

**Holy War Transformed:
A Look at Some Important
(But Neglected)
New Testament Texts**

by Rich Lusk

It is an honor to contribute to this festschrift dedicated to James Jordan. Jordan's work, while sadly ignored in many circles and despised in others, will prove to be of immense value to the church in the generations to come. Jordan is undoubtedly one of the greatest treasures God's Spirit has given to the church in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Over time, I trust the church at large will grow into greater appreciation for and appropriation of Jordan's immense insights and gifts.

When I was a college student just coming to grips with the fullness of the Reformed faith, Jordan's seminal book, *Through New Eyes*,¹ along with his biblical expositions, gave me a rich and broad understanding of the Scriptures unlike anything I had seen before. As an aspiring Bible teacher, I found Jordan's work gave me the confidence I needed to proclaim the whole counsel of God, even the parts everyone else seemed to be skipping over. By paying attention to the broad contours as well as the details of the biblical text, he opened new doors for me. His sensitivity to biblical symbolism, typology, literary features, and the flow of the biblical narrative as a whole helped me break free from forcing the Bible to fit with a rather narrow set of theological categories and enabled me to better read the Scriptures on their own terms. At a time when most people I knew in the Reformed faith seemed fixated on Paul, and had reduced their functional canon to Romans and Galatians, Jordan was making books like Leviticus and Zechariah come to life in ways that amazed me. More than that, he was showing me that a proper reading of Paul had to be undergirded by a deep and broad knowledge of books like Leviticus and Zechariah. Jordan proved himself to be a master Bible interpreter and I wanted to drink in as much of his work and worldview as I could.

Writing an essay for this volume is rather difficult because it has reminded me yet again of how indebted my views are to Jordan's work. How can I write anything original when so much of what I know I learned from him? How can he engage my essay when it will amount to little more than interacting with his own ideas (or, closer to the truth, a pale imitation of his own ideas)?

What makes Jordan's work so special? Jordan has been willing to do things that few theologians in the modern-day Reformed milieu have been willing to do. He has been willing to think outside the box, read deeply and appreciatively from other branches of the Christian church, and explore new areas, even if they involved him in some speculative theologizing. In an age in which conservative biblical scholarship has been stale, anemic, uninspiring, and predictable, Jordan's work has been not just a breath of fresh air, but a strong gust of the Spirit, bringing us to greater maturity and wisdom through deep interfacing with the Scriptures. Jordan is truly committed to the Bible, ready to

¹ James B. Jordan, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Brentwood, TN: Wogelmuth and Hyatt, 1988).

follow the text wherever it leads him, even if it means arriving at a rather unpopular (or unheard of) position. Throughout his theological career, Jordan has not hesitated to speak his mind, or to change his mind, when the circumstances called for it. And his mind is truly immense.

Jordan has completely immersed himself in the Scriptures in a way that goes far beyond any other teacher I have encountered, which has resulted in myriads of utterly unique, but truly compelling, insights. Jordan is one of those rare, creative teachers who continually gives you those “Aha! I can’t believe I didn’t see that before!” moments. In truth, there are very, very few scholars brilliant enough to actually come up with new insights. Most of us make a living repackaging and recycling the insights of others. Those few theologians who aim for originality often end up falling off the deep end. But Jordan is one of those special figures who blazes a trail that is both orthodox and original at the same time. He is both a biblicist and a traditionalist, in the best Reformed sense of those terms.

Jordan’s works are filled with treasures old and new. Throughout his theological career, Jordan has managed to be both a staunch old school conservative and a cutting edge reformer. He is a true “Reformed catholic” (or “Bucerian” as he might put it). In a different ecclesiastical political climate, Jordan’s star would have no doubt risen to a place of prominence in the Reformed sky, but sadly, our contemporary sectarianism and rationalism have kept Jordan’s work from being fully appreciated, at least for now.

As a busy pastor, I do not have time to engage with Jordan’s latest work the way I did when I was younger. But I am very thankful for the impression he made on me during my most formative years as a budding theologian and teacher. I appreciate his years of friendship, mentorship, and leadership. While this essay is not worthy of him, I do hope he will find it enjoyable (and I also hope he will not accuse me of plagiarism!).

Holy War from Joshua to Jesus

In the book of Joshua, the Israelites wage war against the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. This divinely commissioned, aggressive, and total warfare is often referred to as “holy war.”²

Holy war is a major, though neglected, theme in the Scriptures. This paper will not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the biblical doctrine of holy war since that has been done elsewhere.³ Rather, our goal is to clear away

² Alternatively, some have referred to it as “YHWH war” to emphasize the Lord’s leading role in all holy war campaigns.

³ While the theme of holy war has not received its due in mainstream biblical scholarship, it has been a major theme in the writings of James B. Jordan. See Jordan’s “The Holy War in America Today: Some Observations on Abortion Rescues” (Niceville, FL: Biblical Horizons, 1989). Jordan suggests holy war is one of the three major overlapping themes in the Bible:

1. The Bible is given to help us mature and grow up as images of God so that we take dominion wisely over all of life.
2. The Bible is also given, because of Satan’s rebellion, to teach us holy war against principalities and powers.
3. The Bible is also given, because of Adam’s rebellion, to show us the history of redemption.

several false understandings of Joshua's holy war and then highlight the way several often overlooked New Testament texts help us properly understand the way in which holy war has been transformed through the coming of the Greater Joshua, Jesus Christ.⁴ The New Testament uses martial imagery to portray the church's mission and while our warfare is very different from Joshua's in many respects, understanding the relationship of Israel's conquest to the church's mission is vital to biblical theology and application.

God's commands to the Israelites were clear:

When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them...But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire.

But of the cities of these peoples which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the LORD your God has commanded you, lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the LORD your God (Deut. 7:1-2, 5; 20:16-18).

Israel's obedience to those commands was inconsistent, but when they did obey successfully, the Bible does not mince words:

So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.

And it came to pass when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness where they pursued them, and when they all had fallen by the edge of the sword until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword. So it was that all who fell that day, both men and women, *were* twelve thousand—all the people of Ai. For Joshua did not draw back

See Jordan, "How to Do Reformed Theology Nowadays, Part 3," *Biblical Horizons Newsletter*, May, 2007, available at <http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/biblical-horizons/no-194-how-to-do-reformed-theology-nowadays-part-3/>. Accessed July 28, 2009.

⁴ Jesus is Greek form of name Joshua. The name means "the Lord saves."

his hand, with which he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as booty for themselves, according to the word of the LORD which He had commanded Joshua. So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day. And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until evening. And as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse down from the tree, cast it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raise over it a great heap of stones that remains to this day.

On that day Joshua took Makkedah, and struck it and its king with the edge of the sword. He utterly destroyed them—all the people who *were* in it. He let none remain. He also did to the king of Makkedah as he had done to the king of Jericho.... So Joshua conquered all the land: the mountain country and the South and the lowland and the wilderness slopes, and all their kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel had commanded.

Joshua turned back at that time and took Hazor, and struck its king with the sword; for Hazor was formerly the head of all those kingdoms. And they struck all the people who were in it with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them. There was none left breathing. Then he burned Hazor with fire.

So all the cities of those kings, and all their kings, Joshua took and struck with the edge of the sword. He utterly destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded.... And all the spoil of these cities and the livestock, the children of Israel took as booty for themselves; but they struck every man with the edge of the sword until they had destroyed them, and they left none breathing. As the LORD had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses.

Thus Joshua took all this land: the mountain country, all the South, all the land of Goshen, the lowland, and the Jordan plain—the mountains of Israel and its lowlands, from Mount Halak and the ascent to Seir, even as far as Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings, and struck them down and killed them. Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. All the others they took in battle. For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might utterly destroy them, and that they might receive no mercy, but that He might destroy them, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

And at that time Joshua came and cut off the Anakim from the mountains: from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel; Joshua utterly destroyed them with

their cities. None of the Anakim were left in the land of the children of Israel; they remained only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod. So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Then the land rested from war (Josh 6:20-21; 8:24-29; 10:28, 40; 11:10-12, 14-15, 16-23).

We know that God does not want us to fight this kind of violent, bloody battle against particular people groups today. Jesus did not take up the sword, but instead waged war against Satan, sin, and death throughout his earthly ministry, culminating in his sacrificial and substitutionary death on the cross. Paul said our warfare is not against flesh and blood (Eph. 6:10–20) and our weapons are not carnal (2 Cor. 10:4–6). We know we will inherit the nations, but not through bloodshed – unless it is our own (Rev. 2:26–27).⁵

But if take the Scriptures seriously, and if we truly believe that all Scripture is inspired and profitable (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16), we have to fit these Old Testament holy war texts into our understanding of God’s purposes for his people. What, then, do we do with the holy war theme found in books like Deuteronomy and Joshua? How do we apply these texts today? Specifically, how do we reconcile the conquest of Canaan with God’s love for the world and the church’s vocation to disciple the nations? How can the Warrior God also be the Prince of Peace? How do we reconcile the “furious opposites” (to use Chesterton’s term) of biblical revelation? If we look at the Bible’s story arc from beginning to end, we can arrive at satisfactory, albeit still mysterious, answers. But first we must refute some popular false answers.

