

## The Conquest

About a decade ago, a few gay activists in America tried to start a movement claiming the Bible is hate speech because of its stance against homosexuals. That went nowhere, but the attack may resume when the time seems right (and if there's funding). Evidently, that target -- the Bible -- wasn't sufficiently strategic to pursue. Much more threatening to the Church (and to Orthodox Jews) is an attack at God Himself (as well as the Bible) by condemning Him for hate speech *vis a vis* the Conquest in the Book of Joshua. Liberals have long had contempt for the God of Israel, the God of Scripture, because of His will to commit "genocide," mass slaughter, violence. Some theologians have been so embarrassed by the Conquest that they've tried to explain it away by various means (it was only allegory, it was an exaggerated story, it never really happened, etc). "How can God, who reveals Himself as kind, compassionate, and merciful, do such a monstrous thing as demand that His people slaughter the Canaanites so as to steal their land?" I suspect that this condemnation of God and the Bible will soon erupt as a mass concerted effort to publicly condemn Christianity as mean-spirited and ugly, and to make attempts at evangelism absurd in our modern, tolerant, loving society. So, I offer the following discussion to help us understand the Conquest. It's not organized as an essay but as an assemblage of thoughts and comments not in any order of importance.

- The fundamental principle or truth that necessitated the Conquest was established in the opening pages of the Bible and expressed subsequently, indeed, all thru biblical history. No unholy person may be in God's holy presence, in His space. So Adam and his wife were thrown out of the Garden because of disobedience. In the very next chapter, Cain was expelled from God's presence. That pre-Flood civilization had to be annihilated because of wickedness before God. Later, Jacob's entire family had to leave that land even though it was promised to them because those sons of Jacob were becoming just like the ungodly people who also dwelt there at that time. So after the Exodus, the Canaanites had to be thrown off that unique and special land that was God's own sacred space. Later in time, because they also were deep into idolatry and iniquity, even Israel had to be expelled from that land. Thus the Exile. In the future, God will claim the entire earth as His sacred space necessitating another great expulsion, vividly envisioned in the Book of Revelation. The land belongs to God. It's His to give to whomever He pleases, but on the condition that those who dwell there are holy and obedient. So God gave that land where today Israel dwells to Abraham and to his seed, his descendants according to promise. But God still controls the use of the land. Joshua's "conquest" was necessary because the Canaanites were trespassing on God's land and had to be evicted. And not only trespassing but pursuing abhorrent, abominable lives in God's presence. Israel didn't "steal" the land; they dispossessed the Canaanites and repossessed the land that was theirs because of God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 12,15, 17).
- In Genesis 15:16, God told Abraham that at that point in time the sins of the Amorites (the term includes the Canaanites) had not yet reached its full measure. In other words, God allowed them 4 centuries to repent and become godly, and they would be permitted to live there. Instead, their lives became even more detestable, so they had to be evicted. The Conquest did involve total destruction of certain of the cities, mostly the southern cities. God had hardened their hearts so that they went to war against Israel. And they were defeated, mainly by God's direct lethal attack from heaven (Joshua 10:11). But most of the Canaanites were simply driven off the land. Not everyone was targeted! Any Canaanite who was willing to submit to Israel's God and abide by His rules could remain in the land. Thus, Rahab was saved, and so were the Gibeonites.
- That Conquest both reprised the Flood and was proleptic of the (yet future) mass annihilation of the ungodly that presages Christ's Return, when all people everywhere who refuse to repent, who reject the Gospel, will suffer God's deserved wrath. Jesus' name in Hebrew is really Joshua because He is the Warrior who will conquer not just the Canaanites in that land but all the earth for God. With reference to the overarching theme of Genesis 3:15, the Israelites were the seed of the woman who would defeat the Serpent one day, and the Canaanites were the seed of the Serpent. The Conquest was in miniature, in cameo, the defeat of evil. It prefigured the great defeat of Satan that happened at the cross and will be fully realized at Christ's Return.
- Those Amorites weren't merely disobeying God. They were gleefully worshipping wicked gods, evil supernatural beings, demons even. So another way to view the Conquest is, God at war with those gods. By defeating those Canaanite "worshippers," He demonstrated that He was the true God and their gods were powerless before Him. Worship of any god but the God of Israel is not merely foolish, it is wickedness, as their abominable religious practices such as child sacrifice showed. The Conquest was a replay of the power encounter that occurred in Egypt, narrated in Exodus. This is why the Israelites were told to put the Amorites "under the ban"

(*herem*), meaning they were devoted to God or belonged to God as His plunder. For Israel, carrying out the Conquest was entirely a matter of obedience to God. It was "holy war." Achan disobeyed God's clear instructions, so even he, an Israelite, had to be put to death too. And in Joshua's final speeches, he warns Israel that if they fail to obey God in the future, they too will be put to death. No one is exempt from God's justice!

