

2025 Q4 Joshua Lesson 5

God Fights For You

by Stanley Baldwin

First a little background. The author of our 13 lessons is Barna Magyarosi. Presently he is the executive secretary of the Inter-European Division and chair of the division's Biblical Research Committee. He has been a pastor, Conference department director, theology teacher and president of Adventus University, Romania. Pretty impressive resume.

No disrespect to Magyarosi, but resumes do not get you into heaven! Neither do resumes authenticate anyone's interpretation of Scripture.

I think this lesson for today is especially one of those cases in which each of us needs to carefully, prayerfully, decide for ourself just what lesson God is teaching us in the story of Joshua and just who it is we will trust with our life now and into eternity. And our conclusions may or may not agree with what the author or editor suggests!

Magyarosi reveals what his overall goal is for this quarter: "We will discover together that, though the book of Joshua was written more than 3 millennia ago, **the world in which we live today is not so different from that of Joshua's in its spiritual challenges.** ... The example of Joshua will certainly inspire us to claim God's promises in our lives and to grow spiritually through His power, as Joshua did." page 3

Discerning and applying the lessons God had for the Israelites to ourselves today is a very worthwhile goal, and I hope each of us will understand and apply to our own lives the lessons that Israel should have learned under the leadership of Joshua but didn't! That said, let's look at today's lesson.

SABBATH

One thing that is significant about today's lesson is that it is a continuation of last week's lesson. Last week Lori did a wonderful job of using a recent personal experience to highlight the lesson entitled "The Conflict Behind All Conflicts," which of course, refers to the Great Controversy in heaven between Christ and Satan which is affecting our Earthly lives today.

Lesson 4 includes this statement:

"This week and next, we are going to explore the difficult question of divinely commanded wars in the book of Joshua and elsewhere." page 30

And lesson 5 for this week is entitled: “God Fights for You”.

So, what is your reaction to the title for today’s lesson, “God Fights for You? What picture of God does this bring to mind?

Let me state right here that this lesson is backwards, upside-down, wrong, 180 degrees from reality in describing who God is, what He is like, what His character is like and what we should learn from the story of Joshua. I’m not usually so boldly negative about a lesson but the more I studied and reflected on this lesson the more upset I became about the inaccurate interpretation of God’s character based on the stories of Israel’s exodus from Egypt and settling in Canaan.

The author says in the beginning of today’s lesson, lesson 5, ,

This week, we continue to explore the complexity of divinely sanctioned wars.” Then he adds two conclusions for today’s lesson: “the **final vision of peace** offered by the Old Testament prophet, **and** the **spiritual implications** of such wars. page 38

That brings up some questions: Does the end (peace) justify the means (war)?

Does war bring peace or capitulation?

Then why, did God use Israel’s army to destroy the Canaanite people, even though they deserved it?

To start this lesson I’d like to compare the Memory Verses for lessons 4 and 5.

First, the Memory verse for lesson 4: After the fall of Ai, 5 city “kings” or what we might call ”county mayors,” banded together to fight against Israel, they lost. Joshua prayed that the sun would stand still until Israel had destroyed the fleeing army. And God did! This part of the story concludes with verse 14, which was last week’s Memory Verse.

There has been no day like it before or since, when the Lord heeded the voice of a man, for **the Lord fought for Israel**. Joshua 10:14. ESV

Now Lesson 5

Again, from the same chapter in Joshua, just 24 verses later we have today’s memory verse:

And Joshua captured all these kings and their land at one time, because **the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel**. Joshua 10:42 ESV

These 5 “kings” fled the battlefield and hid in a cave. Their location was reported to Joshua who had the cave entrance blocked, imprisoning them. After the mopping up was over Joshua opened the cave and killed the 5 “kings.” Then Israel went on to conquer the rest of Southern Canaan.

I think that this word “fight” in the English language has 3 main concepts

1. An armed, or physical, conflict, as in the Russia/Ukraine war or as in a boxing match;
2. It is often a political expression meaning a serious vocal argument supporting a particular concept; or
3. A personal, internal, spiritual conflict over deciding what is ultimately right or wrong.