False Understandings of Holy War

Before we can explore some subtle ways the New Testament applies the holy war motif to Christ and the church, we must first examine and dismiss a few misunderstandings of the nature of holy war in its old covenant context. Israel’s conquest of Canaan is one of the more distasteful parts of the Bible for modern people. Many critics of the Christian faith base some of their most potent objections on the biblical account of the conquest, while many Christians are, frankly, embarrassed by the Old Testament’s politically incorrect record of holy war and do not know how to justify it in light of modern sensibilities. It is not uncommon to hear terms like “jihad,” “genocide,” and “ethnic cleansing” thrown around in discussions of Joshua, leading, of course, to a hasty dismissal of these portions of the Bible as irrelevant and even immoral. But if this portion of the Bible is not respected or trusted, our confidence in the rest of God’s Word will inevitably be shaken. We cannot, in effect, de-canonize selected parts of Scripture without threatening the whole.

Celebrity atheist Richard Dawkins puts his disdain for the God of the Old Testament and holy war in rather strong terms:

⁵ See Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, blood-thirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.⁶

Set aside the fact that Dawkins has completely misread the biblical narrative.⁷ Given his atheist worldview, we might wonder what ground Dawkins is standing on when he raises questions about the moral character of God. Where is he getting his ethical standards and what right does he have to impose them on others? Given a biblical worldview, Christians certainly have good grounds for objecting to any being who is proud, selfish, and vindictive, but why an atheist would object to such characteristics is a puzzle beyond all reckoning – unless, of course, the atheist has unwittingly smuggled into his worldview some of the moral content of the biblical faith he claims to be rejecting! Besides, when the conquest of Canaan is examined in its broader biblical context, we can see the wisdom and righteousness of Israel's holy war campaign. Contrary to Dawkins the God of the Old Testament is not tyrannical, prejudiced, or cruel.

Because so many are confused about the biblical-theological meaning of holy war, we will briefly examine a couple understandings of holy war that have been proposed by well-meaning Christian teachers.⁸

Some (especially from within different strains of the Anabaptist camp) have suggested that the Israelites were simply mistaken to engage in total war with the Canaanites. Their leaders may have claimed religious justification for mass slaughter (as political leaders do today), but they were either deceived about God's will themselves, or they were deceiving others.

But if this were the case, we would expect to see later revelation condemn the conquest of the land. Scripture never does so (cf. Amos 2:9–10; Hosea 2:14–15). Instead, we find the conquest celebrated as an act of God (Acts 7:45; 13:19), and its leaders praised as faithful heroes (e.g., Heb. 11:30–34). We see Israel criticized for not having the courage and faith to take on the task of conquering the land sooner (e.g., Num. 13–14; Ps. 106:24–36), and when she does finally enter the land, we find God fighting for her (Josh. 2) to give her the land as a promise-fulfilling gift (Josh. 23:3–5, 9–10). The conquest is even celebrated in songs of praise (Ps. 106:42–45). When the Messiah finally comes, he is named after Joshua, which is odd to say the least if the God who sent Jesus into the world did not want to identify the conquest as his own righteous work.

Another attempt to distance the gospel from the conquest is to simply divide the Old Testament from the New Testament, as older forms of dispensationalism attempted to do. That was then, this is now. God dealt one way with primitive Israelites; now he works differently in a more enlightened age. The conquest belongs to an age of law; now we live under grace. Joshua revealed a God of wrath, while Jesus reveals a God who loves even his enemies.

⁶ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam, 2006), 31.

⁷ To be blunt, Christians do not believe in the god Dawkins rejects either. But Dawkins fails to honestly grapple with arguments for the God we *do* believe in.

⁸ For several misguided interpretations of the Old Testament conquest of the land, see Stanley Gundry, editor, *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

But this attempted solution, while containing important grains of truth, is a false path. Those who are embarrassed by God's wrath in the Old Testament will not find relief by turning to the New Testament. Jesus harps on the subject of hell and divine retribution more than anyone in the Old Testament (e.g., Matt. 25:41) and he promises to judge those who do not submit to him. Likewise, the apostles claim that God's punishment is, if anything, intensified in the new covenant era (cf. Heb. 2:1–4). Those looking for a God who does not bring judgment will fail to find him in the New Testament anymore than the Old. Grace and wrath stand side by side in God's revelation of himself in every era of redemptive history. The God of the conquest is the God of the gospel. In fact, properly understood, the conquest includes preparation for the gospel and the gospel itself is a form of holy war/conquest, as we will see.

The Conquest in Context

What then is the biblical view of Joshua's conquest? How should we understand the violence and bloodshed involved in Israel's (and God's) warfare against the Canaanites? If we put the conquest in the wider context of the biblical story as a whole, what do we find?

First, the notion that the conquest is genocidal is simply false. Morality, not race, was the key issue in the conquest. Ethics, not ethnicity, is the driving category. The Canaanites were not punished with extermination because they were Canaanites; rather, they were destroyed because they were wicked idolaters and God chose to no longer tolerate them on his earth. In other words, to call the conquest an act of "genocide" or "ethnic cleansing" is a category mistake.

God warned Israel against an attitude of racial pride from the beginning. God had already made it clear to the Israelites that they were not chosen to be his special people because they were a morally superior or numerically stronger nation in any way (Deut. 7–9). Israel was specifically forbidden to assume that her possession of the land was a sign of her righteousness (Deut. 9:4–6). However, there is no doubt the conquest was a judgment against Canaan's unrighteousness (Lev 18:24–25; 20:22–24; Deut. 7:5, 9:5, 12:29–31; 1 Kings 14:24, 21:26; 2 Kings 16:3, 17:7, 21:2). This act of holy war was about divine judgment against false worship, not genocide against a particular ethnicity.

Two factors prove beyond all doubt that the conquest was not a racially motivated, genocidal attack. Note that the first Canaanite we meet, Rahab, is actually saved! This is striking: Israel has been commanded to wipe out the Canaanites because of their wickedness, and yet we are immediately introduced to a repentant Canaanite woman who fears God and shows loyalty to Israel (Josh. 2:9–11; cf. Heb. 11:31; Jas. 2:25). As a result of her faith, her household is spared when the city of Jericho falls. The scarlet thread on her window (Josh. 2:18) served the same purpose as blood on the doorposts of Israelite dwellings in the exodus (Ex. 12:22–23). Later, the Gibeonites are also spared (Josh. 9), again showing God is willing to save those under the ban if they repent and seek his favor.⁹ The Gibeonites were incorporated into Israel as helpers to the Levitical priests (Josh. 9:27). These instances of Gentile salvation in the midst of judgment

⁹ Note that the Gibeonites, like Rahab, use righteous deception.

foreshadow what is to come. Conversion, rather than conquest, will be the *ultimate* trajectory for the nations.¹⁰ Grace for the nations will ultimately override judgment. The conquest narratives include foreshadowings of the new covenant gospel.

Also note that God threatens to treat Israel precisely the same way he treated the Canaanites if they fall into Canaanite patterns of life (Deut. 9; cf. Deut. 2:1–12, 18–23). God is not partial in matters of justice (Acts 9–10; Rom. 2). Israel's status before God is not an unconditional (e.g., race-based) privilege. God has already threatened to destroy Israel because of her sin (Num. 14:11–25), just as he will destroy the Canaanites for their sin. The terms of the covenant threaten Israel with a Canaanite-like expulsion from the land if the nation rebels (Lev. 18:28; Deut. 28). Even in the books of Joshua and Judges, we find an Israelite individual (Achan) and a whole tribe (Benjamin) can become the objects of holy war. God will fight against his own people if they rebel. Much later in Israel's history, Israel will have done unto her what she did to the Canaanites, when God raises up the wicked empires of Assyria and Babylon to exile the nation. Israel can only maintain residence in the holy land so long as she lives as God's holy people. In short, if Israelites live like Canaanites, God treats them like Canaanites, and if Canaanites live like Israelites, they get treated like Israelites. The covenant is never absolutely tied to blood, but rather to faith. We are familiar with this as a New Testament truth, but it was already a principle in the old covenant.