- The narrative is true, it really happened in history. It's not allegory or an exaggeration. Atheists condemn the text because (a) they don't believe in sin; (b) they don't want God to exist or, if He must, they don't want Him to judge anyone; (c) they don't believe anything in Scripture to be true; and (d) as seed of the Serpent, they hate God and are preparing the people of earth to receive Anti-Christ. That Christians should deny the historicity or significance of the Conquest is an egregiously disloyal stance to take before God. To deny that God judges and punishes sin (or be indifferent to it) reveals a total failure to understand the Gospel.
- God is holy and good. All His acts express His goodness. All Creation manifests His goodness. But He also upholds justice in a world saturated with sin. The Conquest teaches everyone to fear God. We all must be obedient to Him and His Rule in order to avoid deserved punishment. Now, I can hear someone protesting, "Don't push that Old Testament stuff on me. Christ has come and we're in a new era, an era of God's love. My sins are all forgiven and I'm on my way to heaven, regardless how I live." And I say, don't be deceived. Faith in Christ doesn't mean we're at liberty to live as we please. On the contrary, faith in Christ should mean we, of all people, are deeply, fervently concerned about personal holiness, obedience to Christ's Word, and commitment to Him who is the greatest reality there is. Let's be careful to walk in all God's ways.
- That Conquest narrated in the Book of Joshua ultimately was a failure. Moses warned it would fail as did Joshua, and the subsequent books of the Old Testament tell the story of its failure. It failed because there was to be a future Conquest, one that does not fail, one that accomplishes all God's good and great purposes. Thus, the ministry of John the Baptist, calling Israelites back to the other side of the Jordan (the "wilderness"), reprised Deuteronomy 30. They were to turn to God ("repent," in Hebrew, *shuv*) and re-enter the Land with their greater Joshua into a greater new covenant into a renewed Israel with a new and greater Kingdom. (The Gentile-ization of the Church unfortunately has resulted in a loss of this understanding of the four Gospels.) The atoning work of Christ is really one with the Return of Christ. (The Son is both Lion and Lamb; the Daniel 9 prophecy of 70 weeks didn't anticipate the clock of prophetic history stopping before the last week to include an interpolated "church age," although Psalms 2 and 110 did.) So we're called now to participate in that new and greater Conquest, which is on-going as the Church carries out Christ's great commission. This new, ultimate, world-encompassing Conquest will be fully realized at His [I hope very soon] glorious Return. Let's be faithful to our exalted calling.

Dear Reader, three things: 1. We also can allegorize the Conquest. We can say, for example, that it reveals how we're to assiduously put away sin from our lives because we ourselves are now God's sacred space in which He dwells. We need to take all our thoughts captive, even our motives and our values -- every aspect of our lives needs to be holy, committed, for the Holy Spirit to indwell us. The Canaanites had to be expelled from the Land so as not to contaminate the Israelites among whom God was dwelling. Same with us. "Put off the old man . . . Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature" (Colossians 3).

2. Before the Israelites (miraculously) crossed the Jordan into the Land, Joshua sent in 2 spies. They entered Jericho and there, Rahab the harlot acknowledged that the God of Israel was the true Creator God who had given that land to His people Israel. And she wanted to be with them. She was saved, and her family, when God destroyed that city. I see the work of the Church today to be that of those spies, going into the world (or our own neighborhood) to find among the pagans the Rahabs, whom God has elected to salvation, before the terrible day of His judgment. You may want to identify as God's servant this way.

3. And finally, this: The goal of America's godless is to criminalize Christianity. But first they need to stigmatize it by labeling it as hate speech, or hate-mongering. Don't be ashamed of anything anywhere in Scripture just because ungodly people don't like it, regardless what the consequences of your faithfulness may be.