

5 VIOLENCE COMMANDED

This study expands some of the themes of chapter 8

For the modern reader, the whole of the book of Joshua is unexpected... It feels alien and very disturbing. But in order to be fair to the text, we need to try to read it in relation to its ancient context. How would it have sounded to its first readers or listeners?... But where it deviates from [what they expect], we should really sit up and take notice. Because this is what the author is really trying to draw our attention to. This is the intended focus of communication.

From chapter 8, 'Violence commanded', p. 136

Opening question

How long have you been reading the Bible for? In what ways does it still surprise or shock you?

Case study

Read Joshua 5:13–15. In what ways was Joshua surprised? In what ways do you think this might have surprised its original readers?

On page 140, I suggest that everything that follows in the book of Joshua should be read in the light of the man's reply in verse 14. Can you think of other places in scripture where we see God's neutrality demonstrated, or where God appears to fight *against* Israel?

Digging deeper

We will look at a few such places.

- A generation earlier than the story we just read, on the borders of the same land, *this* happens: Deuteronomy 1:22–33, 41–46. See in particular verse 42.
- The Bible talks a lot about the land of Canaan being God's gift to Israel, but note Deuteronomy 2:2–6, 9; 32:8.
- Joshua 7:1–5
- Leviticus 18:26–28
- Deuteronomy 28:15, 25, 49–52, 63–65

What are the themes that emerge from these readings? Does anything surprise you? How do you think these should shape our understanding of the conquest of Canaan by Joshua?

For further study

Read Matthew 8:28–34 and pages 146–51 of the book.

Matthew's gospel so far has shown many parallels between the story of Jesus and the story of Israel. Following his baptism (like the Red Sea), he spent 40 days (like Israel's 40 years) in the desert, following which he went up a mountain (like Israel at Mount Sinai) and delivered a new interpretation of the law given at Sinai (the sermon on the mount). In this passage we may have a parallel to the conquest of Canaan, and particularly the conquest of Jericho.

- There is a strong theme of impurity and uncleanness (death, demonisation, pigs; see p. 147).
- Jesus has entered hostile territory, and this places of uncleanness and threat obstructs his journey (v. 28).
- In Matthew, the two demonised men (unlike the accounts in Mark and Luke, where their suffering is emphasised) represent sheer, raw threat to Jesus.
- Jesus consigns the demonised pigs to the abyss – chaos to chaos. This is a new-creation event (compare with p. 95).

If this story is indeed intended to be read as a parallel to the conquest accounts, there are at least two important differences. How does Jesus conduct the conquest? And what happens to the 'conquered' men?

How will this shape the way that you read Joshua?