

Carnal Warfare not in God's Plan

By E. J. Waggoner

The Everlasting Covenant, chapter 33

In 1888, E.J. Waggoner and A.T. Jones began presenting a special message of righteousness by faith to the Seventh-day Adventist church. This message was identified as the beginning of the proclamation of the message of *Revelation* 18, which is a message about God's glory (which is His character), and which was to illuminate the world.

In this chapter, Waggoner opens up the truth that God's real purpose was for the Israelites to take the land of Canaan without warfare. This is an advanced view of God's character, which has often been misunderstood. The wars of the Old Testament have been used to justify killing in God's name all through history. It is time for those wrong concepts to be discarded.

THERE was sin in the camp when Israel went up against Ai, and this was the cause of their defeat. The whole people suffered, not simply because of Achan's sin, but because all had sinned.

Habakkuk 2

⁴ Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

Whether they were blinded by "the deceitfulness of sin" (*Hebrews* 3:13), and then became exalted in their minds, or whether their self-exaltation led to their sin, is not material; certain it is that the people had given place to sin, and had become self-confident, which is in itself sin.

Because of sin they suffered defeat; so long as sin was given a place in their hearts, they could not go on with the conquest of the land; and this again proves that the promised inheritance, into which God was leading them, was such as could be possessed only by righteous people—those who had the righteousness of faith.

An Unwarranted Assumption

The men who went up to view the country made the people believe that but few men were needed to capture Ai, because it was a small city. But they had no ground for such an assumption. True, Ai was not nearly as large as Jericho, but numbers had nothing to do with the taking of that city.

Hebrews 11

³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down.

If the Israelites had been only half or even one-tenth as numerous as they were, the result would have been the same. It required the same power to take Ai that it did to take Jericho, namely, the power of God, laid hold of by faith.

When the men said that but few of the people were needed for the capture of Ai, they assumed that it was their military skill that was to secure the land for them. But that was a grievous error. God had promised to give them the land, and it could not be obtained except as a gift. The mightiest army that the world has ever seen, armed with the most approved weapons of war, could not take it; while a few unarmed men, strong in faith and giving glory to God, could have possessed it with ease. The force that takes the kingdom of heaven is not the force of arms.

Defeat Not in God's Plan

Another thing that we learn from the story of Ai is that God did not intend that His people should ever suffer defeat, or that in the occupation of the land a single man should lose his life. In ordinary warfare the loss of thirty-six men in an assault upon a strongly fortified city would not be counted great, whether the assault were successful or not. But in taking possession of the land of Canaan it was a terrible reverse. The promise was,

Joshua 1

³ Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you,

⁵ There shall not any man 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 fail you, nor forsake you.

Yet now they themselves had been obliged to flee, with the loss of men. The influence that the passage of the Jordan and the capture of Jericho would have had to impress and overawe the heathen, was now broken. Trusting to their own strength, the Israelites had lost the power of God's presence, and had demonstrated their own weakness.

The Means of Defense

The fact that it was altogether contrary to God's plan that any of the Israelites should lose their lives in taking possession of the promised land, is further shown by the fact, which may well be noted here, that it was not His design that they should have to fight for the possession of the promised inheritance.

We have already seen that numbers and arms had nothing to do with the taking of Jericho, and that when they depended on their weapons, force that in ordinary warfare would have been amply sufficient was of no avail.

Recall also the wonderful deliverance from Egypt, and the overthrow of the entire army of Pharaoh, without the lifting of a single weapon or the use of any human power, and that God led the people by the longest and most difficult route in order that they might not see war (*Exodus* 13:17-18), and then read the following promise:

Deuteronomy 7

¹⁷ If you shall say in your heart, "These nations are more than I; how can I dispossess them?"

¹⁸ You shall not be afraid of them: but shall well remember what the Lord thy God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt;

¹⁹ The great temptations which your eyes saw, and the signs, and the wonders, and the mighty hand, and the stretched out arm, whereby the Lord your God brought you out: so shall the Lord your God do unto all the people of whom you are afraid.

²⁰ Moreover the Lord your God will send the hornet among them, until they that are left, and hide themselves from you, be destroyed.

²¹ You shall not be affrighted at them: for the Lord your God is among you, a mighty God and terrible.

God to Fight for His People

Just as the Lord did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, so did he promise to do to all the enemies that should set themselves against the progress of the Israelites to the promised land. But the children of Israel did not strike a single blow to effect their deliverance from Egypt and the overthrow of all its armies.

