

# CONQUEST AND JUDGES: Part I

Suggested Reading: *The Book of Joshua*, particularly *Joshua* 1-4, 6-8, 23-24  
Coincides with Workbook: Pages 65-72

The time will come.

Eventually.

It is inevitable and unavoidable.

Joshua, Moses' successor and military commander of the Conquest of the Promised Land, poses the blunt question that demands an immediate answer from the wayward Jews: "Decide today whom you will serve.... As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."<sup>1</sup> Straightforward and courageous, Joshua is careful to spell out exactly the cost and demands: God is a "jealous" God in the sense of One who loves and is fiercely protective for the welfare of His beloved. A natural blessing flows from disobedience and a stiff price and natural consequences follow disobedience. This spiritual law of physics is clearly laid out by Joshua: "You may not be able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God who will not forgive your transgressions or your sin. If, after the good he has done for you, you forsake the Lord and serve strange gods, he will do evil to you and destroy you."<sup>2</sup> When the people adamantly exclaim their allegiance to God with the words, "We will serve God... and obey his voice,"<sup>3</sup> Joshua challenges them to "prove" it by the command: "Put away the strange gods that are among you and turn your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel."<sup>4</sup> *Repentance and obedience will always be the two actions necessary for us to walk in close fellowship with the Lord.*

Simple? Easy?—Not always.

Essential?—Absolutely.

How will you respond?

## Joshua 1

On the eve of moving into the Promised Land and certain battle and uncertain casualties, Joshua is given what assurance by God not once, but three times (1:6, 7, 9)?

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Who shall be accompanying Joshua (1:5,9)? \_\_\_\_\_

How "firm and steadfast" typically are you, or do you more closely resemble the picture portrayed in James 1:6-8: "the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed about by the wind...unstable in all his ways"? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Joshua 2

How many spies did Joshua send (2:1)? \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua 24:15

<sup>2</sup> Joshua 24:19-20

<sup>3</sup> Joshua 24:21, 24

<sup>4</sup> Joshua 24:23

What did they learn from Rahab the harlot, “where they lodged” (2:1, 9-11)? How was her assessment relayed by the spies to Joshua (2:24)? \_\_\_\_\_

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Note that 40 years had come and gone since the Red Sea deliverance and the pagans were still talking about it! It is somewhat ironical that Rahab seems more confident of God’s impending victory than the spies are! “Think of the impact Rahab’s faith had on the two spies. When we trust God, He will always use our faith in someone else’s life as well. Would Israel have invaded Jericho without the encouragement from Rahab? We will never know, for the fact is, God chose to use her faith for this very purpose.”<sup>5</sup>

What plan of deliverance did the spies pledge to Rahab (2:17-21)? \_\_\_\_\_

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*Life application:* “Think about what we have here—an immoral woman from a pagan city that is about to be destroyed. Yet because of her faith—not her ancestry or morality—she is spared! Rahab was a trophy of grace who was not in the fold of Israel, yet she heard the voice of God, embraced Israel as her people, and was welcomed. She became the ancestor of King David and Christ. The message from her life is powerful—it is never too late to begin following God. When we choose to believe, we find a fresh start with faith.”<sup>6</sup>

*Historical Note:* Rahab’s place was a perfect site for the spies to lodge, for it was positioned on the city wall in such a way that they had a great view of the city and could make a quick get-away (which indeed proved necessary). Excavations at Jericho show that “the city had two walls approximately thirty feet high. The outer wall was six feet thick, and the inner twelve feet, with a twelve to fifteen-foot space between them. The city itself was relatively small, and, as it became crowded, people built their houses between the walls. Rahab’s house was obviously one of these, with a window on the outside wall. Both the excavated walls and city show signs of violent destruction.”<sup>7</sup>

When the walls eventually fell, only Rahab’s portion of the wall was left standing, and she and her family were saved from the sword.

