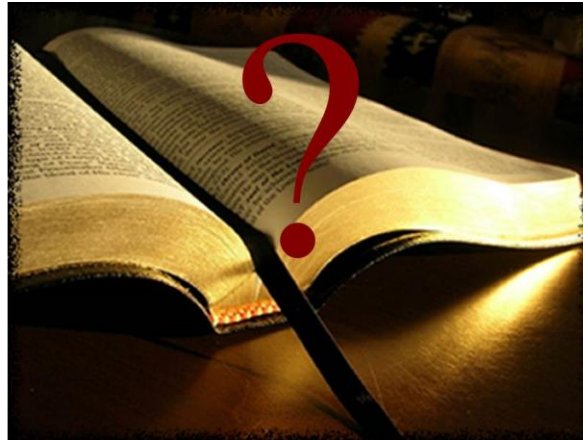


Worship at home

October 17, 2021

21st Sunday after Pentecost

<https://pccweb.ca/moorepc/>



God calls us to worship:

*The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty;
the Lord is robed, he is girded with strength.
He has established the world; it shall never be moved;
your throne is established from of old;
you are from everlasting.¹*

We bring our praise and confessions:

Praise be to you, O God,
for the wonders of your creation.
You spin the shining stars and stretch out the seas to the furthest horizon.
You lift the curtain of dawn so light can chase away the night.
You give the earth its seasons and each creature its lifespan,
breathing life and love into each precious soul.
And so, we come to praise you,
knowing human greatness is a mere shadow of yours.
In this hour of worship,
open us once more to your Spirit,
inspire us to serve you with creativity and commitment,
and with the honesty and humility we meet in Jesus Christ,
your Son, our Lord.

¹ Psalm 93:1-2

Lord Jesus Christ,
you call us to walk your way in the world,
to serve our neighbours and love our enemies.
We confess these are not easy choices for us.
Forgive us, Jesus, for seeking an easier way than your way.

God assures us of his forgiveness:

While it is true that we have sinned, it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love in Jesus Christ. To all who humbly seek the mercy of God I say, In Jesus Christ, our sin is forgiven. Be at peace with God, with yourself and with one another.

**In response to the gospel,
we confess our faith and offer our lives and resources:**

Please remember to prayerfully make your offerings to the congregation of which you are most associated. If you're a member/adherent of Knox-Moore or St. Andrew's, Mooretown, please send your offering to Howard McKellar or Judy Armstrong.

Hymn: #290 "Immortal, invisible, God only wise"

God speaks to us through his Word:

Holy One, you are the Source of Wisdom for the ages. Prepare us to learn from your Word. Open our minds and hearts to the scriptures by the illumination of your Holy Spirit, that we may grow wiser as we listen, and serve you more willingly as we live.

READ JOSHUA 11:16-23.

Did God really say that?

The Canaanites were afraid of the Israelites. We've come across that at least twice now. The first time was in connection with Rahab and the two spies sent by Joshua to determine the lay of the land, the second time was last week in Joshua 5 when we read that the kings of the Amorites and all the kings of the Canaanites were paralyzed by fear because of the Israelites. "Their hearts melted."²

However, when we get to Joshua 11 which serves as a summary of Israel's three campaigns into the Promised Land: central, southern, and northern, we read that in all of these battles the Lord God gave the Canaanites the courage they needed to come against Israel in battle.

The verb used in verse 20 is "to harden." It was the Lord's doing *to harden* their hearts. Often, we think of that expression as meaning that they were obstinate or stubborn or perhaps uncaring. However, the Hebrew word more properly means "to strengthen." When we hold this with the image in chapter 5 wherein their hearts melted, the image that comes to mind is of reconstituting something of strength. Of putting the strength back in that which has weakened.

It was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts. To give them courage to come against Israel in battle.

Had the reading ended there, it would perhaps be easier to accept as the word of a gracious God. It would describe God levelling the battlefield between the confident Israelites and the frightened Canaanites. God gave them the courage which enabled them to have a fair fight with the Israelites.

