

THE STORY CHAPTER 7

This chapter deals with that we call The Conquest

It starts with the death of Moses and Joshua being commissioned by God

Joshua commands the people to get ready for battle, and sends 2 spies into the land to spy out Jericho

They are protected by Rahab, and promise her safety in return for their safety

The spies return to Joshua with encouraging reports

They defeat Jericho with a most unusual battle plan, which makes it clear that God in fact fought the battle for them

They go to battle against Ai, but are defeated because there is sin in the camp – Achan took some of the loot

Once that is dealt with, and Achan punished, the Lord gives them the victory over Ai

Because Joshua neglected to consult the Lord, he is tricked into a treaty with Gibeon

Gibeon is threatened, and Joshua needs to respond to their call for help

God gives him victory over 5 Amorite kings and during these battles the sun stood still for a day

God gives them victory over the land of Canaan

Joshua gives his farewell speech

He reminds the Israelites of their history – and how God honoured all his promises

He closed with the well known challenge: “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... but as for me and my household we will serve the Lord”

The question of God ordering the extermination of the Canaanites:

This has led some to doubt that the God of the OT is the same God as the God of the NT.

This of course runs counter to biblical teaching.

This remains a problem to modern ears – how to answer it?

The first point to understand is that the Israelites would not have found it strange – it was common practise among nations in those days. God has always been the God of the Sermon on the Mount where we are to love our enemies, but the Israelites were not ready for that revelation – so God’s revelation is progressive, and God started with the Israelites where they were in that culture.

Secondly, God did not simply order the extermination of the Canaanites. This was part of God’s judgement on that nation described by one scholar as perhaps the nation practising the most depraved religion known to human kind.

Thirdly, the spiritual life of the Israelites was at stake – the sensual practises of the Canaanite religion would prove a temptation and therefore a threat to the purity of the Israelite’s devotion to a holy God.

Finally, God did not order the extermination of all gentiles. Neither did God order this as a common practise. It was God’s provision for those Israelites occupying the land God had promised to their forefathers.

In the end, these are our attempts to justify God’s actions, but they are not unreasonable explanations.

The question of the sun standing still:

We accept that God is able to perform the miraculous – there is no doubt about that. God, who created all we see is quite capable of causing the sun to stand still for a day.

The question is, is that what the biblical passage implies?

The most telling argument against a literal understanding of the passage is that the command to the sun is given in poetry, and poetry needs to be interpreted as poetry. Even a cursory reading of the Psalms shows how we take for granted that poetry is poetry:

Psalms 19:1-6

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.

They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth.

No-one takes that literally, but all who read that are left, “lost in wonder, awe, and worship” of the God being glorified by the verbose heavens and skies; by the bridegroom sun, emerging from his tent, running like a champion.

So, not all scholars agree on what happened. Some, those with whom we would not share common ground, dismiss the whole incident as being from a pagan source.

Others, who do believe that a miracle event occurred, have different answers:

- Joshua was asking for relief from the heat of the sun’s heat
- The sun’s rays were bent by an alteration of the refracting power of the atmosphere, so the sun and moon appeared to have stood still

However we may answer that, what we dare not deny is this:

Something happened that day and the faith of the Israelites was strengthened by it.

And this has application for us:

The God who worked on behalf of the Israelites that day – in what ever way, which could have been the sun and moon “standing still” – is the God who still is able to, and does, work miraculously on behalf of his people.

1. How could Joshua be “strong and courageous” in such intimidating situations?

When faced with challenges, we can choose to whom, or to what, we will ascribe greatness – to the challenges? Or to God? For Joshua the challenges were huge – he had a country to conquer. But then there was his God. The God who had brought them from slavery, had sustained them in the desert for 40 years. This God was now reaffirming promises to Joshua: I will give you every place you set your foot; your territory will extend from ...; no-one will be able to stand against you; as I was with Moses (and Joshua knew how God had been with Moses) so I will be with you. Therefore, in the light of all that, be strong and very courageous.

To facilitate the choice to faith, Joshua was to obey God’s commands, he was to mediate on the law.

2. What do you learn about God from the story of the salvation of Rahab the prostitute?

In **2Pet 3:9** we are told that God does not want any to perish, but for all to come to a knowledge of repentance. Seems that God knew of one person in the city of Jericho who had faith – Rahab. Why else did Joshua choose to direct the spies to her? Turns out she had not only heard of the conquests of God – as all in Jericho had – but there must have been faith mingled with her having heard. As James will tell later, “I will show you my faith by what I do” (**James 2:18b**). She believed, and “saved” the spies as an evidence of her faith. So we learn that God is a God of love, not wanting any to perish.

3. What do the string of amazing battle victories the people experienced as they entered the land reveal about who is really in charge of history.

We often talk about history being “HIS-story”. This is clear from the Conquest. God is “in charge.” But what we see is that God works IN history. It took time. God used people – like Joshua, like the armies of Israel – to accomplish his end for history. There wasn’t a transcending the historical process. While God may have suspended the normal laws of nature to accomplish his purposes in history, God still limited himself to working within history, moving it towards his desired end.

4. Why did God order the Israelites to go to war against others? How was this war justified?
See above.

5. How did Joshua challenge the people in his final speech?

This speech of Joshua is maybe *the* classic example of what theologians call a rehearsal of salvation history (heilsgeschichte). Often, when God's people are facing a new challenge, they are taken back to their history in order to remind them of what God did in their past. Joshua does that in a fairly competent way. Then, based on God's faithfulness in the past; based on the truth that God is the same yesterday, today and forever, we are encouraged to trust God for the future.

In **Eph 2:11-3** Paul calls on the Ephesian Christians – and us – to remember what we were, but that we have now been brought near to Jesus. Remembering is an important discipline for God's people, especially when we are facing a challenging future.

6. Why do you think God lavished blessings on Joshua and all the Israelites, who, like Joshua, trusted God?

By and large the time of conquest was a good time for the Israelites – they were obedient. There are the obvious lapses, but God dealt with those. Now God had promised the people – and Joshua – that if they trusted God – were obedient – God would bless them. God was being faithful to his promises.

We need to remember that in OT times, blessings were mainly associated with the land and good harvests – material blessing. When God blessed them for their obedience and trust, they experienced the blessing in material terms. The same promises apply to us – if we trust God we too will be blessed. We, however, are now able to understand that while the blessings may be in material terms, that the immaterial blessing – spiritual blessing – are actually more lasting and actually of greater benefit. This is NOT to say that we don't experience God's material blessing. But God's blessing for obedience is not limited to material blessing.

7. What practical steps can you take to gain a deeper faith in God?

Sadly there are many books giving 5/6/10 easy steps to whatever. And maybe there is value in some of them. However, whatever "steps" are taken must have the right starting point. The "steps" are not really about a deeper faith in God. Faith is a "fruit." We must understand that our concern is not the fruit – in terms of "benefits" which may accrue. Benefits like the love, joy peace, faith, power to witness etc. What we are looking for is relationship, intimacy, with Almighty God. And any steps we take must have intimacy as their aim. Which means that we are looking at "steps" which facilitate intimacy. If we get that right, then automatically, we will have love, joy peace, deeper faith, power to witness, etc.

Intimacy can only be facilitated in the context of time spent with the person – in this instance, God. We cannot facilitate intimacy with a spouse, a friend, a son or daughter, without committing time to the relationship. Time when we are "present" to God – actively listening, responding to what we read in scripture, to what we sense God to be saying to us.

This is an important discussion!!!!