I know, dictionaries list many various uses of the word “fight” but to me they all seem to fit into one of these 3 very general categories.

So, how is the Lord God “fighting” for Israel? Is it a literal fistcuffs with the Canaanites? Let’s see what the Bible says in two texts!

Joshua 10:11 God used “great hailstones.”

Habakkuk 3:11-13 is so apt that I want to look at it more closely.

11 **Sun and moon stood still** in the heavens
at the glint of your flying arrows,
at the lightning of your flashing spear,
12 In **wrath** you strode through the earth
and in **anger** you threshed the nations.
13 You came out to deliver your people,
to **save your anointed one**.
You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness,
you stripped him from head to foot.
Habakkuk 3:11-13 (NIV)

Sun and Moon standing still is obviously referring to the miracle in the battle with the 5 kings in our lesson today.

In the next verse, God is spoken of as being wrathful and angry with the 5 kings and their subjects. Those are just human words trying to explain in human terms about God granting the wish of those living in Canaan who had rejected God’s kingdom of love and life support and accepting Satan’s lies. In doing so they effectively unplugged themselves from the source of life and protecting care and left themselves open to the machinations of Satan!

Was it God’s original plan that Joshua himself should kill those 5 kings, or that Israel should kill the Canaanites?

Doesn't the 6th commandment say not to kill anyone?

Wouldn’t killing another human be damaging to the character?

Was God's original plan then that God or Israel was going to kill them? NO! Satan has the power of death. (Heb. 2:14)

God limits Satan's use of this power, (Job 1 and 2) but when people reject God, they reject His protection and Satan is free to kill. All that Israel knew about moving into already inhabited land was war, and fighting, so, God took them where they were and baby step by baby step began their education in the art of love.

I want to share an EGW quote that God's judgment is simply granting our wish and removing His protection which we often describe as God's wrath and anger, but it isn't!

I was shown that the judgments of God would not come directly out from the Lord upon them [today's sinners], but [rather] in this way: they place themselves beyond His protection. He warns, corrects, reproves, and points out the only path of safety; then, if those who have been the objects of His special care will follow their own course independent of the Spirit of God after repeated warnings, if they choose their own way, then He does not commission His angels to prevent Satan's decided attacks upon them. It is Satan's power that is at work at sea and on land bringing calamity and distress, sweeping off multitudes to make sure of his prey. Storm and tempest both by sea and land will be, for Satan has come down in great wrath. He is at work. He knows his time is short, and if he is not restrained we shall see more terrible manifestations of his power than we have ever dreamed of. 4LtMs, Lt 14, 1883, par. 8

There is no question that the inhabitants of Canaan had unquestionably made their choice for Satan and rejected God. Their degrading worship practices, witchcraft and "might makes right" philosophy proved beyond question that they had irrevocably rejected God, they had "unplugged" themselves from the source of life and their ultimate destiny was death.

In fact, God specifically names the peoples who had made this irredeemable decision:

This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that He will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. Judges 3:10

NO, God's original plan was **not** for Israel to become "killers." God was Israel's protector and He would remove His sustaining, life giving power from the inhabitants of Canaan as needed.

I want you to notice the words of Jesus who is the Creator and sustainer of life (see Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 1:1-3) and NOT a killer. (Heb. 2:14 says that the devil is the one who "holds the power of death.")

In answer to Pilot Jesus said:

My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place. John 18:36

Two kingdoms. And two vastly different, basic philosophies on which they operate. One kingdom is strictly based on love and the other is based on fear. A “fight” based on love is vastly different than a “fight” based on fear.

We are born into Satan’s kingdom, ruled by lies and fear, and that is all we know. Jesus came to introduce us to God’s Kingdom ruled by love, which is a concept totally outside our comprehension.

Our language has no words to accurately portray the functioning of a kingdom of love. As a result, God uses our earthly language to try to convey a heavenly concept that is totally foreign to us. Our words like “fight,” “war,” “death,” “vengeance,” “punishment,” “wrath” etc. are used to try to picture a kingdom, a lifestyle, outside our natural inclinations.