Second, we need to note that the real prosecutor of holy war is not Israel, but the Lord. Indeed, this is one major distinction between "holy war" and what we could call (following Jordan) "normal war." In holy war, such as the exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan, God himself functions as chief commander (Ex. 15:3; Josh. 5:13–15) and combatant (Josh. 23:3; Ps. 44:2–3; 47:1–4) in a unique way. Holy war is total, in that everything comes under the ban (*herem* in the Hebrew) and is devoted to God, including men, women, children, and plunder (Josh. 10:40–42, 11:16–20). Holy war brings an end to any future succession of the enemy and builds up God's house as the spoil is collected. Holy war is ultimately liturgical and sacrificial: the targets of this specialized form of warfare become an offering to the Lord, consumed with fire from his altar (Josh. 6:24; cf. Deut. 13:16). In normal warfare, by contrast, civilian casualties and property damage were to be kept to a minimum (Deut. 20; see also Num. 31:7–18; Deut. 21:10–14), and plunder could be kept by the people. Normal war also required Israel to pursue peaceful avenues of reconciliation before fighting (Deut. 20:8) and forbade aggression on the part of Israel (Deut. 17:6).¹¹

¹⁰ Note that those who left Egypt in the exodus were already a mixed multitude. Gentile stock was already included in the redeemed nation. During the period of wilderness wandering, the ethnic children of Abraham and these Gentile believers were woven together into one people. Surely, this is at least part of the reason why the wilderness generation was not circumcised until they were ready to enter the land (cf. Josh. 5). The entire transitional forty year period was typological of the apostolic age, from 30–70 AD, as we will see below.

¹¹ Jordan develops this distinction at some length in his paper "The Holy War in America Today." Jordan writes:

In the Old Covenant, after God set up the Tabernacle and constituted Israel as a nation, there were two kinds of war. The first was Holy War, and the other was what we can call normal warfare.

The Lord authorizes and wages “holy war” as a way of administering his perfect grace and justice. The conquest is gracious because it is the way in which God gives the land he swore to Abraham to the nation of Israel. The conquest is an act of divine justice because the inhabitants of the land had filled their cup of iniquity to the brim. Several generations earlier that had not been the case, and so the gift of the land to Abraham’s descendants was delayed (Gen. 15:16). But when the Canaanites’ wickedness had reached its full measure of maturation, God’s longsuffering patience expired and the Canaanites received their just deserts. In this way, the conquest serves as sign and pointer to the final judgment and the restoration of the earth to the righteous.

It is important for us to grasp the crucial element of justice in holy war. God did *not* use Israel to invade a peace-loving, righteous people. This was not an act of oppressing the innocent. The inhabitants of the land were grossly depraved and wicked, on par with those who perished in the flood in Noah’s generation. Canaanite society was filled with violence, cruelty, idolatry and immorality. Their destruction was well deserved.

This brings us to a third point. The conquest is not inconsistent with God’s love; indeed, God’s love *demand*s that he bring judgment on the wicked. God’s anger at human cruelty and his wrath against human sin are driven by his love. Can we really say God loves if he is indifferent to the wickedness of a Hitler or Stalin? Is he loving if he lets his people suffer slander and persecution without ever doing anything to vindicate them and punish their oppressors? Is he loving if he allows the wicked to have dominion indefinitely, without ever acting against them? Consider an analogy: If I simply stand by and watch as my wife is assaulted, I do not love her. If I truly love her I will step in to defend her, even if it means using force against the one who is attacking her. The conquest shows us that God’s anger is aroused by evil because evil disfigures his good creation and stands in the way of his gracious design for humanity. As a loving God, he simply has to act to defeat it. The Canaanites had come to embody evil to the fullest degree, and had to be destroyed.¹²

Of course, the conquest does not reveal the whole of God’s purpose for the Gentile nations. Nor should it have shaped Israel’s attitude to the nations for the long run. God’s law gave Israel very specific instructions for relating to aliens and strangers in the land after the conquest was over (Ex. 22:21; 23:12; Lev. 19:33–34; Deut. 10:17–19; 14:28–29; 24:17–18; 26:12–13). Once the Israelites occupied the land, they were to show hospitality and kindness, remembering that God had showered his mercy on them.¹³ The sharp distinction between the

Holy War (or *herem* warfare, as it is sometimes called, after the Hebrew for “ban”) was prosecuted in a special way, and only against certain people.

Jordan goes on to demonstrate that normal warfare is never aggressive and is waged only as a last resort when peacemaking and defensive measures have failed. Because holy war finds its fulfillment in the church’s ministry of the gospel, our civil magistrates must look exclusively to the Bible’s teaching on normal war for guidance in prosecuting armed conflicts.

¹² On God’s anger being driven by his love, see Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Receiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 138–139.

¹³ In Joshua 1, the Lord tells Joshua to walk according to the law. That law (the Mosaic *torah*) certainly included commands relating to the conquest of the land. But it also included abundant instruction about caring for the poor, the widow, the orphan, and, yes, the stranger within the gate. The apparent tensions between the conquest and the mission of God’s people are not something new with the Great Commission in Matthew 28. Even in Deuteronomy, the tension is

way Israelites were to treat the Canaanites during Joshua's generation and the way they were to treat Gentiles after they settled in the land is definitive proof that the conquest did not exhaust God's design for the nations outside Israel. While the conquest was a vitally important episode in Israel's history, we should keep in mind it was also a unique event, limited in scope to a singular time and place. Even within the span of the Old Testament, the conquest hardly provided the overriding model for Israel's relationship to the other nations (cf. Ex. 23:9; Jer. 29:7).¹⁴

Indeed, God's ultimate plan is salvation for all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:1–3; cf. Gal. 3:8), including bringing an end to violence, as swords are beaten into plowshares and tanks into tractors (cf. Isa. 2:1–4). Temporary judgments on particular nations do not negate God's overarching purpose of extending blessing to all nations in the long run. Somehow, the conquest is a key stage in God's unfolding plan of global, cosmic redemption. Thus, the conquest of Canaan can never be disconnected from the cross of Christ. In the former, God brings judgment against the sin of the nations; in the latter, God bears judgment against the sin of the nations. Both are crucial parts of the biblical narrative, but there is no doubt which holds center stage.

Of course, none of our explanations of God's deeds can ever be comprehensive and the conquest is no different. Much mystery remains. But it should be clear that any attempts to use the conquest to justify total, *herem* warfare in the church age are misguided, as are those attempts to completely sever the God of the conquest from the God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. We will never again have a special command from God, ordering us to physically execute entire peoples and nations. Instead, we have been given a mission to disciple the nations. Those who refuse to be disciples will finally face the sword of the Greater Joshua, but how and when is his business, not ours.

We will see how all of this connects with the conquest below as we look at the way the new covenant uses the holy war motif as a paradigm for the mission of Christ and the church.

The Transformation of Holy War: Several Important (But Neglected) New Covenant Texts

In many ways, the transformation of holy war is obvious, just on the surface of the New Testament.¹⁵ Jesus clearly did not come to do literal battle with the Roman Empire, or even apostate Jews for that matter. He came to achieve

already there. Of course, the tension is resolved at least in part by placing the conquest within the wider framework of the biblical narrative and understanding it as a temporary measure.

¹⁴ This is not to say there were no further episodes of conquest/holy war after Joshua (cf. Judges; 1 Sam. 15; Esther 9). But it is certainly safe to say that conquest is swallowed up by mission in the God's grand scheme of things.

¹⁵ In fact, the transformation of holy war had already taken place in many respects in the old covenant. The Old Testament Scriptures already revealed that God scatters his (and our) enemies primarily through faithful worship (cf. 2 Chronicles 20). After the destruction of the temple, it was no longer even possible to wage holy war in the sense that Joshua had because there was no longer an altar with fire to use to burn up the *herem* plunder. By the time of Daniel, it was becoming more explicitly evident that God's people would fight their battles through spiritual means such as prayer.

salvation for the world (cf. Jn. 2:16-17; Lk. 4:16-20). He accomplished this global salvation in his cross and resurrection.

