



## Warfare in the Old Testament

Part 1. What did Joshua and the Israelites know about the battles they were about to fight?

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## Warfare in the Old Testament

- Why are we talking about this topic?

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**Because the accounts of war in the Old Testament have caused many people to give up their faith, OR move away from a traditional Christian understanding of scripture:**

“In high school, in the midst of yet another noble attempt to read the Bible in a year, I remember drawing breath upon reaching the story of the Battle of Jericho and realizing that after the walls came a-tumblin’ down, the Israelites “destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys,” all on God’s orders. In any other context, this would be condemned as genocide. Why would a good and loving God call for the slaughter of little children?

Rachel Held Evans

<https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/peter-enns-bible-tells-me-so>

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Rachel Held Evans' "answer" is to change the way she understands scripture, and to accept the argument of Peter Enns in his book *The Bible Tells me so...*

- "God never told the Israelites to kill the Canaanites. The Israelites believed that God told them to kill the Canaanites."

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In order to explain uncomfortable texts about warfare, people like Gregory Boyd, Eric Siebert, and Richard Hays take a variety of approaches, one of which can be described as follows:

- "According to the New Testament, Jesus is the ultimate image of God. Therefore, if we want to know what God is like, we should look at Jesus. Since Jesus is non violent as portrayed in the Gospels, then following this method teaches us that God himself is pacifistic and the violence attributed to Yahweh in the Old Testament must be mistaken in some way."

Charlie Trimm, *The Destruction of the Canaanites*, p 58.

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The problems with this approach are as follows:

1. The New Testament accepts the stories of the Old Testament, including the violent ones.
2. The Bible doesn't make a distinction between an angry, violent God in the Old Testament, and a non violent God in the New Testament. God's compassion and forgiveness, and justice and wrath are central to both the Old and New Testaments.

Charlie Trimm, *The Destruction of the Canaanites*, p 61.

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So, how can we understand warfare in the Old Testament, in a more biblically faithful way?

- By seeing how the war stories in the Old Testament fit within the larger biblical story of "God's Warfare against Evil."

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### God's Warfare against Evil:

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." Exodus 34:6-7

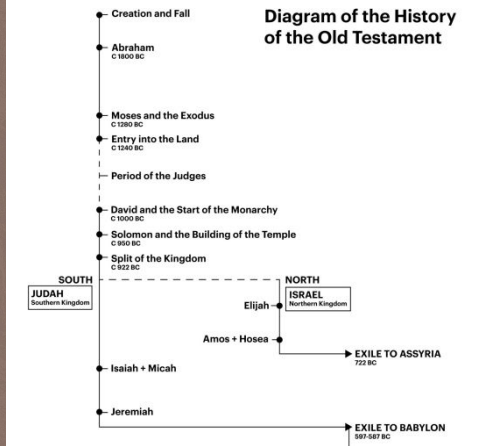
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"God has no pleasure in the destruction or calamity of persons," writes Edwards. "He had rather they should turn and continue in peace. He is well-pleased if they forsake their evil ways, that he may not have occasion to execute his wrath upon them. He is a God that delights in mercy, and judgement is his strange work."

Following the lead of Scripture, both Edwards and Goodwin call mercy what God most deeply delights in and judgement his "strange work." Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*, pg 142

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### Diagram of the History of the Old Testament



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### Phase 1: Old Testament

God uses Israel to Fight Flesh and Blood Enemies in the Promised Land

- The texts from Part 1 explain why...
  - Genesis 15, Deuteronomy 9, 18

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## Phase 1: Old Testament

God uses Israel to Fight Flesh and Blood Enemies in the Promised Land

- The Battles were to follow a specific pattern:
  - Before (Inquiry, Spiritual Preparation, Sacrifices)
  - During (March, Number of Troops & Quality of Weapons)
  - After (Songs of Praise, Herem)

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## Phase 2: Old Testament

### God fights Israel

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth...

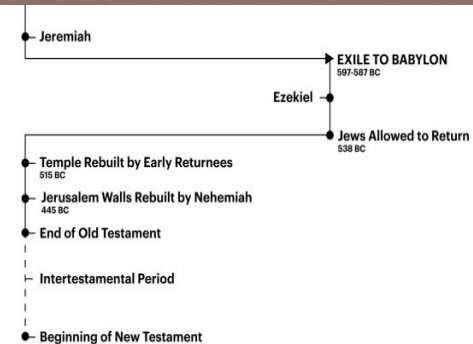
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## Phase 2: Old Testament

### God fights Israel

... So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress. Judges 2:11-15

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### Phase 3: Old Testament & Intertestamental

#### God the Warrior will come in the Future to Fight our Oppressors

Behold a day is coming for the LORD... For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle... then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle... On that day there shall be no light, cold or frost ... On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem ...and the LORD will be king over all the earth. Zechariah 14:1-9

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### Phase 4: New Testament

#### Jesus the Warrior Fights Spiritual Powers and Authorities

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. Matthew 11:2-5

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### Phase 4: New Testament

#### Jesus the Warrior Fights Spiritual Powers and Authorities

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Colossians 2:13-15

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### Phase 4: New Testament

#### Jesus the Warrior Fights Spiritual Powers and Authorities

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God... Ephesians 6:10-13a

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## Phase 4: New Testament

### Jesus the Warrior Fights Spiritual Powers and Authorities

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

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## Phase 4: New Testament

### Jesus the Warrior Fights Spiritual Powers and Authorities

- We live in Phase 4!
- What is our role?

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## Phase 5: New Testament

### Jesus Will Come Again to Defeat Human and Spiritual Enemies

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

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## Phase 5: New Testament

### Jesus Will Come Again to Defeat Human and Spiritual Enemies

And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

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## Phase 5: New Testament

### Jesus Will Come Again to Defeat Human and Spiritual Enemies

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great."

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## Phase 5: New Testament

### Jesus Will Come Again to Defeat Human and Spiritual Enemies

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. Revelation 19:11-20

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## Phase 5: New Testament

### Jesus Will Come Again to Defeat Human and Spiritual Enemies

- We look forward to Phase 5!
- What is our role?

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"There is a day spoken of throughout Scripture - a day of divine intervention in human history called "the day of the Lord" ... For those who have feared the Lord by believing his gospel and are joined to Christ by Faith, ... it is worth waking up wondering, with an eager heart, if this will be the day. But for those who have rejected God's offer of mercy and ignored God's gracious invitation into the safety of his fold, it is a day worth waking up every morning thinking about with a sense of sickening fear..."

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**Perhaps this sets before us the highest aim of ministry among women: to prepare women for that great and terrible day.** Surely if we prepare women to do good work in the world and to have good relationships and to be good wives and moms but don't prepare them for that day, then we have ultimately failed. Will not all of our sound theology and creative communications and interesting events and well-attended gatherings be in vain if our ministry among women does not result in being surrounded by the women God has placed in our lives now, when we stand before him on that day?

Nancy Guthrie in *Word-Filled Women's Ministry*, pg 230-232

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God's Warfare against Evil.

As we read the warfare stories in Joshua, may we understand them in light of the rest of Scripture:

- God is using Israel to fight flesh and blood enemies in the land as Phase 1 of his warfare against evil. If (and when) Israel embraces evil, God will also fight Israel!
- At the end of time, God will defeat all people and all spiritual forces who stand against Him.

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