God does not use threats, fear, coercion, or lies to force us to join His kingdom. That is what Satan does to keep us in his kingdom. God uses evidence, truth, with an invitation to join His kingdom while leaving us free to choose. When anyone joins God’s Kingdom they are spiritual babes with a lot of growing to become mature, adult Christians.

I like to think of spiritual growth as being similar to learning math. We begin with the basics—addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Most people grasp these concepts without much trouble. Then we move on to algebra and geometry, which can be more challenging. Eventually, we reach calculus, which many—if not most—find confusing or even incomprehensible. Only a few go on to become masters of advanced calculus, and they often use a specialized vocabulary to explain their concepts. And so it is spiritually.

Unfortunately, prophets have to use the language of earth to describe the realities of heaven. Translators have to be as inspired as the original prophet to accurately reflect God’s message in a language different from the original prophet.

Maybe I can illustrate this growth from Paul’s letters to his protégé, Timothy. We find Paul’s advice to a young man:

Fight the good fight of the faith. 1 Timothy 6:12 (NIV)

we find an old man’s reflection on his life. In both of these passages the “fight” is NOT physical but spiritual. It is a life-long process of cooperating with the Holy Spirit in changing the character from being self-centered to being others-centered.

I have fought the the good fight, I have finished the race, ... there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which **the Lord, the righteous Judge**, will award to me...
2 Timothy 4:7 (NIV)

And what does Paul mean when he calls Jesus the “righteous Judge?”

If we can agree that God being JUDGE just means that He makes an accurate diagnosis of our ultimate decision, then we won't have to spend time on Monday's lesson!

Just as Matthew 25:31-46 says, God the Judge just separates the already sheep from the already goats. And in the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:31-43 Jesus added another very important concept, God waits for the weeds to mature so that there will be no question about which is which when the weeds are finally disposed of. Remember, after the millennium the wicked outside the New Jerusalem ALL choose to remain outside even though the 12 gates of the city are left wide open! (Rev. 21:25. "On no day will its gates ever be shut.")

We need to look at Israel's entrance into Canaan through "heavenly eyes."

Just a side note about this map before we get into Israel's conquering of Canaan. South, at the bottom of the map are the Edomites who were the descendants of Esau and in Num. 20:14-21 Israel was told to go around not through them.



Just to the North of them were the Moabites who were Lot's descendants by his oldest daughter, and further to the North are the Ammonites who were Lot's descendants by his youngest daughter. (Both Moab and Ammon were born of incest which wasn't prohibited until roughly 500 years later under Moses.)

Let's get back to Israel as they stand on the border of the promised land. This time, on the Eastern bank of the Jordan river Israel obeyed God's command to enter the Promised land and they followed Joshua and the priests through the Jordan river and conquered Jericho without a fight, though they did go into the city and killed all those who survived the walls falling.

After their signal victory in Jericho, Israel confidently sent only a small army to Ai, only to be soundly defeated. Because of Achan's disobedience God had let Israel attack Ai in their own strength and they lost—big time! Later, after Israel rooted out sin from their midst, Israel goes on to defeat all the “kings” in Southern Canaan. Joshua chronicles that successful campaign:

So Joshua subdued the whole region, including the hill country, the Negev, the western foothills and the mountain slopes, together with all their kings. **He left no survivors.** He totally destroyed all who breathed, **just as the Lord, the God of Israel, had commanded....**All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered in one campaign, **because the Lord, the God of Israel fought for Israel.** Joshua 10:41,42

Then Joshua adds, “This was what the Lord God of Israel had commanded.”

Evidently the hearts of the Israelites were not fully mature spiritually yet as they stood on the bank of the Jordan river ready to enter Canaan for It is just 3 chapters later in Joshua 13 we find the story of the death of Balaam. And remember, It was because of Balaam's recommendation that Israel had been enticed into idol worship by the Moabites not long before Moses died (Num. 22) and about 39 years after their parents had worshipped the golden calf!