However, it doesn't end there.

² Joshua 5:1

We read on that it was the Lord's doing to harden the hearts of the Canaanites to come against Israel in battle *in order that* they might be utterly destroyed. In case you're unclear of the intention, the author spelled it out: receive no mercy, and be exterminated.

It was the Lord's doing to give the Canaanites courage to enter these battles in order that they might be utterly destroyed!

This is not so easy to accept on first reading. That the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob whom we know in Jesus of Nazareth would encourage a people group – rather, several people groups – just so they could be destroyed.

And yet, this is one of the central themes of the book of Joshua and indeed the motivating idea of their three campaigns of conquest which are described in chapters 6-11:15: *That Israel was under divine commission to utterly destroy the inhabitants of the land which we call Canaan.*

I want to spend our time today reflecting a little on how we might read the difficult parts of scripture.

In order to follow and learn from Jesus, we must read, study, assimilate, and be changed by the written record of God's revelation to us under the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, disciples of Jesus must take seriously the word of God, know it, and submit in obedience to scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; interpreting the story and shaping our lives accordingly.

However, when you undertake the task of learning the scriptures, it won't be too long before you come across something that is confusing, obscure, or even offensive. Something that profoundly challenges or outright offends your pre-conceived notion of God, of justice, of morality.

Joshua 11:20, is an example of such a difficult passage. It's a passage which, after reading, one might reasonably ask: "Did God really say that?"

Did God really sanction the destruction of a people group: their lives, religion, and culture.

How can we read this verse?

When you come across such passages, you can choose to ignore them. With this choice, you might find yourself ignoring a substantial portion of our sacred writings. The disadvantage of this choice is that your understanding of God, of God's purpose and ways, and of our relationship with God will be limited in consequence.

Instead, I want to urge you to choose to believe that the Holy Spirit still has something to teach us in these passages. To sit with them, ask questions, research, and discuss them with others; to open yourself to the possibility of learning something new about God and God's ways.

It behooves anyone who chooses to take this route to commit such verses to memory so that you can continue thinking them over, and to purchase a good study Bible with footnotes, essays, commentaries, and maps.

Taking this path with verse 20 and the surrounding verses, we tuck the verse into our memory bank and then read on. We learn in doing so that the writer described the people who were to be destroyed as Anakim.

This is a little bit different from before when Joshua listed the tribes who lived in Canaan prior to the Israelites: the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites.

In fact, the Anakim were a race who lived throughout the area. Amongst the Canaanites there may have been some Anakim, amongst the Hittites there may have been some Anakim, etc.. The Anakim were the people who had so frightened the first generation of Israelites into disobedience and thus sentenced them to 38 more years and death in the wilderness. They were so large, strong, and fearsome that they were thought to be descendants of the Nephilim. When you consult the notes in your study Bible – or ask your pastor – you learn that the Nephilim were a race of giants described in Genesis 6 as the product of relations between lesser gods who were trying to push Yahweh out of the picture and human women. These 'sons of God' tried to undermine

Yahweh by mixing with Yahweh's children and thus taking possession of the people and the land that were properly Yahweh's.

So, before the Israelites arrived, there were people living in the land who were culturally sophisticated, and who were formidable warriors, and who did not recognize Yahweh as Creator and Lord. They were not loyal to Him nor his ways nor his vision of what life could and should be like.

Now, in the biblical perspective, the very particular God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob whom we know in the unique One-of-a-kind Son of God named Jesus of Nazareth is *the* creator. Of everything – the heavens, the earth, and all that is therein.

Which means, that whomever is living on a particular piece of real estate is doing so as a guest, or as a squatter.

The land did not belong to the Anakim. Yet, they were living as though it did and as though the Lord God was not real, nor was He able to do anything about it.