What do you learn about Rahab in Matthew 1:5-6, Hebrews 11:31, and James 2:23-26? \_\_\_\_\_

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Rahab was a pagan who did not initially know God’s truths and lived a life of sin, but she responded once she became acquainted with God and His works. Are you as responsive as Rahab? Are you unconvinced that God can use you because of your past? \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>5</sup> Barber, Wayne. *Following God: Life Principles from the Women of the Bible: Book One*. © 2004 by AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN, pp 41.

<sup>6</sup> Barber, pp 37, 41.

<sup>7</sup> Barber, pp 42.

“He seeks us before we dream of seeking Him; he knocks before we invite Him in; He loves us before we respond”- Bishop Fulton Sheen.<sup>8</sup>

### Joshua 3

Was this a military or spiritual campaign? What clues are given as to its real dynamics (3:11, 14-17)? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Joshua 4

What is the meaning of the memorial stones taken from the bed of the Jordan River, where priests “had stood motionless” (4:6-7, 21-24)? \_\_\_\_\_

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In particular, crossing the Jordan on dry land was to teach the Israelites what two lessons, according to 4:24:

- (1) \_\_\_\_\_
- (2) \_\_\_\_\_

### Joshua 5-6

How did the kings of the Amorites and Canaanites react to this miracle (5:1)? \_\_\_\_\_

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Joshua then hits the “pause” button for what reason (5:2-8)? What does this tell you about Moses’ disobedience to the Law? \_\_\_\_\_

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Once they were in full obedience to the Law, they were ready to worship, and worship they did! The pagan neighbors would have observed the joyful singing. God Almighty had shown up, and His people were celebrating not only what He *had* done for them, but also what He was *about to do*!

What ceased once they finished celebrating the Passover (5:12)? \_\_\_\_\_  
Once the people crossed the Jordan and its waters returned, they had only one option: go forward trusting God. If they did nothing, they would starve. The Jordan prevented a retreat barrier. Forward march!

When have you felt that you had no option but to trust God and move forward? How did God prove Himself to you? Did that affect your confidence in facing your next ‘battle’?

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Prior to the siege of Jericho, who does Joshua encounter (5:14)? \_\_\_\_\_

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Remember what Joshua had been promised earlier, in 1:9.

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<sup>8</sup> *The Wisdom of Fulton Sheen with Introduction by Matthew Kelly*. © 2019 by Blue Sparrow, North Palm Beach, FL, pp 40.

What battle plan did the Angel of the Lord convey to Joshua (6:3-5)? \_\_\_\_\_

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What was the “ban” (6:18-19)? \_\_\_\_\_

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Joshua 6:20

“We miss out on the Miraculous because we are not willing to risk asking God for the extraordinary. Yet taking a risk to trust Him and act on His word is part of prayer, part of faith. Joshua risks looking foolish by telling his whole army to shout instead of fight at Jericho. The Lord rewards his act of obedient faith and tears down the walls of Jericho.”<sup>9</sup>

“What does it mean to trust, to turn one’s heart to God? It means to root the whole of one’s life in God, and not to ground our concerns in the things of the world: wealth, power, pleasure, and honor. Ask yourself: ‘What is the center of gravity in my life?’ The Bible consistently proposes this question. For example, read the book of Joshua, when Joshua lays it on the line for the people of Israel: ‘Do you serve God or some other gods?’ That’s the question being asked of you today.”<sup>10</sup>

How did these military victories affect others in the region (6:27)? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Joshua 7

Partial obedience is disobedience. What was Achan’s sin (7:1,11, 20-21)? \_\_\_\_\_

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Why was it so serious? What resulted (7:2-8)? \_\_\_\_\_

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What penalty did Achan receive (7:24-26)? \_\_\_\_\_

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“How does Achan’s failure illustrate what St. John Paul II spoke of as a ‘communion of sin,’ whereby one person’s sin, no matter how private, affects the rest of the Church?”<sup>11</sup>

### Joshua 8

Using a clever ambush plan, Joshua then proceeds to defeat the king of Ai, killing all 12,000 citizens. Afterwards, what did Joshua do in the presence of all the Israelites of all ages (women and children too) (8:30-35)? \_\_\_\_\_

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How was worship and adherence to the Law central to Joshua’s leadership? \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>9</sup> *Daily Catholic Wisdom*: Accessed online May 3, 2021 from yourfriends@catholicwisdom.org. Quoted from *Bible in a Year: Your Daily Encounter with God*.