Was this physical war of conquest God's original plan “A” for the Israelites? OR was this just a baby step in Israel's growth in learning to trust God?

Here are some interesting verses which seem to point to a dispossession not an elimination policy toward the Canaanites.

I will send hornets before you to drive (them) out.” But I will not drive them out in a single year ... Little by little I will drive them out before you. Ex. 23:28-30

The Lord your God will send hornets among them. Deut. 7:20

I sent the hornet before you which drove them out ... **it was not by your sword or by your bow.** Joshua 24:12.

God's original plan was not for an army to destroy the inhabitants but for a righteous people to displace them. The Canaanites foul, disgusting, worship services were diabolical, but God still gave them the freedom to choose between the God of Israel and the gods of Canaan.

There was still an opportunity for the Canaanites to respond positively to God's invitation as did Rahab, just as the Israelites were free to choose loyalty to Baal, as did Achan, and both were free to suffer the natural consequences.

God's original plan "A" was for Adam and Eve to both reject Lucifer's lies and then and there, the question of the government of the universe would have been settled once and for all.

That didn't happen so evidently God instituted another plan. However, even before sin, God had a contingency plan. God, In the being of Jesus, volunteered out of love for His creation to become human, the second Adam, providing for humanity the opportunity to choose for themselves entry into God's Kingdom rather than staying in Satan's kingdom, the kingdom of our birth.

I can speculate, with a sanctified imagination, that if the children of Adam had fully embraced God's promise and lived a committed life there would have been no flood, little or no OT, and the NT would have been vastly different even though Jesus would still have died at the instigation of Satan. Exactly how, no one knows!

But here in the book of Joshua, after approximately 1,500 years of sin and Satan's rulership of the earth, we have the story of God working through the Israelites, the progenitors of the Messiah. They were the only people, evidently, who recognized the Creator God, the true God, but unfortunately the only culture or society they knew was their pagan experience in Egypt for 400 years. The concept of love, forgiveness, and free choice had become foreign to them. All they were familiar with were the Egyptian gods who were to be appeased, bribed, hoodwinked or manipulated in various ways, because they were capricious and authoritarian, caring only for themselves. They were definitely not to be trusted! What about us?

Here in the USA, we live in a country founded on many of the concepts from God's Kingdom. That is not true for most of the rest of the world! Socialism, Communism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and paganism are the underlying principles of most other cultures. But even in our society we idolize worldly successful people who have money, power or a leadership position, contrary to the principle of love, the cornerstone of God's Kingdom.

What it comes down to is that any human, whatever their background or successes, when they choose to join God's Kingdom, they are spiritual babes, just like the Israelites were. The Israelites and any one of us has a lifetime of spiritual growth ahead of us.

It seems to me, and you are free to agree or disagree, that the O.T. from Abraham on is the story of how God was trying to establish and lead the nation of Israel by small spiritual steps into the kingdom of love. After the crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah, God's focus was no longer on a nation but on the individual to join and represent His Spiritual Kingdom. Thus, the story of Israel is illustrative of what we as individuals face.

The result of focusing on the individual (instead of a nation) was not to establish an organized denomination nor a legal, governmentally recognized entity. These individuals are part of an