When Moses, forty years before, had attempted to deliver Israel by physical force, he most signally failed, and was obliged to flee in disgrace. It was only when he knew the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation, that he was able to lead the people forth without any fear of the wrath of the king.

This is conclusive proof that God did not design that they should fight for the possession of the land; and if they did not fight, of course they could not lose any of their number in battle. Read further as to the manner in which God proposed to give them the land:

Exodus 23

²⁷ I will send my fear before you, and will destroy all the people to whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs unto you.

²⁸ And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before you.

²⁹ I will not drive them out from before you in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against you.

³⁰ By little and little I will drive them out from before you, until you be increased, and inherit the land.

God's Care for His Defenseless People

When Jacob, years before, sojourned in the same land, with his family, the

Genesis 35

⁵ ...terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.

Psalm 105

¹² When they were but a few men in number; yes, very few, and strangers in it.

¹³ When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people;

¹⁴ He suffered no man to do them wrong: yes, he reproved kings for their sakes;

¹⁵ Saying, "Touch not my anointed, and do my prophets no harm."

That same power was to bring them into the land, and speedily give them an eternal inheritance in it, for afterward, the Lord, bewailing their unfaithfulness, said:

Psalm 81

¹³ Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!

¹⁴ I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries.

¹⁵ The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever.

Why the Israelites Fought

"But the children of Israel did fight throughout all their natural existence, and under God's direction, too,"

—it will be urged. That is very true, but it does not at all prove that it was God's purpose that they should fight. We must not forget that...

2 Corinthians 3

¹⁴ ...their minds were blinded...

—by unbelief, so that they could not perceive the purpose of God for them. They did not grasp the spiritual realities of the kingdom of God, but were content with shadows instead; and the same God who bore with their hardness of heart in the beginning, and strove to teach them by shadows, when they would not have the substance, still remained with them, compassionately considerate of their infirmities.

God himself suffered them, because of the hardness of their hearts, to have a plurality of wives, and even laid down rules regulating polygamy, in order to diminish as far as possible the resulting evils, but that does not prove that He designed it for them. We well know that...

Matthew 19

⁸ ...from the beginning it was not so.

So when Jesus forbade His followers to fight in any cause whatever, He introduced nothing new, any more than when He taught that a man should have but one wife, and should cleave to her as long as he lived. He was simply enunciating first principles—preaching a thorough reformation.

Executing the Judgment Written

One thing, however, which should never be lost sight of by people who are disposed to cite God's commands to the Israelites as sanctioning wars either of defense or conquest, is the fact that God never told them to destroy any whose cup of iniquity was not filled to the full, and who had not irrevocably rejected the way of righteousness.

In the end of this world, when the time comes that the saints possess the kingdom, judgment will be given to the saints of the Most High (*Daniel 7:22*), and the saints will judge not only the world, but also angels. They will also, as joint-heirs with Christ, have a share in the execution of the judgment, for we read:

Psalm 149

⁵ Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds.

⁶ Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand;

⁷ To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people;

⁸ To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron;

⁹ To execute upon them the judgment written: this honor have all his saints.

Since Christ associates His people with himself in the kingdom, making them all kings and priests, it is no more incongruous for His saints, in connection with Him, and by His direct authority, to execute just judgment upon the incorrigibly wicked, than it is for Him to do it.

And so, when we remember that the deliverance from Egypt was the beginning of the end, and that God was then purposing to give His people the very same kingdom which He now promises to us, and to which Christ will call the blessed when He comes, we can well understand that a righteous people might then, as well as in the future, be the agents of God's justice.

But that would not be a war of conquest, even for the possession of the promised land, but the execution of judgment. But it must not be forgotten that God himself personally gives directions when such judgment is to be executed, and does not leave men to guess at His will in such a case. Moreover, only those who are themselves without sin can execute judgment upon sinners. Let him that is without sin, cast the first stone.

War Not a Success

Yet one more thing must be remembered in connection with this question of fighting and the possession of the land of Canaan, the promised inheritance, and that is that the children of Israel did not get it after all, with all their fighting. The same promise that was given them, remains for us:

Hebrews 4

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day,

...in which to seek and find it. The reason why they did not get it, was their unbelief, and that was why they fought. If they had believed the Lord, they would have allowed Him to clear the land of its totally depraved inhabitants, in the way that He proposed.

They in the meantime would not have been idle, but would have performed the work of faith which God set them: that of being a missionary people.