Mark's gospel is especially clear about the kind of warfare Jesus came to wage because of its fast pace and militant themes. Mark portrays Jesus as a new Davidic warrior king, fighting on behalf of his people. For example: When Jesus arrives on the scene, he is the YHWH Warrior incarnate, but he has zeroed in on the true enemies of God and God's people, namely, Satan, sin, and death. In Mark's gospel, Jesus is continually on the warpath. Through his teaching, exorcisms, healing miracles, and ultimately through his death and resurrection, "Mark seems to be portraying Jesus as the true restorer of Israel, the divine warrior reconquering holy space."¹⁶ Mark virtually begins his gospel with Jesus, as a freshly anointed Warrior-Priest, going into the wilderness to do battle with God's archenemy, Satan. In Mark's gospel, Jesus is constantly on "the way" – which is to say, he is on the warpath. Mark presents Jesus' casting out demons primarily in terms of warfare with idols, fulfilling Isaiah's promise that the gods of the nations would be toppled when the kingdom arrived. The thieving strong man has been bound so that God is now reclaiming what is his (Mk. 3:20-27). Jesus even takes on a demon (or demons) named "Legion," an obvious military term (Mk. 5:1-20). In Mark 2:23-28, Jesus uses David and his band of soldiers as a paradigm for his own ministry; in other words, Jesus and his disciples are a band of warriors on the march, as they go around teaching and healing. When Jesus sends out his disciples, they are symbolically recapitulating the exodus and conquest of the land by the twelve tribes (Mk. 6:7-13). Obviously all these militant themes reach their climax towards the end of the gospel when Jesus wins the battle by giving himself sacrificially on the cross and rising again on the third day, as the Victim becomes the Victor, and those who see him in his glory shake with fear (Mk. 15-16). Since Mark records Jesus' Nazirite holy war just before he goes to the cross (Mk. 14:25) and then presents a Roman soldier as the first human being to confess the divine sonship of Jesus in the gospel (Mk. 15:39), there is no question Mark intends to highlight the *militia Christi/christus victor* theme in his gospel account. Mark shows us Jesus has come as the Warrior God in human form to defeat his enemies and win the salvation of his people. He fights – but it is not the kind of fighting the Jews were expecting from their Messiah.¹⁷

The apostles pick up on this transformation of holy war. Nowhere do they call on Christians to engage in armed revolt, even when they are horribly mistreated. Instead, following the teachings of Jesus, the apostles counsel suffering Christians to be longsuffering and forgiving in the face of opposition (e.g., 1 Pt. 2:13-25; cf. Mt. 5:39). We are called upon to love our enemies and forgive them, rather than zealously taking up the sword against them. Christians can expect to suffer at the hands of the powers-that-be just as their Master did. But the apostles also remind the first Christians that through their faithful suffering, they are actually winning the victory. Their suffering is not in vain; rather, as they endure persecution for the sake of the kingdom, the world is defeated and brought to its knees before Christ. Paul's way of dealing with his

¹⁶ Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 99.

¹⁷ For a much more extensive survey of Mark as "holy war," see Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, ch. 7-8.

suffering in Acts certainly bears this out. Paul does not fight back when wrongly imprisoned; instead, he fights by singing and praying and, as a result, gets his freedom and a greater opportunity for gospel ministry (cf. Acts 16). When Paul was writing from prison to the Colossians, he did not ask them to pray that God would open the prison door, but that God would open a door for the gospel, that he might preach even in chains (Col. 4:2-3). Paul knows that, as with Joseph and Job and ultimately Jesus, suffering is a prelude to glory and victory. Thus, Paul models the way we fight in the new covenant: through song, prayer, preaching, suffering, and service. Paul directs the churches to do the same, reminding them that their real battle is not against flesh and blood and does not require force of arms (Eph. 6:10-20; 2 Cor. 10:4), but cruciform, sacrificial living.¹⁸ In this way, we will conquer.

That much is clear. However, there are also a number of texts in the New Testament that show us how holy war has been transformed, but because they do so in subtle ways, they often get overlooked. We will now examine a handful of key texts that through closely detailed readings further confirm and fill out this understanding of how holy war is waged in the new covenant.

1. *Matthew 15:21-28*

Several recent studies on Matthew's gospel have examined the overall structure of the book. Peter Leithart has made a very compelling case that "Matthew organized his account of the life of Jesus as an Irenaeus recapitulation of Israel's history, in which Jesus replays both major individual roles of that history (Moses, David, Elisha, Jeremiah) as well as the role of the nation herself."¹⁹ According to Leithart's analysis, "Matthew's gospel begins like Genesis and ends like Chronicles, and thus encompasses the entirety of the Hebrew canon."²⁰ If Matthew retells the history of Israel through the life of Jesus,

¹⁸ When Paul described the church's armor in Ephesians, he did so in a way reminiscent of the priest's vestments, connecting our warfare, priesthood, and worship in the closest possible way.

¹⁹ See Peter Leithart, "Jesus as Israel: The Typological Structure of Matthew's Gospel" available at <http://www.leithart.com/pdf/jesus-as-israel-the-typological-structure-of-matthew-s-gospel.pdf>. Accessed July 29, 2009. For additional helpful material on the typological themes in Matthew, see also David Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995) and C. J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

²⁰ Leithart, "Jesus as Israel." While Matthew 1:1 echoes Genesis, indicating this gospel will have a cosmic sweep, going back to the very beginning of the biblical record, it is also obvious that Matthew's primary interest picks up with the call of Abraham. As Leithart points out, the first four chapters of Matthew sync with Genesis and Exodus in this way:

1:1: Book of genesis	Gen. 2:4; 5:1
1:1-17: son of Abraham	Gen. 12-26
1:18-25: Joseph the dreamer	Gen. 37
2:1-12: Magi	Nations come to Joseph/Egypt
2:13-15: Herod kills children	Ex. 1-2: Pharaoh kills children
2:14: Jesus rescued, flees	Ex. 2: Moses rescued, flees
2:19-23: Jesus returns to Israel	Ex. 3-4: Moses returns to Egypt
3:1-12: John announces judgment	Ex. 5-12: Moses brings judgment
3:13-17: Jesus passes through waters	Ex. 16: exodus
4:1-11: temptation in wilderness	Ex. 17-19: travel to Sinai
4:18-22: Jesus calls disciples	Ex. 18: Moses appoints rulers

so that he relives and fulfills the nation's vocation, the question for our purposes is obvious: Where does the period of the conquest fit into Matthew's narrative? How does Jesus relate to the Canaanites of his day? If we can find the proper connections, Matthew's gospel can shed light on our understanding of how to apply the conquest portion of the old covenant Scriptures in the new covenant age.

The overarching scheme in Matthew's gospel looks something like this:

Matthew 1	Genesis ("book of genesis," Abraham and Joseph connections)
Matthew 2-7	Exodus (exodus, law at Sinai, tabernacle/house)
Matthew 8-11	Numbers – Joshua (wilderness, spies, conquest, rest)
Matthew 12	1-2 Samuel (David)
Matthew 13	1 Kings (Solomon; wisdom)
Matthew 14-18	2 Kings (Elijah and Elisha themes)
Matthew 19-21	2 Kings (divided kingdom, Joash, Jehu, etc.)
Matthew 21-27	Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Lamentations (exile/ death)
Matthew 28	Ezra-2 Chronicles (resurrection/ return from exile; Cyrus' great commission) ²¹

Looking in more detail at chapters 10-11, Leithart concludes that

[T]he "Pentateuchal" section of Matthew's gospel concludes somewhere near chapter 10, and from that point we move from a Moses/Exodus typology into a Joshua/conquest typology. Given the fact that Joshua is himself typologically compared to Moses, it is not surprising that traces of Mosaic typology continue into chapter 10, but these traces become faint because Matthew has brought another typology to the forefront and allowed the Mosaic typology to recede to the background.

In Matthew 10-11, we find allusions to the sending of the twelve spies into the land (Num. 13) and the commissioning of Joshua as Moses' successor.

Jesus treats the mission of the Twelve as a quasi-military operation. The apostles are "sheep in the midst of wolves" (10:16), and should expect to face persecution and rejection (10:17, 23). Their ministry will create turmoil among their hearers, turning brother against brother and children against parents (10:21, 35-36). To fulfill their mission, the Twelve need to act with courage, trusting their Father and fearing God rather than man (10:28-29). Jesus announces that he has come to bring a "sword" rather than peace (10:34), and demands a total commitment from His disciples, including a willingness to die for His sake (10:37-39). In exhorting His apostles "Do not fear," Jesus is repeating the words of Moses and Joshua to Israel before the conquest (Num 14:9; 21:34; Deut 1:21; 3:2, 22; 31:8; Josh 8:1; 10:8, 25). The discourse anticipates that some will receive the Twelve, and promises that those who do will, like Rahab,

²¹ The correspondences are developed with much more detail in Leithart, "Jesus as Israel."

receive a reward (10:40-42). Of course, this conquest is quite different from the original conquest. It is a conquest of liberation and life-giving – the sick healed, dead raised, lepers cleansed, demons conquered (10:8). If this is *herem* warfare, it is directed not against Canaanites, but against Satan and His demons. Like Moses, Jesus instructs and sends the Twelve into the land but does not accompany them (Matt 11:1).²²

While this recapitulatory meta-structure is the key to Matthew as a whole, there are smaller structures within the gospel which, while not competing with this overarching pattern, provide added layers of meaning to particular sections. For example, while the early chapters in Matthew are very heavily loaded with allusions to Mosaic imagery, Mosaic themes bleed into a number of other places in the book. Similarly, while Matthew's later chapters correspond to Israel's prophetic period, Matthew uses prophetic quotations as an interpretive lens in earlier sections, creating additional layers of typological meaning in the text (e.g., 2:5, 15, 18; 3:3; etc.). The early chapters are connected primarily with Genesis, but also allude to themes and patterns taken from Isaiah and Jeremiah.