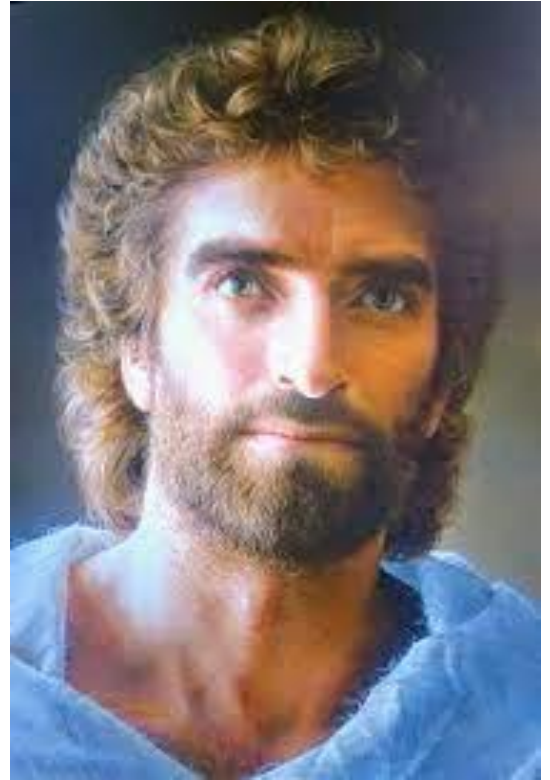
“invisible church” the “remnant church.” This “invisible” church has no human membership rolls, no statistics, no records of tithes paid or receipts for tax deductions, no organizational hierarchy with presidents, chairmen, popes or Elders. Just individuals, lead by the Holy Spirit to use their talents for the benefit of others, irrespective of their race, language, gender, education, physical challenges, or worldly power or position.

If this is true then we do not have to physically “fight” to conquer nations, cultures, or peoples but we are “fighting” internal habits, preferences, and desires in order to allow the Holy Spirit to change us individually into what we were originally created to be. And then the Holy Spirit, as in the Early Church, will inspire us to share our joy and happiness by inviting others into the same type of life.

WEDNESDAY

Wednesday’s lesson has a fantastic title: *Free Choice*. However, the lesson’s commentary is not so fantastic. It implies that God was using Israel to punish the Canaanites in order to fulfill His promise to Abraham. A sad picture of an imperial god punishing those who disobey him.

Free Choice is a bedrock condition of love. We are free to choose the rulership of God or Satan, the rulership of love or lies, the rulership ending in eternal life or eternal non-existence. Put in those stark terms it is easy to decide between the 2 kingdoms; but to put that decision into daily practice is not easy. It is a daily, individual “fight.” Satan will contest our decision for God every step of the way enticing us to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, which is very alluring! It is very easy to just give in, just quit the fight. And without the aid of the Holy Spirit it would be irresistible.



Akaine Kramarik had visions of Christ beginning when she was 4 years old even though she was being raised in an atheistic family. She was painting pictures at 6. This first picture here is her painting of Jesus which she named the Prince of Peace. She was 8 years old when she painted this picture. Her original picture of Jesus was stolen and so at 20 she repainted Jesus from her visions of Him. I love these pictures. Jesus just seems more loving and approachable than in most pictures, truly the Prince of Peace.

Here are two more pictures of Jesus out of the thousands that are out there. I like the first one because of the dove which to me indicates God's desire for peace and reconciliation with His creation. Of course, atonement is done through the Holy Spirit and His symbol is the dove. The second picture is incidentally the picture that Ellen White thought looked the most like Jesus whom she saw in her visions.



Isa. 9:6, a very well-known verse, it lists 5 names for the coming Messiah the last of which is Prince of Peace. He has always been the Prince of Peace and will always be the Prince of Peace. Every story in the OT and New Testament, every explanation, every description of Jesus Christ must reflect this facet of His character.

The Prince of Peace offers to every human eternal peace in His Kingdom to come and atonement or reconciliation or peace with God now. Satan can only offer the pleasures of sin for a short time (Heb. 11:25). Meanwhile, Satan is free to cause problems for Christians now—NOT JESUS—and note that Satan can only provide non-existence later.

Often, I hear of God developing my character now by testing or tempting me. I don't think so. James 1:14 says, "but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." We are born with the native instinct to reject God's protection and accept the lies of the Tempter, Satan. However, the Holy Spirit is near and willing to help when asked. He will begin changing our character which will bring us peace with God now, even amidst the problems and turmoil that we have brought upon ourselves. Oh yes, God does discipline, that is to teach us, but it comes only out of our choices when we accept or reject His protection and His desires in our life.

Is the spiritual implication of Israel's wars that God uses warfare, fear, force, and intimidation in our lives and that we should do the same in our evangelism **OR** are these wars of Israel symbolic of the individual struggle we have in choosing to conquer sin in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit?