

God's Complicated Promise

Lesson Scripture: Joshua 6; 8:26; 10:28-43; 11:1-23; Deuteronomy 7:1-26

Focus Scripture: Joshua 11:6-9, 16-23

***Key Verse:** It was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts so that they would come against Israel in battle, in order that they might be utterly destroyed and might receive no mercy but be exterminated, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Joshua 11:20*

JOSHUA 11:6-9, 16-23 (NRSV UE)

Joshua 11:6-9

6 And the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, for tomorrow at this time I will hand over all of them, slain, to Israel; you shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire."

7 So Joshua came suddenly upon them with all his fighting force, by the waters of Merom, and fell upon them.

8 And the Lord handed them over to Israel, who attacked them and chased them as far as Great Sidon and Misrephoth-maim and eastward as far as the valley of Mizpeh. They struck them down until they had left no one remaining.

9 And Joshua did to them as the Lord had commanded him; he hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots with fire.

16-23

16 So Joshua took all that land: the hill country and all the Negeb and all the land of Goshen and the lowland and the Arabah and the hill country of Israel and its lowland,

17 from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, as far as Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He took all their kings, struck them down, and put them to death.

18 Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.

19 There was not a town that made peace with the Israelites except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon; all were taken in battle.

20 For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts so that they would come against Isra-

JOSHUA 11:6-9, 16-23 (KJV)

Joshua 11:6-9

6 And the Lord said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire.

7 So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly; and they fell upon them.

8 And the Lord delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephothmaim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining.

9 And Joshua did unto them as the Lord bade him: he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire.

16-23

16 So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same;

17 Even from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baalgad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them.

18 Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.

19 There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle.

20 For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts,

el in battle, in order that they might be utterly destroyed and might receive no mercy but be exterminated, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

21 At that time Joshua came and wiped out the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel; Joshua utterly destroyed them with their towns.

22 None of the Anakim was left in the land of the Israelites; some remained only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod.

23 So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war.

that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the Lord commanded Moses.

21 And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities.

22 There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained.

23 So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.

KEY TERMS

- **Jericho** – The first city the Israelites encountered and conquered after crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Its miraculous fall served as a definitive demonstration of divine power over human strength.
- **Inheritance** – The passing of physical property/land within families and the spiritual blessings, promises, and covenantal rights bestowed by God upon his people.
- **Plunder (shalal, bizah)** – Goods, livestock, or people taken by force during war or conquest, representing both material spoils and divine

judgment.

- **Allotment**—A division of the conquered land of Canaan among the tribes of Israel as an inheritance.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as a significant crux in the book, transitioning from the phase of military conquest to the phase of permanent tribal settlement. Israel is now a nation. What was once a community who wandered in the wilderness is no longer simply a populous collection of migrants. They have become a governed people possessing a mighty army comprised of the twelve tribes of Israel. Previously led by the prophet, Moses they have been

transformed into a massive, empowered social order. They are entrenched in a faith belief that the sole deity of the universe has selected them and granted them the privilege of a Promised Land, upon which they are steadily encroaching. Israel's historic conquests and Joshua's evolution and affirmation into leadership must not be ignored. His willingness for accountability is just as important as his rise to power and fame.

As the wars proceeded, Joshua and the Israelite armies were once again victorious. The process of allotting land to each tribe in an equitable manner provided assurance that each tribe received a portion corresponding to their size and needs.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The Israelite people encamp east of the Jordan River in a region known as the plains of Moab. This position gives them the perspective of overlooking the northern end of the Dead Sea and the Southern Jordan Valley. They have accomplished the military victory over Jericho (chapter 6), which is interpreted

as God's authorizing act. But the narrator also reveals the turmoil that followed. After a decisive win over Jericho, Joshua and the people realized a terrible defeat at the hands of the people of Ai. This defeat was due to the disobedience of one man, named Achan. In Joshua chapter 7, the "devoted things" (Hebrew: *herem*) refer to items from the city of Jericho that were set apart exclusively for the Lord,

either for destruction or for his treasury. The Israelites were able to plunder the defeated nation which signified a transfer of wealth. But the disobedience of one individual resulted into a major setback for God's people. Achan confessed to secretly taking and hiding treasures comprised of a Babylonian robe, 200 shekels of silver,

and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels. After Joshua realized the sin against God that was affecting all of the people, he bowed down in remorse, begging for forgiveness. God was merciful and instructed Joshua to have the people consecrate themselves and prepare for the battles ahead. God's wrath was also

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found in the inflection of bitterness held by Israel's adversaries. The kings and rulers were said to have hardened hearts (Josh. 11:20). Scholars interpret God's hardening of the Canaanite kings' hearts as a judicial act of judgment following centuries of persistent wickedness and rebellion. Rather than an arbitrary act of divine force, this hardening is seen as God ratifying the kings' existing choices, strengthening their resolve to wage war so they could be justly destroyed. This story is not simply about God's power wielded over foreign lands. This illustrates the consequences that people face due to the poor choices of their leaders and those who follow evil. It recalls the need for repentance from sin and

commitment to a new life with God. How difficult this was for the people and still is today. Yet, humanity has been given a Savior, through Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God that the poor choices and mistakes due to temptation and human frailty have been resolved through God's son, Jesus the Christ.