In short, we find a number of smaller cycles and sequences in Matthew's gospel in which alternative typologies are nested within the larger recapitulatory framework that structures the gospel as a whole. Matthew's gospel has an overarching typological structure that traces out the entire canonical history of the old covenant from Genesis to Chronicles. But there are other smaller structures within Matthew that readers should not ignore or overlook. Matthew 14-15 is a prime example and of special interest to us here. These chapters are part of Matthew's wisdom section, relating to monarchy / prophetic period of Israel's history. But that does not exclude other themes and patterns from being buried in the text at deeper levels.²³

In Matthew 14-15, there is a clear Passover-exodus-law-conquest-feast sequence: Jesus serves a meal to a multitude in 14:13-21, then crosses the sea at night (cf. Ex. 12, 14) walking on water (cf. Ps. 77:19) and joining his disciples in their boat (Matt. 14:22-33). Parallels with the Passover and Red Sea crossing are obvious. Next, there is a discussion of the law with the Pharisees, corresponding to the giving of the law at Sinai (Matt. 15:1-20). Then Jesus engages a Gentile woman, in an episode that resonates with conquest allusions (15:21-28). Afterwards, we find Jesus healing and feeding the multitudes, providing rest and joy (15:29-39), corresponding to Israel settling in the land.

Matthew 15:21-28 is our focus because of its connections with the conquest. First, notice that Matthew describes a woman who comes to Jesus as a "Canaanite." This is striking on a number of levels, and frankly, is a dead giveaway as far as Matthew's intentions are concerned, even though most commentators either miss it or ignore it.

²² Leithart, "Jesus as Israel."

²³ This is in part due to the fact that even within the Old Testament, we already find recapitulation, typology, and intertextual connections. Several more or less random examples make the point: Noah is a new Adam after the flood. Joshua is another Moses and the Jordan River crossing recapitulates the exodus. Later, Elijah and Elisha are presented as new Moses figures who experience exodus events. And so forth. The web of biblical typologies and intertextualities is very, very thick. Thus, it should not surprise us to find that Matthew's recapitulatory framework is heavily layered with additional, smaller frameworks.

By the first century AD, the Canaanites had not existed as an identifiable people group for many centuries, so the label is obviously anachronistic and must tip us off to Matthew's chief concern in this pericope. Matthew's description of her as a "woman of Canaan" is also highlighted by comparison with the parallel story in Mark's gospel. Mark calls her "a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth." (Mk. 7:26). Mark's terminology would have certainly been regarded as more current and straightforward. For Matthew to call this woman a Canaanite would be like a modern day Frenchman calling himself a Gaul or a modern day Iraqi calling himself a Babylonian.

What, then, is Matthew doing? Matthew is sending us a theological signal. He is going to show us how the New Joshua would have his New Israel relate to "Canaanites" (that is, outsiders, outcasts, ostensible enemies) in the new age he is inaugurating. If Jesus is the New Joshua (as his very name implies), then this woman is a New Rahab (as her "Canaanite" identity implies). Jesus' ministry to her is going to challenge Israel's self-understanding and prejudices against outsiders, as well as foreshadowing the church's soon to be launched mission to the nations.

When she approaches Jesus, asking for mercy for her daughter, Jesus rebuffs her three times, reminding her that he was sent first and foremost to the covenant nation of Israel, even suggesting that she is an unclean "dog."²⁴ Whereas Rahab in Joshua 2 used wise deception to prove her loyalty to the true God, this woman uses her quick wits: "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table." With these words, she acknowledges the primacy of Israel in redemptive history. The covenant is for the Jew first. But she also insists that the goodness and justice of God demand that he deal impartially with all who seek him in faith, even if they are outside the nation of Israel. She knows Abraham received the blessing first, but also knows (possibly because she was familiar with the story of Joshua 2 the same way Rahab was familiar with the story of the exodus?) that blessing must ultimately flow out to all the families of the earth. In other words, she was a much better theologian than the scribes and Pharisees, Israel's religious leaders and supposed teachers. Because this Canaanite woman shows great faith, her household is saved, just as Rahab's family was spared by faith. She may be a Canaanite, but she acts like an Israelite, so she receives the blessings intended initially for Israel. Jesus does not wage holy war against her, but against the demon that has possessed her daughter; he does not conquer her, but conquers her oppressor, so that she is set free.

²⁴ The reference to her uncleanness is all the more interesting in light of the immediately preceding discussion with the Pharisees in which Jesus clarifies the meaning of the old covenant uncleanness laws, and then proceeds to transform, transcend, and negate them. Why does he immediately revert back to an old covenant-style way of viewing this woman immediately after overhauling the laws of uncleanness? Obviously, Jesus is up to something big. Also, note the contrasting ways in which food is used in 15:1-20 and 15:21-28. In the 15:1-20, we find the Pharisees are afraid that what they put in their mouths will defile them. They are obsessed with the minutiae of the law, and end up ignoring its deepest meaning. The woman, on the other hand, is happy to gobble up crumbs that fall from Jesus table. She knows she is unclean (by Jewish standards), but also knows that if she can "eat" what Jesus offers, she and her child will be cleansed and healed.

Matthew's narrative is showing us that the church will engage in a different kind of conquest of "Canaanites" (that is, outsiders/Gentiles). If we look at the wider context, we get more confirmation Matthew has a transformed holy war theology in view in this section of the gospel. The story of the encounter with the Canaanite woman is followed by further healings (as Jesus continues his holy war against disease and sickness) and then the feeding of the 4000 with a few loaves and fish. In biblical numerology, four is the number of the world (e.g., four winds, four corners, of the earth, four faces of the cherubim representing creation, etc.).²⁵ Jesus' disciples collected seven large baskets of leftovers (e.g., crumbs that fell from the table – cf. Matt. 15:27). When the Israelites entered Canaan, there were seven Gentile nations they were to drive out:

When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are about to enter and occupy, he will clear away many nations ahead of you: the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. These seven nations are all more powerful than you (Deut. 7:1-2).

The use of four and seven in close proximity to the story of the Canaanite woman point to the coming globalization of Jesus' mission. The combination of loaves and fish do as well: loaves obviously point to Jews, as the priestly nation, and fish are associated with the Gentiles.²⁶ Thus, the numerical and food symbolism in Matthew 15 show us that Jesus is putting an end to traditional boundaries between Jew and Gentile, and pointing forward to the new missionary situation that will exist on the other side of Easter and Pentecost when even the "dogs" will take their place at the table.²⁷

Taking all these clues together, we arrive at the following: Jesus is showing that even those very peoples God once commanded to be destroyed are now to be embraced. Instead of conquering them, we are to heal them, feed them, and bless them. This is our new covenant holy war. In the new covenant, Gentiles will be invited to the covenant feast. Holy war has been transformed into mission; in the new covenant, the church will conquer her enemies unto conversion with love and mercy. This does not negate the theme of judgment on those who reject the word of Jesus (e.g., Matt. 24-25). But, compared with Joshua's day, love has replaced wrath as the leading edge of the church's ministry. The circle of grace has expanded in a radical way. In the ancient world, the greatness of a king was measured by how many people he could kill and

²⁵ Of course, most everything I know about biblical numerology, I learned from Jordan, though I cannot put my finger on where he explains the meaning of different numbers.

²⁶ Readers of Jordan will find these symbolic connections intuitive. Bread is clearly associated with Israel in the Levitical system, e.g., the twelve loaves of showbread in the tabernacle/temple represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Fish are associated with the Gentile nations in numerous places. For example, the sea monsters represent Gentile empires. Jonah is unique in the Old Testament in featuring fish, as well as mission to a Gentile city. Jesus uses the expression "fishers of men" to describe the mission of his disciples in the new age he is inaugurating. And so forth.

²⁷ The juxtaposition of Matthew 15:21-28 and 15:32-39 is very interesting. After the feeding miracle, the leftovers are gathered up so that there are no "crumbs." But perhaps this is because in the new covenant, the Gentiles "dogs" will no longer scavenge under the table but will take their place at the table.

how many nations he could conquer; in the case of Jesus, his kingly greatness is revealed in his overflowing mercy and loving service to those in need.