<sup>10</sup> *Barron, Bishop. Daily Gospel Reflections from Bishop Barron*: John 14:1-6 from *Word on Fire*. Presented online April 30, 2021 at wof@wordonfire.org.

<sup>11</sup> Cavins, Jeff. *Workbook: The Bible Timeline: The Story of Salvation*. © 2019 by Ascension Press, West Chester, PA, pp 67.

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**Joshua 9**

What deceptive plan did the Gibeonites employ to trick Israel into an alliance of peace (9:3-6)? What mistake did Joshua make (9:14-15)? \_\_\_\_\_

When have you made a decision without consulting God and later regretted it? \_\_\_\_\_

What compromise was made (9:21-27)? \_\_\_\_\_

**Joshua 10**

What effect did the capture of Gibeon have on the King of Jerusalem (10:2, 5)? \_\_\_\_\_

What miracle did God perform as Joshua fought the alliance of pagan kings (10:10-14)? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the fate of the five Amorite kings? What lesson did Joshua teach his men (10:24-25)? \_\_\_\_\_

Joshua went on to conquer all the major settlements in the South (10:28-39), leaving no survivors. How quickly and thoroughly did he carry out this campaign (10:40-42)? \_\_\_\_\_

**Joshua 11**

Against what odds did Joshua beat the alliance of northern kings (11:3-5)? \_\_\_\_\_

Did Joshua carry out all the Lord had commanded Moses (11:15)? Why was it so imperative to wipe out the Canaanites? \_\_\_\_\_

**Reconciling a Loving God with Violence of the Old Testament**

One of the most common objections that you may be confronted with as a Catholic defending the faith, will be a question that will run something like: “How can you believe in a God who permits such evil?” —or— “How can you reconcile God being loving and commanding His people to essentially commit genocide on the people of Canaan?” The corollary in a discussion about homosexuality may be: “How can you believe in a God who would wipe out Sodom and Gomorrah with fire?” These are good, albeit complex, questions that demand a response to contemporary atheists and seekers, or believers who are wrestling with the Word of God.

First, as Bishop Fulton Sheen said: “The evil in the world must not make me doubt the existence of God. There could be no evil if there were no God. Before there can be a hole in a

uniform, there must be a uniform; before there is death, there must be life; before there is error, there must be truth; before there is a crime, there must be liberty and law; before there is war, there must be peace; before there is a devil, there must be a God, rebellion against whom made the devil.”<sup>12</sup>

In short, “What about all this fighting? Many people read this far in the Bible only to put it down, put off by what seems to be excessive bloodshed. How can the God pictured here be the God of love and forgiveness? There is no easy answer to such questions The best way to move forward may be to back up and review the big picture.

The God we met at Creation is a God to whom goodness is paramount. The God who called Abram is a God of promise and abundant blessing. The story so far has shown us how people who reject God’s goodness and blessing live: Cain kills his brother, and his descendants prize vengeance (Genesis 4), Pharaoh oppresses the Hebrews and kills their children. God has just pulled the children of Israel out of the frying pan of Egypt. If they are to survive in Canaan, the ‘fire’ represented by the culture there must be put out. God has allowed the people of Canaan hundreds of years to repent of their wickedness (see Genesis 15:16). The Red Sea crossing and Israel’s victories on the way to Canaan send a final set of warnings, which the people understand but do not heed—except for Rahab and the Gibeonites, who listen and are saved (see Joshua 2:8-13).

