

## The Conquest

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### A. Introduction

1. Miraculous provision and divine protection notwithstanding, the children of Israel rebelled against the Lord and had to learn the costly price of disobedience – forty years of wilderness wanderings. Not until all the rebels had died was the time ripe for the conquest of Canaan.
2. This attitude of rebellion was deeply entrenched in spite of their agreement to the covenant. The decisive moment came with the return of the spies and the complaint of the people (Numbers 13-14). Unbelief lay at the root – Hebrews 3:7-19. All would die except Joshua and Caleb and a younger generation. These would go in to possess the land.

### B. The time and the place

1. If the Exodus is dated c.1270 BC, when Rameses II ruled Egypt, then Joshua invaded Palestine c.1230 BC.
2. The name Palestine derives from the migrant sea people from Crete (Caphtor) called Philistines who occupied the coastal strip in the five key cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath and Ekron – hence Philistia (Palestine). It was also known as Canaan because Ham's descendants through his son, Canaan, settled there. Commonly, the area was measured 'from Dan to Beersheba.' (Judges 20:21).
3. The territory was, and remains, one of the most important geographic corridors in the world. It connects the continents of Africa, Asia Minor, Europe and Asia, and is the western flank of the fertile crescent which stretches from the Egyptian Nile, along the Mediterranean seaboard, curving across and down the Tigris and Euphrates to the Persian Gulf. Three great trade roads ran through it, converging on Damascus in the north. They are The Way of the Sea, The Way to Shur, and The King's Highway.

### C. The preparation

1. Moses addressed the people after they had defeated Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan on the east side of the River Jordan. These two victories provided a settlement for the two and a half tribes of the Reubenites, Manasseh and the Gadites and put the fear of God in the hearts of the Canaanites to the west of the Jordan.
2. Moses rehearses the history of their wanderings in the wilderness and the reasons why. He also appoints Joshua as his successor. This is no soft sermon. Moses is explicit about the rebellion and fickleness of the people. In repeating the Ten Commandments and their implications he urges the leaders to teach these generation upon generation, with dire warnings if they do not.

3. He also reminds them that conquering the land is God's will according to his covenant promise to their forefathers. God had blessed them in the wilderness; how much more he will bless them in the promised land!
4. Being a prophet, Moses looks far into the future, seeing the establishment of a central temple, the appointing of a king, and the captivity and restoration of God's people.
5. Nothing is deterministically set in stone. The response of the people will determine their destiny. I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ... (Deuteronomy 30:19).

#### D. The gods of Canaan

1. The farming Canaanites worshipped a pantheon of fertility gods, each of which addressed a human need. Yet these gods were not innocent projections of the people's hopes and fears. Although powerless in themselves (Psalm 115:4-8; Isaiah 44:12-20; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6), nonetheless, they inspired demonic worship (1 Corinthians 10:19-20).
2. Baal, the male fertility god
  - a. Baal was the western Semitic storm-god, also known as Hadad. His name means master, possessor, or husband. He is the god who fights death, infertility and flood waters. Did Ham's son, Canaan, in his unbelief imagine a god who would conquer the flood which God had sent on the world? First depicted as a phallic symbol, he is later represented holding forked lightning.
  - b. God's people have a better security against disaster and judgement. It is a covenant rainbow and the ark of salvation.
3. Asherah, the female fertility god
  - a. Asherah was the mother-goddess who came from the sea. She was the female consort of Baal, and likewise a fertility symbol.
  - b. Christianity has no female deity, for there is one God, revealed to us in male terms of Father and Son. However, the church is revealed consistently in the feminine—the Bride of Christ, Jerusalem above who is our mother, the fruitful heavenly woman (Revelation 19:7-8; Galatians 4:26; Revelation 12:1-6, 13-17).
4. Ashtaroth, the goddess of violence
  - a. Ashtaroth is also known as Ishtar, Astarte, Aphrodite and Venus, and The Queen of Heaven. She was a witch-goddess associated with sex and violence.
  - b. The primeval urges of love (eros) and death (thanatos) are sanctified by the Holy Spirit to become fruitfulness and passionate devotion to God, and the power to establish his righteous kingdom.
5. Molech, god of war
  - a. Molech was also known as Melech, Melcart, Malcolm and Chemosh. He was a god of war and blood and fire, requiring sacrifice, especially of first-born children.

- b. The sacrifice of God's first-born secures us from the insecurity that drives people to sacrifice their children for economic reasons. Abraham understood this when he offered Isaac.
  - c. Worship of these gods involved ritual murder, child abuse, mutilation and prostitution. Because of their key geographic position the Canaanites were capable of influencing the whole world.
6. The Israelites were the instruments of God's judgement to cleanse the land, to execute judgement on the child-killers, and to transform Palestine's geographic position into one that would inspire the whole world to true worship (Genesis 15:16; Leviticus 18:24-25).
  7. The fact that the Israelites compromised in their mission fatally tarnished their relationship with God from then on. Moses had anticipated this possibility in Deuteronomy 28-30.

## E. A new era

1. Moses died on Mount Nebo because of his unbelief (Numbers 20:7-13). A new generation entered Canaan under the mature anointing of Joshua and Caleb (Deuteronomy 34:9).
2. Joshua (his name means the same as Jesus, God is Salvation) served many years as assistant to Moses and was with him at the giving of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 24:12-18). He spent his time before God in the Tabernacle of Meeting (Exodus 33:11). He was a Spirit-filled man and was appointed as Moses' deputy and successor (Numbers 27:15-23).
3. The first convert to the worship of God in Canaan was a prostitute named Rahab who hid two Israelite spies on condition that she and her family were spared. She is a hero of the faith, proven by her works (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). Later she married Salmon and became the mother of Boaz whose line produced David. So she is in the genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1:5).
4. The river Jordan was crossed miraculously from east to west and at once the fear of God fell on the inhabitants of the land (Joshua 5:1). The Israelites established their covenant commitment in the land by being circumcised and celebrating the Passover (Joshua 5:2-11). Corn replaced manna (Joshua 5:12). The blessings and curses of the covenant were recited on fertile Mt. Gerazim and barren Mt. Ebal, respectively (Joshua 8:32-35).

## F. The campaign

1. After crossing the Jordan the Israelites miraculously took Jericho, the lowest city on earth (– 260 metres). Ai was a near disaster because of Achan's sin (Joshua 6-9).
2. The Israelites then swept south to Hebron and westwards to the Gaza strip. The Gibeonites struck a deal with the invaders, preferring servitude to death (Joshua 9). Ammorite opposition was crushed by hail from heaven, and miraculously the sun stood still to allow the battle to be won (Joshua 10).
3. Returning to central Canaan, Joshua's army moved steadily northwards, conquering as far as Hazor.

4. Unconquered territories remained but the land was sufficiently cowed inside seven years to allow the settlement of the Israelites by tribal boundaries. Cities of refuge were set up and the Levites were given cities also, so establishing the judiciary and the priesthood. God's promise to the patriarchs had been fulfilled.

#### G. Some principles of spiritual warfare

1. It is the Lord's battle (Joshua 5:13-15).
2. A war of judgement must be without compromise (Deuteronomy 7:1-6).
3. Spiritual authority can produce miracles (Joshua 10:12-14).
4. It is good to taste victory (Joshua 10:24-25).
5. Old age does not mean you have to give up (Joshua 14:6-15).

#### H. Questions for reflection

1. Genocide or judgement, inheritance or invasion? Consider!
2. How do the pagan gods manifest themselves in today's secular society? What is your alternative?
3. What can we learn about our own spiritual warfare from the conquest of Canaan?