So, when the second generation of Israelites finally arrive at the Promised Land, they saw the destruction of those who caused the fall of their parents and who were squatting on and polluting the land of Yahweh as an act of worship. An act of offering to Yahweh. They will rid the land of all that is not of Yahweh and offer it as a cleansing ritual. By the destruction of the Anakim, the land will be redeemed; reclaimed in God's name and made holy once more.

We learn all of this contextual information with the help of the footnotes in our study Bibles. We also bring an awareness of our own context – present and past. Of how notions of Holy War and devotional extermination have been used in our own histories – of ridding the land or of converting all that is not holy to the Lord.

Then we come back and again ask: How can *we* read this verse?

Did God really sanction all of this violence?

Is God pleased by such an offering?

Is this justification for destroying people and cultures in the name of God?

Or, is this an example of misguided obedience from a limited grasp of the Lord and the Lord's intentions?

Upon reflection, you might come to the conclusion that the answer is: Yes and No. God does not favour the destruction of his good creation – people included. Nor can any particular nation claim to be unique in having God on their side. As we read last week, God is neither on the side of the Israelites nor the Canaanites. However, God does root out and destroy any power that seeks to undermine His purposes of redemption and distract his children from that which will give our life meaning beyond our circumstances, namely fellowship with Him.

No, God does not condone the destruction of lives. After all, it's one of the commandments: You shall not commit murder! And, it's the basis of the food laws that required no animal be eaten that still had blood in it.

At the same time, God is committed to destroying all powers that undermine who he is and what he's trying to do in redeeming and restoring his beloved creation.

So now we look to that other “Joshua.” The one conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a woman named Mary who was still in her virginity. The one whose name is translated “Jesus.” And in him we see this God taking upon himself the sacrifice which truly destroys the bonds of those other forces and redeems/reclaims anyone who accepts his grace in faith. He sacrificed his place in the heavenly throne room to make his home among people. He sacrificed his life on the cross to secure forgiveness. Forgiveness for our misguided faith, our misinterpretations of His word, our sin. In Jesus there is truly rest from war within our hearts and minds against the adversaries: sin, death, and the devil. By the Holy Spirit dwelling within and speaking through the scriptures, Jesus continues to encourage us to learn evermore about what it means to be a follower of Jesus so that we can live in this land that belongs to our God in a way that truly reveals His grace and heals His land.

For the health of our souls, the good of the nations, and the glory of God.

Amen.

Hymn #497 “Word of God, across the ages”

We respond with faith and prayers:

God of each and every life,

You open our eyes on the world you love
to show us your presence and your purpose in all creation.
We thank you for the wonders of the seasons as they change,
and for gifts of love and compassion you offer us through friend and stranger.
We pray for the earth as it struggles to support your many creatures.
Make us better stewards in creation,
and kinder neighbours to both friend and stranger.

God, in your deep mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God of justice,
You open our eyes on the world to show us struggle and conflict.
We see the burdens many are carrying,
and the way differences create division.
We pray for all those still struggling with the economic impact of the pandemic
and for those feeling the stress of these days in deeply personal ways.
Show us how to support those in difficulty
and mend relationships in our community.

God, in your deep mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God of compassion,
You open our eyes on the world to show us suffering and despair.
We see challenges for health care all around us,
and know many still face the effects of COVID-19
or other illnesses and complications that make life hard to cope with.
We pray for those who suffer here
and in so many places in the world you love.
(Keep silence for 15 seconds)

Give strength and compassion to all who offer treatment,
and courage and hope to all who wait for healing.

God, in your deep mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God of wisdom,
You open our eyes on the world to show us its complexities.
We see countries locked in old animosities
and communities overwhelmed by fresh upheaval.
We pray for the millions displaced in current conflicts and by natural disasters,
and for leaders here and around the world.
Open their eyes to the suffering of the earth and those in their jurisdictions.
And open all our eyes to ways we can participate in solutions
to situations which break your heart and ours.

God, in your deep mercy,
Hear our prayer.

And so, we pray for your kingdom to come in the words Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us with His blessing:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. Amen.