At the time of the Conquest, there is not yet a remedy for the problem of sin, but there are visible consequences for it. God is not only merciful—he is just. His directions to Israel in the Conquest are concise and specifically directed to apply in particular situations, not to every battle. Today, under the New Covenant, we must still work to possess ‘the land’ of the kingdom, but as St Paul is careful to point out (see Corinthians 10 and Ephesians 6), our enemies are no longer other nations but spiritual forces of evil. The battle begins in our hearts and minds, and we must destroy every sinful thought with the ruthlessness Israel was meant to show the inhabitants of those cities God put under the ban.”<sup>13</sup>

How would you respond to someone who said: “The God of the Old Testament is harsh and cruel, but the God of the New Testament is loving”? -or- “How can a loving God condemn anyone? He is loving.” \_\_\_\_\_

God is loving and holy. How do you see both of these attributes highlighted in the Book of Joshua? \_\_\_\_\_

Note that after Ai there will be no further “ban” or Kherem warfare. God does not take any pleasure in the death of His created beings (Ezekiel 18:32, 33:11).

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<sup>12</sup> *The Wisdom of Fulton Sheen: 365 Days of Inspiration*, with an Introduction by Matthew Kelly. © 2019 by Blue Sparrow, North Palm Beach, FL, pp 84.

<sup>13</sup> Cavins, Jeff. *The Bible Timeline: The Story of Salvation Workbook: The Great Adventure*. © 2019 by Ascension Press, West Chester, PA, pp 70.

## Summary: The Moral Problem of the Conquest

“While the time of the conquest contains many marvelous events, it also casts a shadow that cannot be ignored. What are we to make of the command for the utter destruction of the Canaanite tribes in Israel’s conquest of the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 20:16-17)? How can such a mandate, located at the heart of Israel’s Scriptures, be the will of God? Can the God of the Old Testament who commanded “Thou shalt not kill”- the God made manifest in Jesus in the New Testament- mandate genocide?

As with divorce (Matt 19:8), *herem* is a concession that does not reflect God’s original plan. When the Exodus began, God told Moses he would ‘drive out’ the inhabitants of the land from before Israel (Ex 23:23-33). Indeed, God says he will send a ‘terror’ before Israel and drive out the people with ‘hornets’ (Ex 23:27-28). Exodus makes no mention of *herem* warfare. Rather, the people occupying the Promised Land will flee before Israel, with no need for battle or slaughter. It is only after Israel’s apostasy and rebellion that Moses gives directions regarding warfare and *herem*. It would seem, then, that slaughter and warfare were not in God’s original plan for Israel to take the Promised Land. Israel’s failure to trust God and enter the land a generation earlier, along with their proclivity to follow the other nations in practicing pagan idolatry, results in their having to forcibly clear out the inhabitants of the land.

While Israel’s sins and lack of trust necessitate a forcible removal of the pagan nations, the sins and wickedness of the pagan nations also enter into God’s allowing warfare and the timing of the return to the land (Deut 9:4-5). Long before the Conquest, God had foretold to Abraham that his descendants would not be freed from Egypt and given the Promised Land until ‘the iniquity of the Amorites is *complete*’ (Genesis 15:16). Because of their wickedness, the Canaanite tribes are made to perish before Israel and driven from the land. Yet God shows no partiality, as he warns Israel that if they sin as the Amorites had, then they, too, will be driven from the Promised Land (Deut 8:19-20).<sup>14</sup>

### Joshua 12

This chapter lists the many conquered kings—thirty-three in all!

### Joshua 13-19

The land is divided among the twelve tribes of Israel, and loyal Caleb (leader of the tribe of Judah) receives his portion (14:6-15; 15:13). However, was Jerusalem (whose inhabitants were the Jebusites) completely subdued (15:63)? \_\_\_\_\_  
Keep in mind that battles were won or lost not based on God’s ability, but on the people’s faith and obedience.

### Joshua 20-21

Asylum cities were set up. In Joshua 21, Levitical cities were established. How many cities were allotted to the Levites (21:41)? \_\_\_\_\_  
Did God keep His promise to the patriarchs (21:43-45)? \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>14</sup> Gray, Tim and Jeff Cavins. *Walking with God: A Journey Through the Bible*. © 2010 by Ascension Press, West Chester, PA, pp 114-116.

