

Old Testament Literature

Joshua: Jericho, Ai, Gibeonites, and Theology of War

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Ted Hildebrandt examines the historical, archaeological, and theological themes within the Book of Joshua. He opens with a demonstration of the interactive "Get Lost in Jerusalem" tool before detailing Israel's crossing of the Jordan River, the conquest of Jericho, the defeat and eventual victory at Ai, and the treaty with the Gibeonites. The discussion highlights key archaeological debates surrounding Jericho's walls and Mount Ebal's altar, contrasting figures like Kathleen Kenyon and Bryant Wood. Finally, Hildebrandt addresses the ethical complexities of ancient Israelite warfare (herem) and explores Christian perspectives on war, including non-resistance and dual citizenship.

Outline

I. Introductory Matters and "Get Lost in Jerusalem" Demo

- A. Course Logistics and Reading Assignments (2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-11, Psalm 51)
- B. Virtual Exploration of Jerusalem
 - 1. Technical access and software navigation
 - 2. Key sites: Area G, Hezekiah's Tunnel, Warren's Shaft, Western Wall (Wilson's Arch)

II. Crossing the Jordan River and Early Memorials

- A. The Crossing Miracle at Flood Stage
 - 1. Jordan River geography and historical damming events (e.g., 1927, 1200 AD)
 - 2. Miracle of timing at Adam
- B. The Twelve Stones Memorial
 - 1. Representation of all twelve tribes standing together as "All Israel"
 - 2. Historiographical significance of the phrase "to this day" (lifetime of Rahab vs. late redaction)

III. Events at Gilgal

- A. Celebration of the Third Passover in Spring (harvest season)
- B. Cessation of Manna and transitioning to eating produce of the land
- C. Mass Circumcision of the Israelites prior to battle

IV. Archaeological Debates Surrounding Jericho

- A. John Garstang (1930s): Discovered Late Bronze walls fallen outward
- B. Dame Kathleen Kenyon (1960s-1970s): Redated walls to Early Bronze Age (time of Abraham), claiming no walls existed in Joshua's era
- C. Bryant Wood (1990s): Re-evaluated Kenyon's published and unpublished data (pottery, cemeteries) to uphold Garstang's Late Bronze dating
- D. Methodological Lessons: Limits and nature of archaeological proof and interpretation

V. The Altar Discovery at Mount Ebal

- A. Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim setting (Shechem valley)
- B. Discovery of a massive uncut stone altar with a ramp (Joshua 8:30)
- C. Academic controversy and differing archaeological interpretations

VI. The Gibeonite Treaty and the Southern Campaign

- A. Gibeonite Deception (old clothes, moldy bread) and Israel's failure to inquire of the Lord
- B. The Southern Coalition (Jerusalem, Hebron, Lachish, etc.) attacks Gibeon
- C. Joshua's Overnight March from Jericho to Michmash/Gibeon (3,300-foot incline)
- D. The Miracle of the Sun Standing Still
 - 1. Textual narrative: Hailstones and solar/lunar stoppage (Book of Jashar citation)
 - 2. Interpretive options: 24-hour solar cessation, stopping/silencing the sun's heat, or John Walton's Babylonian omen text theory
 - 3. The theological significance of divine responsiveness to prayer

VII. Northern Campaign and City of Hazor

- A. Jabin, King of Hazor, and the northern alliance
- B. Battle in the Valley of Har Megiddo (Armageddon)
- C. Defeat of Hazor (250-acre city) and burning of the site

VIII. Problems and Setbacks in Israel's Conquest

- A. The Defeat at Ai
 - 1. Overconfidence and human arrogance following Jericho
 - 2. Failure to consult God
- B. Achan's Sin and Divine Judgment
 - 1. Theft of forbidden plunder (herem—gold and Babylonian garment) from Jericho
 - 2. Corporate personality vs. individual responsibility in ancient culture
 - 3. Practical illustration: The widespread corporate impact of individual sin

IX. Theological and Ethical Dimensions of War (Herem)

- A. Understanding Herem (Devoted to Total Destruction)
 - 1. Divine judgment on 400 years of Amorite iniquity
 - 2. Protection of Israel from Canaanite idolatry and spiritual contamination

3. God's sovereign prerogative over human life and death
4. Historical rarity of total destruction (Jericho, Ai, Hazor)

B. Christian Perspectives on War and Violence

1. Non-resistance position: Service as medics/chaplains, turning the other cheek, loving enemies, kingdom separation
2. Dualism and Just War considerations: Responsibilities of citizenship, protection of the innocent, and defensive necessity