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Continuous victories may lead to arrogance and conceit, sloppy behavior, and disregard for discipline. Most people see fighting wars and battling in competition as the natural order of survival. Encouraging a spirit of competition, winners and losers, is perceived as training and preparation for life. But most trainers and coaches will advise that the greatest challenge is maintaining a clear mind, focused on a broader vision. One must be committed to the survival of the community and be faithful to the purpose and plan that not only supports the individual but the community at large. Despite the harsh reality of wars

during ancient times, it poses a reality check of the divide throughout humanity today. The desire to have peace among all people has become increasingly distant as humanity vies for the natural resources and rulers of all nations appear to hunger for more power. Countless actions by the United States of America

have been questioned and condemned as lacking evidence of upholding not only our democracy and civil rights, but lack of demonstrating integrity and upholding human rights. The commands of God that are being repositioned in schoolhouses and courthouses may appear to be no more than plaques of art and artifacts of the vision of the past. The hypocrisy is exasperated by the belief that tax dollars are better spent on deportations and wars rather than provisions for food, housing, and affordable health care. The past teaches us that our greatest resources are human resources, young and old, able bodied or other abled. What we learn from the book of Joshua is not simply that God is able to bring victory to God's people. We also learn that war brings death and destruction, and even the victor is held accountable for fairness and justice. Let us pray that our vision and desired legacy for the next generation is that war will not be the first option but instead be the last resort.

CASE STUDY

Throughout history, the loss of human life due to mass conflicts is incalculable. Reflecting on the costs of war over the past century is daunting and immeasurable when recognizing the wholesale global impact on ethnicities, societies, economies, and the environment. In the 20th century the world witnessed over 260 wars or major conflicts across the globe. Most notable to people are the two massive world wars, the Russian Civil War, the Cold War, Korean War, Vietnam War, Arab-Israeli War, Iran-Iraq War, and the Gulf War. These do not include the wars and conflicts that have occurred since the beginning of the new millennium.

The Vietnam War (1955–1975) represents one of the most significant demographic shocks of the 20th century. Total death toll estimates vary widely but most scholarly figures range between 1.3 million and 3.8 million total deaths. In addition to the toxic herbicides from Agent Orange and unexploded ordnances (UXO) left



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behind, the Vietnam War resulted in a tremendous refugee crisis. The United Nations estimates that between 200,000 and 400,000 died at sea due to storms, piracy, and overcrowding. The war in Afghanistan (2001–2021) resulted in an estimated 176,000 to 212,000 deaths. When including related conflict in North-West Pakistan, the estimated death toll rises to approximately 241,000 people. These figures primarily represent

direct deaths from violence (bombs, bullets, and fire). However, hundreds of thousands more Afghans died from indirect causes such as hunger, disease, and the destruction of infrastructure. As of early 2026, the Russia-Ukraine war has resulted in a devastating death toll, with total casualties across both

sides estimated to exceed 1.8 million. As of October 3, 2025, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health, 67,075 people have been killed and 169,430 people have been injured. Recent analysis by public health experts suggests that the number of fatalities reported by the Gaza Ministry of Health may be

significantly undercounted. Regarding the War of Iran, the most recent conflict involving the U.S., the numbers are still being compiled. As of late April 2026, reports stated that over 3,600 people had been killed in Iran, with estimates including 1,701 civilians. Wars are also expensive. In the few years since the Hamas attack on Israel, the costs of the U.S. government support to Israel have exceeded \$31 billion. The U.S. spent an

estimated \$28 to \$35 billion on the war against Iran, in the three-month span between February and April 2026. Although some would focus on the monetary cost of war, the human toll and impact to human welfare, social structures, generational advancement, and the environment is a far greater loss. Conflict

resolution, peace negotiations, building alliances and promoting unity among diverse groups offer a less costly price. It is incumbent upon believers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to call for alternatives to war and work towards stronger leadership that will work towards options to resolve conflicts globally.

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LIFE APPLICATION

There is significant concern of the messaging from Christian leaders who reject or avoid opportunities to promote peace and welfare for all people. The ideology of having a “Christian” nation has no biblical foundation. Jesus often corrected the disciples to understand that the Messiah is not a military leader, but a God-inhabited Savior, spreading a message of love and understanding for all people. The parables that Jesus used to illustrate the definition of loving our neighbors, was effectively done through the Good Samaritan. It served as an illustration of the prejudice and bigotry that prevent love and compassion from reaching all people. The book of Joshua is often used as the justification of privileged and more powerful groups to condemn others. But God’s promises and plans are more complex and cannot be defined by narrow minded prejudicial practices. The true battle is against sin. God’s greatest promise is the redemption

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from sin we receive through Jesus Christ. The fight has already been won. We must share this with others, so that we all can be victorious through Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. What are the greatest concerns surrounding wars in the 21st century?
2. What messages (if any) should the church share in the 21st century regarding human rights and welfare?
3. How can the church become a stronger advocate for human rights, especially in times of war?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: AMEC Hymnal #453, “I Trust

in God”

Closing Prayer: Dear Lord, we humbly come before you this day with grateful hearts, thanking you for our basic needs being met and for the protection you provided that has kept us from harm. But we know that everyone does not

experience the same blessings. We pray for peace and prosperity to replace now for those who are in harm's way, disease, death, and despair. Heal our facing war and conflict, sickness and land, oh Lord. This we pray in Jesus' disease. We pray for healing of the land, name. Amen.
for righteous and honorable leadership,

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**September 21-27**

Monday	Joshua 2:1-7 (Welcoming Strangers)
Tuesday	James 2:18-26 (Faith Without Works Is Dead)
Wednesday	Psalms 67 (May the Nations Know God's Salvation)
Thursday	Hebrews 11:1-2, 29-31 (Faith to Live by)
Friday	Acts 10:34-48 (God Shows No Partiality)
Saturday	Joshua 2:8-14 (Rahab's Faith in Israel's God)
Sunday	Joshua 6:6-17 (Rahab Is Spared)