**Joshua 22-23**

As Joshua prepares to die, what solemn instruction does he leave (22:6-16)? \_\_\_\_\_

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What does it mean “to cling to the Lord” (23:8)? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Joshua 24:15**

The history of Israel is succinctly summarized by Joshua in 24:1-13.

What famous quote by Joshua is found in 24:15? \_\_\_\_\_

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“Joshua delivers his final speech at Shechem, which is no accident, for it was here that Jacob gave a similar speech, instructing his wives and family to put away the idols they had taken from their father’s house and to bury these idols under an oak tree in Shechem (Gen 35:1-4). Joshua appeals to this sacred family memory, much like an American president might appeal for courage by speaking from Valley Forge or Gettysburg.

The key word-repeated almost to the point of monotony in the speech- is ‘serve.’ This word should be very familiar from the Exodus story, where ‘serve,’ or *avad* in Hebrew, could mean either ‘work’ or ‘worship.’ Joshua exhorts Israel to keep the charge given to them at Sinai—serving the Lord their God—and initiates the next generation into the covenant life of Israel.”<sup>15</sup>

*New Testament Connection:*

Read Matthew 8:5-17.

“What is the center of gravity of your life? What is your ‘ultimate concern’? The Bible consistently lays this out as an either/or. Think of (this) passage when Joshua lays it on the line for the people of Israel: ‘Do you serve the Lord or some other gods?’ Jesus tells his followers: ‘Either you are with me or you are against me.’ (This) Gospel reminds us that we each have to answer this question with great honesty and clarity.”<sup>16</sup>

Jesus will ask the same question to His followers, (after the controversial Bread of Life discourse in John Chapter 6, where He maintains it is essential to eat His body and drink His blood): “Do you also want to leave” (John 6:67)? Jesus’ listeners could not fathom a God who required such action. They had their preconceived notions of what the Messiah would do, and Jesus did not meet their expectations.

“Especially today, with all the stress and the many difficulties of daily life, there is a temptation to escape from reality, to create an abstract spiritual world that is unreal and

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<sup>15</sup> Gray, Tim and Jeff Cavins. *Walking with God: A Journey Through the Bible*. © 2010 by Ascension Press, West Chester, PA, pp 126-127.

<sup>16</sup> Bishop Barron. *Daily Gospel Reflections from Bishop Barron: Matthew 8:5-17*. Presented online June 26, 2021 from *Word on Fire*.



illusory, and to encounter a god that we have created, a god who gives what we want and leaves us in peace to do what we want. Instead, the Incarnation tells us that we cannot create our own god. Rather, it is He who comes to reveal Himself to us, to make Himself known to us, and who comes to meet us.”<sup>17</sup>

What false image of God have you held? What is the Biblical portrait of God that you have appreciated over time? \_\_\_\_\_  
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The renewal of the covenant with God is made at Shechem in 24:16. What stern warning does Joshua then give to the people (24:19-20)? How does this compare to Moses’ admonition in Deuteronomy 6:4-7, 12, 14, 18? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Joshua died at age 110 and is buried (24:29). On what positive note does the book of Joshua end (24:31)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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**New Testament Connection:**

“Israel’s conquest and occupation of the Promised Land anticipates the Church’s warfare against the powers of the world and its efforts to establish and spread the kingdom of God on earth. The apostles Paul and Peter encourage the early Christians in this battle. Read the following passages from their letters, and note what they say about the nature of the battle and the weapons God gives us to fight it. Relate them to the book of Joshua if you can.”<sup>18</sup>

2 Corinthians 10:3-4 \_\_\_\_\_  
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1 Peter 2:11 \_\_\_\_\_  
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1 Timothy 6:11-12 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Ephesians 6:11-18 \_\_\_\_\_  
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<sup>17</sup> Mother Elvira Petrozzi, foundress of Comunita Cenacolo. Reflection: “To Whom Shall We Go?” in *Magnificat*, August 2021, Vol. 23, No. 6, pp 326-327.

<sup>18</sup> Cavins, Jeff. *The Bible Timeline Workbook: The Story of Salvation*. © 2019 by Ascension Press, West Chester, PA, pp 69.