2. Luke 19:1-10

The story of Jesus and Zacchaeus takes place in a location Luke identifies as “Jericho” (Lk. 18:35; 19:1), so we naturally look for parallels and contrasts with earlier biblical stories involving Jericho. In the book of Joshua, Jericho is the first city destroyed in the conquest of the promised land. The Israelites marched around the city for six days and then on the seventh God leveled it to the ground (Joshua 6). Little children learn in Sunday School that Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, but in reality, the Lord did all the real fighting. In fact, the story of Jericho reminds us of one of the oddities of holy war. Most of the time, holy war is presented as a form of liturgical warfare. God causes the wicked to fall and his people to triumph when his people call out to him in prayer and song. The heart of any biblical holy war campaign is worship.²⁸

In Joshua 2, before the city of Jericho was destroyed, the prostitute Rahab hid the Hebrew spies. As a result of her faithfulness and loyalty to Israel’s God, her household was spared. Rahab used righteous deception, and by her courageous actions showed that her true allegiance was with Israel and Israel’s God. Zacchaeus is, at least in some respects, another Rahab. No, he (obviously) is not a prostitute – but he is “in bed” with the Roman Empire in the eyes of the Jews. But in this story, Zacchaeus transfers his loyalty from Herod/Caesar (and his own pocketbook) to Jesus, the New Joshua. Thus, his house is saved, just as Rahab’s was (Lk. 19:9). Even as Rahab received the spies into her home, so Zacchaeus received Jesus. Like Rahab, he shows Abraham-like faith and is incorporated into Abraham’s family (Lk. 19:9). In both Joshua 2 and Luke 19, we find salvation coming to the unlikeliest of candidates, namely, a prostitute and a tax collector (cf. Matt. 21:31-32 for this pair of categories).

Note that when the first Joshua destroyed Jericho (Josh. 6), he threatened curses against anyone who rebuilt the city (Josh. 6:26-27; 1 Ki. 16:34). If Jericho was rebuilt, it would be a sign that the land was being re-Canaanized, a sign that the conquest and exodus were being undone. When the city was reconstructed, it was certainly not a good thing (1 Ki. 16:34). However, even within the horizon on the old covenant epoch, Jericho experienced a quasi-restoration, a reversal of the curse. Peter Leithart explains:

Jesus’ Hebrew name is “Joshua,” and the last time a “Joshua” came through Jericho, he destroyed the city (Joshua 6) and threatened curses against anyone who would rebuild it (Joshua 6:26-27; 1 Kings 16:34). Later, the prophet Elisha, whose played “Joshua” to Eiljah’s “Moses,” came through the rebuilt Jericho and purified the waters (2 Kings 2:18-22), making the “city of Palms” (Judges 1:16) another Eden. Jesus’ “conquest”

²⁸ Again, this is an important point of contact between Joshua’s *herem* warfare and the church’s missional warfare.

of Jericho is more like Elisha's than like Joshua's; He brings healing and salvation rather than destruction (but cf. Luke 19:41-44).²⁹

What do we learn from this passage? Jericho is a symbol. It signifies the city of man. It was destroyed (on the whole) by the first Joshua, but later redeemed (representatively) by Elisha and then ultimately by Jesus. Just as prostitutes and tax collectors are not beyond the reach of Jesus' mercy, neither is a cursed city like Jericho. Again, we see the contrast between old covenant and new covenant holy war. In the old covenant, a ministry of death, Jericho was razed to the ground. Once the New Joshua comes, Jericho receives signs of salvation and resurrection.³⁰ The gospel is ultimately given not just to bless Israel, but the whole world. What has been destroyed by sin will be rebuilt and transformed. What has been killed will be brought back to life. Holy war is now primarily constructive rather than destructive.

3. Acts 18:18, 20:33

The book of Acts is basically a new covenant version of Joshua.³¹ The book of Acts uses Joshua as a blueprint for the church's mission. Joshua's "little commission" in Joshua 1:1-9 points to Jesus' "Great Commission" at end of the gospel narratives. Luke has very obviously constructed the early chapters of the book of Acts so that they track with the early chapters of Joshua. In other words, the church's fulfillment of her mission (Matt. 28:16-20; Luke 24:46-49) witnessing to the nations is the new covenant counterpart to and fulfillment of Joshua's conquest of Canaan.

If we overlay the two books, we see that Joshua and Acts show a number of striking parallels and structural similarities:

- In each case, the leader of God's people has just left the scene (Moses in death, Jesus in his ascension).
- In the book of Joshua, Joshua is called to be Moses' successor and carry forward God's purposes in the conquest. Joshua is presented as a new Moses in a variety of ways. In Acts, the Holy Spirit comes as Jesus' alter ego to be Jesus' successor, and to carry forward the church's mission of conquest "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).
- The Lord commands Joshua to be strong and courageous at the beginning of the book (Josh. 1:1-9). At the beginning of Acts, the Lord promises power will come upon the disciples to make them strong and courageous (as seen in the sudden transformation of Peter from coward to preacher; cf. Acts 1-2).
- In Joshua, Israel is commanded to conquer the land. In Acts the church is commanded to bear witness to the ends of the earth. The nature and scope of the conquest have been transformed and expanded.

²⁹ See Leithart's post, available at <http://www.leithart.com/2004/02/11/sermon-outline-february-15>. Last accessed July 29, 2009.

³⁰ The healing of the blind man in the immediately preceding section of Luke forms a unit with the story of Zacchaeus. Thus, there is a double witness to Jericho's redemption by the Greater Joshua in 18:35-19:10.

³¹ Jordan, of course, is the teacher who pointed this out to me.

- In Joshua, the people are led through a clear sequence of events: they cross over the Jordan in a kind of baptism (cf. 1 Cor. 10:2), they get circumcised, and they celebrate Passover. In Acts, the sequence is similar: the Spirit baptizes the church, 3000 are baptized with water (the new covenant counterpart to circumcision per Colossians 2:11-12), and they break the bread of the Lord's Supper together (cf. Acts 2:42-46; the Lord's Supper is the new covenant fulfillment of the Passover according to 1 Corinthians 5:7-8).
- In both books, the first move of God's people is to invade a key city. Jericho falls by shouting and trumpeting, while Jerusalem is invaded by means of prayer and preaching. In both cases, holy war is waged by liturgical means. Jerusalem, like Jericho of old, is destined to be destroyed (cf. Matt. 24; Lk. 22), but those who exercise Rahab-like faith and put their faith in scarlet blood of Christ (the Greater Joshua) will be saved.
- Almost immediately in both books, we find the people of God hindered by sin in the camp: In Joshua, Achan steals booty that belongs to the Lord, and is put to death on the spot (Josh. 7). Likewise, in Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira steal from the Lord by lying about some property they had sold, and they are executed on the spot. Note the word for stealing in Acts 5:2 is a rare term, but is also used in the Greek (Septuagint) translation of Joshua 7:1. In both books, fear enters the enemies of God's people, allowing the covenant community to score significant victories (Josh. 2:9-13; 5:1-2; Acts 2:2-43, 5:5, 11; 9:31; 19:17)
- In both books, we see Gentiles brought in, though with significant controversy (Josh. 9; Acts 15) and attack (Joshua 10; Acts 6-7).

Later on in the book of Acts, Luke chronicles Paul's missionary journeys. These journeys should be understood as holy war campaigns. Paul is invading the world in waves, going on the offensive with the gospel. Several clues indicate this truth. First, Paul takes a Nazirite vow in conjunction with his mission work, at least once, possibly twice. The Nazirite vow is preeminently a holy war vow. The person who has taken a Nazirite vow enters into special quasi-priestly status for the duration of his vow.³² His uncut hair indicates his consecration. The Nazirite cannot drink alcohol under his vow because such drink is given to celebrate rest and victory, which cannot happen until the holy war task is fulfilled.³³

³² Note that priests are basically full time holy warriors. When they are on the job, they are not allowed to drink alcohol, just like the Nazirites. Priests waged constant, total war by killing animals bearing the sins of the people. They destroyed the animals with sword and fire, even as holy war against the Canaanites was waged with sword and fire (cf. Judg. 1:8). So the categories of Nazirite, priest, and warrior heavily overlap and interpenetrate.

³³ The Nazirite vow is found In Numbers 6. But there are several others references to Nazirites in the Scriptures which fill out our understanding of this institution. Samuel, Samson, and John the Baptist are lifetime Nazirites, each with an obvious mission to fulfill. In Judges 4-5, we find those who went to war with Barak had taken Nazirite vows. Judges 5:2 tells us that when they went into battle, "locks hung loose;" that is, the men entered battle with uncut hair. Similarly, the holy warriors described in Revelation 9:7-8 "had hair like women's hair." Most likely, this means that in the church, all of God's people are symbolic Nazirites. We are not under the stipulations of the old covenant Nazirite vow, but we do have a holy war mission to fulfill. Of course, the Nazirite vow is ultimately fulfilled in Christ. It is possible Matthew is using a pun to describe Jesus as a

Luke indicates that Paul took a Nazirite vow because in Acts 18:18, we find he cut his hair and then returned to Antioch, the place from which he was originally commissioned for his evangelistic work. He may have taken another Nazirite vow in Acts 21:24. While the context of the vow in Acts 21 is much more cryptic, it is still obviously tied into his missionary work. Paul, as a Nazirite, is a holy warrior, like the old covenant Nazirites who came before him. But unlike most old covenant Nazirites, the shape of his warfare is entirely missional. He wages war with the sword of the Spirit, as he preaches the gospel of Christ.

