to fall in behind him, the Captain of our Salvation, following him wherever he leads.

There's a lot of pressure today to take a side on some issue or another, for some person or another, for some politician or another, for some church leader or another, for some theological position or another. At the end of the day what matters is being on the Lord's side. His side will never be the popular side, but it's the right side. There's a lot of talk today about those who are or are not on the right side of history. One can only

determine who's on whatever side of history if they know where history is going. History has a goal; we know where it is going. It is moving toward Jesus Christ, the One by whom and for whom all things were made.

Martin Luther King said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." He was right inasmuch as the arc of history bends toward the return of Jesus to establish God's eternally righteous kingdom.

Close: Moses died in the wilderness, only seeing the promised land but never entering it. Joshua led Israel into the promised land.

Moses represents the Law, which can never bring us into the promises of God. Joshua represents the Gospel, which brings us fully into all of God's promises.

Jesus is the greater and better Joshua who leads us out of the wilderness of sin and barrenness, and into the life of the Spirit and fruitfulness.

The Cross—Communion