

The BIG QUESTIONS about Christianity
The Taking of the Promised Land
12-12-10
Scripture Reading - Joshua 23:1-16

One of the pictures we hate the most is that of a powerful individual or army coming in and brutally taking from innocent victims that which isn't theirs.

That's why we hate: Darth Vader and the Emperor from Star Wars, Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin from our past, and the power hungry executives and bullies in our schools today.

We hate the idea of the strong wielding their superior power against the weak. We really hate the idea of the strong *ruthlessly and selfishly* wielding their superior power against the weak. And we especially hate the idea of the strong ruthlessly and selfishly wielding their superior power against the weak, *who are innocent and undeserving*.

And that's why many people HATE the God of the Bible, especially what many would call the God of the Old Testament.

They see God's acts of judgment in the OT, *especially the taking of the Promised Land*, as unwarranted, ruthless, brutal, and cruel. They see God as the power hungry evil dictator and the Caananites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites as His innocent victims.

For many, the taking of the Promise Land is right up there with Jesus being the only way, Hell, and God judging those who haven't heard, as Biblical teachings that are hard to stomach and extremely tempting to reject, ignore, twist, or downplay.

But, as I've tried to do with these other hard, *but clea*, Biblical teachings over the past few weeks, I want to encourage you not to reject, ignore, twist, or downplay the taking of the Promised Land, no matter how tempted you may be to do so. The taking of the Promised Land *did happen, it was brutal, and God was responsible for it all*. But rather than rejecting, ignoring, twisting, or downplaying these facts, God wants us to face them, to trust them, and to do our best, with his help, to understand and accept them.

As Paul said of some of God's other acts of judgment in the OT...

1 Corinthians 10:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, *but they were written down for our instruction*, on whom the end of the ages has come.

The taking of the Promised Land happened for a reason, *as an example*, not only for those who were there, *but for us* on whom the end of the ages has come. God wrote it down *for our instruction*, so that we could learn from it. God has something He wants to say to us through the taking of the Promised Land, and that's what we are seeking to hear from Him today.

But before we seek it further, I want to briefly point out to you **three things about the taking of the Promised Land that have helped me to reconcile it's brutality in my mind.**

- 1) Those who were driven out or killed were not innocent
 - a. Because of our sin, all of us are guilty before God and deserving of His wrath.
 - i. Jesus himself makes these amazing comments in Luke 13.
 1. **Luke 13:1-5 (ESV)**

¹ There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."
 - ii. Those who were driven from the Promised Land were particularly sinful.

1. Much of the Law was written in response to the abominable practices of the Canaanites.
2. **Leviticus 18:1-25 (ESV)**

¹ And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. ³ You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and *you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you.* You shall not walk in their statutes...⁶"None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the Lord...(incest)

¹⁸ And you shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive. (polygamy)

¹⁹ "You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness. ²⁰ And you shall not lie sexually with your neighbor's wife and so make yourself unclean with her. (adultery)

²¹ You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord. (child sacrifice)

²² You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. (homosexuality)

²³ And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion. (bestiality)

²⁴ "Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, *for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean,* ²⁵ *and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.*

- 2) Those who were driven out or killed were warned
 - a. Warning for cities outside the Promised Land

i. **Deuteronomy 20:10-15 (ESV)**

¹⁰ "When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it. ¹¹ And if it responds to you peaceably and it opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall do forced labor for you and shall serve you. ¹² But if it makes no peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. ¹³ And when the Lord your God gives it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword, ¹⁴ but the women and the little ones, the livestock, and everything else in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as plunder for yourselves. And you shall enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the Lord your God has given you. ¹⁵ Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not cities of the nations here.

b. Warning for cities inside Promised Land

i. **Deuteronomy 20:16-18 (ESV)**

¹⁶ But in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, ¹⁷ but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded, ¹⁸ that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God.

ii. Jericho and Rahab

1. **Joshua 2:8-14 (ESV)**

⁸ Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof ⁹ and said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came

out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. ¹¹ And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. ¹² *Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign* ¹³ that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death." ¹⁴ And the men said to her, "Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the Lord gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you."

iii. The Gibeonites

1. **Joshua 9:1-4 (ESV)**

¹ As soon as all the kings who were beyond the Jordan... heard of this, (the fall of Jericho and Ai) ² they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel. ³ *But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai,* ⁴ *they on their part acted with cunning* and went and made ready provisions and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended,

2. **Joshua 9:22-26 (ESV)**

²² Joshua summoned them, and he said to them, "Why did you deceive us, saying, 'We are very far from you,' when you dwell among us?" ²³ Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall never be anything but servants, cutters of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." ²⁴ They answered Joshua, "*Because*

it was told to your servants for a certainty that the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you—so we feared greatly for our lives because of you and did this thing. ²⁵ And now, behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it." ²⁶ So he did this to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel, and they did not kill them.

3) God took no pleasure in driving out or killing anyone, but did so for His glory and the good of His people

a. **Ezekiel 18:21-23 (NIV)**

²¹ "But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die.

²² None of the offenses he has committed will be remembered against him. Because of the righteous things he has done, he will live. ²³ *Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?*

Three things God wants us to learn from the taking of the Promised Land

1) God always keeps His promises

a. God promised Abraham the land of Canaan hundreds of years earlier

i. **Genesis 12:1-7 (ESV)**

¹ Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all

the families of the earth shall be blessed." ⁴ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, ⁵...When they came to the land of Canaan, ⁷... Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "*To your offspring I will give this land.*"

b. God kept his promise

i. **Joshua 23:1-14 (ESV)**

¹A long time afterward, when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, ² Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said...¹⁴ "And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that *not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed.*

c. God keeps His promises today

i. **Hebrews 13:8 (ESV)**

⁸Jesus Christ (God) is the same yesterday and today and forever.

ii. **Hebrews 13:5 (NIV)**

⁵Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "*Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.*"

iii. **Romans 8:1 (NIV)**

¹...there is...*no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

iv. **Romans 8:28 (NIV)**

²⁸And we know that in *all things* God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

v. **Romans 8:38-39 (NIV)**

³⁸... (*nothing*) can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

vi. **Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV)**

¹³You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

1. The 30 to 50

2) God fights for His people

a. God fought for the Israelites in their battle for the Promised Land and God fights for us in our battle for the Kingdom of God.

i. **Joshua 23:3-10 (ESV)**

³And you have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake, *for it is the Lord your God who has fought for you.* ⁴Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west. ⁵*The Lord your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the Lord your God promised you...* ⁹*For the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day.* ¹⁰*One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, just as he promised you.*

ii. **Philippians 2:12-13 (ESV)**

¹²...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

3) We need to be ruthless about the killing of our sin

a. Ruthless - To show no mercy. To completely destroy

b. God called the Israelites to be ruthless with the Canaanites and He calls us to be ruthless with our sin.

i. **Joshua 23:6-15 (ESV)**

⁶Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, ⁷that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or

serve them or bow down to them, ⁸ but you shall cling to the Lord your God just as you have done to this day... ¹¹ Be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God. ¹² For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, ¹³ know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the Lord your God has given you.

ii. **Mark 9:43-48 (ESV)**

⁴³ And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

⁴⁴ ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁶ ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'

iii. One of the big reasons we're not more ruthless with our sin is that we don't see it as being all that bad.

1. Jess' insight from Advent this week

Leviticus 4:27-35 (ESV)

²⁷ "If anyone of the common people sins *unintentionally* in doing any one of the things that by the Lord's commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, ²⁸ or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering... ³²...a lamb...a female without blemish ³³ and lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill it for a sin offering in the place where they kill the burnt offering.