There is another clue in Acts that Paul understood his mission trips as holy war campaigns. In Acts 20:17-38, Paul makes his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders, wrapping up an extensive three year work. In Acts 20:33, he says, "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel." On the surface, this is a bit odd: Other than establishing his own integrity in their eyes, why would Paul make this claim in this context? The Bible reader sensitive to intertextual echoes hears in these words an explicit repudiation of the sin of Achan.

The story of Achan is found in Joshua 7. After the Israelites defeated the metropolis of Jericho, they moved in on the tiny village of Ai. But at Ai, they experienced a stunning defeat. Joshua's account gives the clear reason for their failure:

But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel....

Get up, sanctify the people, and say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: "There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you." In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the LORD takes shall come according to families; and the family which the LORD takes shall come by households; and the household which the LORD takes shall come man by man. Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel.'"

So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the Zarhites; and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man, and Zabdi was taken. Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD

symbolic Nazirite in Matthew 2:23. Whether or not that is the case, it seems almost certain that Jesus takes a Nazirite vow just before he goes to the cross in Mark 14:25, when he promises to not drink of the fruit of the vine again until he has finished his work and brought in the kingdom (cf. Jn. 19:28-30). For a complete discussion of the Nazirite holy war vow, see Jordan's *Judges: God's War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Tx.: Geneva Ministries, 1985), 221ff.

God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.”

And Achan answered Joshua and said, “Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done: When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it.”

So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it. And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD. Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor. And Joshua said, “Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day.” So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones.

Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor to this day (Josh. 7:1, 13-26).

Achan confessed to having coveted and taken gold, silver, and apparel for himself. Paul confessed that he had *not* coveted these things, using virtually identical language. There is no mistaking the fact that Paul is echoing this account from the book of Joshua. Thus, Paul sees himself as a kind of anti-Achan, an Achan in reverse. Achan took from the spoils of war. Paul refused to do so. Instead of taking he gave of himself and “kept back nothing that was helpful” (Acts 20:20).

But this connection between Achan and Paul only makes sense if Paul saw himself as carrying on a new kind of holy war, analogous to but radically different from the holy war of Joshua. The Ephesians are his Canaanites, but instead of destroying them, he pleads and works for their salvation. He wants them to escape destruction. Instead of wrongfully claiming spoil for himself, he keeps himself pure in the sight of God.

Paul’s precise choice of language shows he understood his mission work in Ephesus as a successful “holy war” campaign. He expected his gospel to be victorious because he did not tolerate the sin of Achan in his war camp. Achan’s coveting led to defeat for Israel; Paul’s contented service will lead the church, the new Israel, to victory.

What do we learn about new covenant holy war from this intertextual fragment in Acts 20? Acts as a whole is about new covenant holy war, as the church “invades” Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. But the nature of her warfare has been transformed. There is a shift from killing to converting. Unlike Joshua, in the book of Acts, Paul does not inflict suffering, but bears suffering for the sake of others (Acts 20:22ff). Paul is innocent of the blood of all men (Acts 20:26). He desires to protect rather than harm, and shows special care for the weak (Acts 20:29ff, 35). Unlike Joshua, Peter and Paul advance the kingdom through service rather than force (Acts 20:19). Unlike Joshua, Paul is

not so much claiming an inheritance for himself as he is drawing others into an inheritance in God's promised new creation (Acts 20:32). However, just as with Joshua's holy war the church will only be victorious if she is first righteous.³⁴

It is evident, then, that God's people no longer fight with a literal sword and fire; instead they use the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God; Heb. 4:12) and witness in the fiery presence of God's Spirit (Acts 2:3). The weapons of holy war have morphed. The church can learn a great deal about her mission from the book of Joshua, but to do so she must apply Joshua's use of sword and flame in a metaphorical way, guided by Acts and the rest of the New Testament.

4. Hebrews 13:5

Hebrews is a book about the transition from old covenant to new covenant. That transition takes place between the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in 30 AD and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Hebrews is most likely written by Paul in the mid-60s AD to his fellow Jews who have converted to Christian faith but are finding themselves under intense pressure to turn away from Christ to avoid persecution. From the perspective of the book's original context, "the day" rapidly approaching (Heb. 10:25) is the day of Jesus' coming to destroy the temple and thus end the old covenant order (cf. Matt. 24). Paul calls on these believers to forsake their attachment to the earthly Jerusalem, going outside the old covenant city so that they may receive the heavenly city that is to come (Heb. 13:13-14; cf. 12:22). Pastorally, Hebrews functions as an extended call to perseverance in faith, even in the face of terrible opposition and obstacles. Theologically, Hebrews demonstrates that Christ fulfills, and therefore surpasses, all the features of the old covenant age.

It is vital that we root our reading of Hebrews in the book's original historical context. While the book is most certainly applicable to the church in all times and places, in a very real sense, it is not giving us "timeless truths." Nothing in the book is abstract; it is all anchored to a specific shift taking place in the history of God's people. In order to understand the book's meaning for the church today we have to grasp what it meant for the church then. The pre-70 AD context of the book is a vital interpretive key.

For example, in Hebrews 1, Paul says that God has spoken to us in his Son "in these last days" (Heb. 1:1-2). While the "last days" may refer to the entire new covenant age, in the context of this letter, it is more likely a reference to the "last days" of the old covenant age. Hebrews is about the transition from old covenant to new covenant; as the book is being written that period of transition is drawing to a close.

Later, in Hebrews 3-4, Paul draws a typological relationship between Israel's forty year period of wilderness wandering and the church's forty year

³⁴ This is a crucial point for pastors and elders: We are sometimes led to believe that the faithful practice of church discipline will stand in the way of church growth because the church will be perceived as harsh and unloving. This narrative shows us just the opposite is true. If the church is to be a well-heeled army, she must keep the troops in line. She will not experience true growth in the long run unless she prunes away unfruitful branches on the vine.

transitional period from 30-70 AD.³⁵ Israel wandered in the wilderness for a generation, then conquered Canaan. Likewise, the church underwent a generation-long period of preparation before beginning her invasion of the nations.³⁶ Paul uses Psalm 95, a reflection on the wilderness period, to threaten first century Christians: They must not harden their hearts and so fall short of the goal of entering the new covenant in its fullness on the other side of 70 AD. The temptations and promises for the first century church were analogous to (but much greater than) those presented to Israel under Moses.

It has been pointed out by several scholars that Hebrews is a new covenant version of Deuteronomy.³⁷ Just as Deuteronomy functions as a last will and testament by Moses for the people, so Hebrews is likely Paul's last epistle and therefore something of a farewell sermon. Hebrews follows the same overarching structure as Deuteronomy, quotes extensively from Deuteronomy, and like Deuteronomy, prepares a people for their coming warfare/conquest. The hearers of Deuteronomy were faced with a choice between faithfulness to God, demonstrated in obedience and conquest of the land, or rebellion, curse, and loss of the land (Deut. 28-30). The first readers of Hebrews were faced with a choice as well. It was a choice between Christ and apostate Judaism, between the rising glories of the new covenant and the fading glory of the old covenant. But they were also faced with a choice between two different kinds of warfare. Paul does not want them going to war with the Romans over the temple and their national independence. He knows that path is a dead end for Israel (quite literally). He does not want them to fight for a lesser altar and meal (Heb. 13:10) and for a city that is going to be lost anyway (Heb. 13:14). Instead, he wants them to go to war for the nations, to conquer all the families of the earth with the gospel, following the lead of the Greater Joshua, who promises an even greater rest. He wants them to give themselves to the city that is to come, the heavenly Jerusalem. He wants them to engage in a better form of sacrifice (Heb. 13:15-16) and live under a better covenant (Heb. 8).

The warfare/conquest theme is seen in Hebrews right out of the gate. In the first chapter, seven Old Testament texts are quoted and applied to Jesus; five of them have to do with the Christ subduing the nations to himself. As Wilson says, "This is the great subject of the book of Hebrews...All of them [that is, the Old Testament quotations in the book] fit into the story of the greater Joshua, subduing the nations of Canaan, that is, the nations of the world."³⁸

All of this sets the stage for the key text we want to examine. In Hebrews 13, there is a crucial, but often overlooked Old Testament quotation that further

³⁵ During Israel's wilderness wandering, the mixed multitude of Jews and (believing) Gentiles who left Egypt were assimilated into a "new Israel." The same thing is going on in the Jew-Gentile churches of the first century AD, as Paul's other epistles show.

³⁶ Obviously, the gospel was already being preached widely before 70 AD (Col. 1:24; cf. Rom 15:7-33). In fact, Paul's expansive missionary enterprise to furthest stretches of the *oikumene* (the Roman Empire) was a sign of the end of the Israel-centered old covenant (cf. Matt. 24:14). The apostles who established churches throughout the world prior to 70 AD were like the spies Moses sent into the land ahead of the conquest. They laid the initial foundation for what would come in much greater fullness later on.

³⁷ See Douglas Wilson, *Christ and His Rivals* (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2008), 13f.

³⁸ Wilson, *Christ and His Rivals*, 11-12.

confirms that the transformed holy war motif is at the heart of this book.

Consider Hebrews 13:5:

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Covetousness is at the root of all kinds of sin. In this particular situation, coveting riches would lead these Jewish believers straight back to unbelieving Judaism. If they stayed true to Christ, they could easily face the plundering of their property and the loss of wealth (Heb. 10:32-34). But following on the heels of the command to resist covetousness and pursue contentment, Paul cites an Old Testament text about God's covenant faithfulness and constancy: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Why is this text dropped into the exhortation at this point in the letter?

These words are a quotation from Deuteronomy, later repeated in Joshua:

Then Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. And he said to them: "I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in. Also the LORD has said to me, 'You shall not cross over this Jordan.' The LORD your God Himself crosses over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as the LORD has said. And the LORD will do to them as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites and their land, when He destroyed them. The LORD will give them over to you, that you may do to them according to every commandment which I have commanded you. Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you." Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed" (Deut. 31:1-8).

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying: "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel.³ Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to

the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:1-9).

The original context of the promise "I will never leave you nor forsake you" is clear: It is God's word of encouragement on the eve of warfare and conquest. These words are part of God's (or Moses') pre-battle pep talk to Joshua and the rest of Israel. God will be with his people as they move into battle to claim their promised inheritance.

These words function in the same way in Hebrews 13, properly understood. Times are tough for the believers addressed in this letter, but if they will hold on to God's promise with courage, he will begin to deliver the nations into their hand as an inheritance. Paul is reminding them God is with them as they move out to conquer, leaving the old covenant and its trappings completely behind. Wilson puts it very well:

This text is what we might call a naturally inspirational one: "I will never leave you" is a text you might want to have imprinted on a cocoa mug for a rainy day, or a Christian inspirational poster portraying a glorious California sunset. But a far better image for such a poster would be a panoramic view of Normandy beach just before the invasion...[T]he people who first read the book of Hebrews were on the threshold of God's great invasion of the world, and this is how they were encouraged (Heb. 13:5; Deut. 31:6). Never will I leave you *during the course of the invasion of the land...*

The people of Israel are on the brink of invasion, and God is promising to be with them in the thick of the fighting...

The biblical faith, lived as it should be lived, will always generate resistance and conflict. This should not come as a surprise; it should not come as a shock. The charge we are given in this context is the charge to be strong and courageous. This means we are in the midst of circumstances where it would be easy *not* to be courageous, and *not* to be strong. What is God's role in this? He does the "not leaving." He does the "not forsaking." What do we do? We believe him when he says this, and the natural response to this faith is *courage*.³⁹

Now that the promised Messiah, God-in-the-flesh, has come, the Lord is with us in a much greater way than he was with Joshua and the Israelites. Jesus is, after all, Immanuel. His presence with us ensures the success of our new covenant holy war campaign. The church can move forward with strength and courage to conquer the nations with the word of the gospel, which is the sword of the Spirit.

³⁹ Wilson, *Christ and His Rivals*, 13-14, 24, 15.

Conclusion

Among Reformed Christians, it is relatively non-controversial to claim that Jesus has transformed holy war so that the church now fights her battles through the gospel. I do not know any modern day Christians who believe Joshua's form of holy war should be repeated against unbelievers today. Even if holy war is a neglected biblical theme in the contemporary church, even if the nature of the original conquest is often misunderstood, we have at least some kind of consensus understanding of the way God wants us to fight and win the battle for the nations in the new covenant.

The transformation of holy war is at the heart of the coming of Jesus and his kingdom. Jesus did not come to kill like Joshua, but to be killed for the sake of "Canaanite" sinners. He did not come to destroy the pagan nations but to save and convert them. He now sends his church on a mission to all the nations of the earth, but it is a mission of restoration, renewal, and healing, not a mission of destruction. Furthermore, Jesus is with us to ensure the ultimate success of our holy war mission. The conquest under Joshua was not exactly a resounding success as the book of Judges reveals. But the new covenant brings greater power and greater presence to guarantee that the church will be victorious. All of this is evident if we look at the "big picture" the Scriptures give us, but also if we look at the subtle details of several New Testament texts (as demonstrated in this essay).

But that is not to say Jesus will never bring judgment, or never wage war against flesh and blood. Nor is it to say that his people may never pray for judgment against their enemies, as we see in the imprecations of David (Ps. 139:19-22), Paul (1 Cor. 16:22), and the saints (Rev. 6:10). Judgment is the shadow that trails the substance of the kingdom; it is still there, but it is not the focus as in the book of Joshua.

In 70 AD, Jesus waged a kind of physical holy war against unbelieving Israel, using Rome as his instrument. He continues to bring judgments against empires, nations, and individuals in history, as he pleases. At the last day he will bring eternal destruction and damnation to those who have rejected him and clung to idols. In other words, the holy war theme is not fulfilled by his redemptive work and the church's mission with no remainder. There are judgments in history and there is a final judgment still to come. Joshua's conquest was but a type and preview of the judgment Jesus brings and will bring against the wicked. In the end, Jesus will drive "Canaanites" who refuse to convert out of his world, destroying them and their false gods in the lake of fire forever. But the meek shall inherit the earth.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ I agree with Jordan that the best treatment of the old covenant law and holy war in relation to "normal war," the so-called "culture wars," the mission of the church, and the civil magistrate is still Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Brentwood, TN: Wogelmuth and Hyatt, 1991), especially chapters 10-11, 16, and appendix A. Jordan develops a helpful fourfold approach to the application of old covenant law to the new creation situation in *Through New Eyes*, 201. These hermeneutical guidelines are useful for understanding and applying Joshua's holy war motif in the new creation.

It is obvious that I believe holy war is exhaustively fulfilled in Christ's work and in the church's administration of the gospel, with no remainder for the civil government. But what does this

mean for the ethics of normal war? Many claim that the warfare of the Old Testament is so completely fulfilled by Christ and the church that there is no place left for Christians going to literal war on behalf of their nation, even if there is "just" cause. In other words, the church's Spiritual holy war is now the only legitimate war, and so Christians must be pacifists. This Anabaptist view is refuted easily enough by the words of Paul, speaking of the magistrate: "for he does bear the sword in vain" (Rom. 13:4). There is a legitimate use of the sword in punishment and protection. Paul even calls the magistrate "God's servant," opening the door to Christian participation in Caesar's administration.

But we can go further than this and ask: If the magistrate is truly understood as God's minister, as Romans 13 indicates, does his use of the sword have any relation to the kingdom of God and the mission of the church? When Caesar converts and seeks to use the sword righteously, how can his use of the sword best further the ministry of the gospel among the nations? Even if there is no residue of holy war that sticks to the magistrate's office, even if holy war waged exclusively by the church, does the magistrate have a role to play in the kingdom's embodiment and advancement?

To be more pointed: If we believe (with Jordan) that the gospel is theocratic, that Christendom is the outcome of the Great Commission, and that nations as nations must be disciplined, can a Christianized magistrate make use of the sword in a way that serves and even expands the kingdom of God? Can the sword of the magistrate ever serve (or at least make way for) the mission of the church? Should the power of the sword be used by Christian magistrates to enforce some basic Christian morality in society? How does the church's holy war relate to our so-called culture wars against secularism, liberalism, Islam, and so forth?

We might scoff at such notions. Evangelism by the sword is one of the things we most detest about Islam. We know that force of arms cannot change hearts and bring about true conversion. We know that Christian faith and practice cannot be imposed on an unwilling people without disaster for everyone involved.

But at the same time, we must recognize historically that God has used Christian magistrates to at least create space for the work of the church to grow. Many of us of European descent should be thankful that medieval Christian kings converted our ancestors, sometimes at sword point, using their office to suppress the old idolatries and support the growth of the true faith. Was that completely wrong-headed? Were medieval Christian kings wrong to use the sword to stem the brutal and bloody spread of Islam? In what way do these historical actions relate to the church's holy war, waged through prayer, preaching, discipline, service, and so forth?

The church's legacy on questions of these sorts is mixed. We could point to the good that Christian magistrates have done in their attempts to assist and cooperate with the church, but we can also point to many evils and abuses that have cost lives and greatly damaged the reputation of the church and the gospel. The latter get all the attention in our day, but a balanced, informed theological and historical discussion would be very profitable, especially if carried out by a scholar of Jordan's caliber.