

In recent years, an entirely new group has emerged in the religious category: the NONES. No, these are not your female catholic devotees, but rather people who no longer identify with any religious belief. They are not religious in any sense – not atheistic nor nominal, but rather they identify with no religious group at all. In 1972, just 5% of Americans claimed no religion on the General Social Survey, but in 2018, that number rose to almost 24%, making them as large as evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics. Every indication is that this group will become the largest religious group in the US in the next decade.

While some people might confuse this group with atheists or agnostics, the NONES do not identify with these groups either. Rather, they are apathetic to religion. For many in this group, religion breeds violence and is intolerant.

The issue of violence is one that we have to address when we go through the Story of Everything. When we come to the book of Joshua, God commands his people to take the land by force, and for many people these chapters remind them of the holy wars of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. How do we understand these chapters where God commands his people to take the land and devote everything to destruction? How can we make sense of these battles?

1. Trust your Warrior God (5:13-6:5)

The way that we can make sense of these battles is to see that God fights for us. As Joshua stands outside of Jericho, he must have wondered how they would conquer this thickly walled city. While the city was only 7 acres in size, its walls and closed gates would have prevented Israel from attacking it.

But as Joshua stands outside the city, a man with a drawn sword is there – the same figure who had appeared to Balaam and protected Israel from enemies. Joshua asks him if he is for or against Israel, but he doesn't answer; instead he tells Joshua that he has come.

And in that moment, when Joshua realized that this man was a superior commander, he bows down to worship. Just as Moses had been commissioned by the Lord by taking off his sandals because he was on holy ground, now Moses' successor experiences the same commissioning.

But how will they take Jericho when the city looks impossible to take? Simple: by faith. Walk around the city one time for six days. Take the ark of God's presence and let God lead the way. On the seventh day, walk around 7 times, and on the seventh time, seven priests will each blow a trumpet; the people are to shout, and the walls will come down.

God has always been the one who fights the battles for his people. God had told Moses to watch and see the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt because the Lord would fight for his people. And God has always been the one who fights for his people. His people

bear his name. He defends the honour and glory of his name. He will not let his people be put to shame forever – he will be their God who fights their battles.

## 2. Obey your Lord (6:6-16)

Trusting the Lord doesn't mean just thinking something in your head, but having those thoughts affect your heart. So Joshua gives the people commands: "Go forward. March." And by faith, the people obey what God had commanded them through Joshua. And just as God had said, on the seventh day at the seventh trip around with the trumpets of the Lord resounding, with the shout of the people of God, the walls came crashing down.

Just because the Lord fights for you doesn't mean that you aren't responsible to obey. The sovereign Lord has called you to be responsible, and being responsible means obeying him. And just because we don't understand the ways of the Lord doesn't mean we neglect what he has said.

We may not even understand the conquest of the land of Canaan, but trusting him and obeying him not only brings city walls down, it brings understanding. We cannot comprehend God's ways apart from trusting and obeying.

## 3. Beware his wrath (6:17-21)

As the people see the walls come down, the people do what the Lord had commanded. Just like the first of the harvest was to be given to the Lord, so the firstfruits of this conquest were to be dedicated to God.

But what are we to make of everything being devoted to destruction (v. 17)? Some, like atheist Richard Dawkins, claims that these acts are ethnic cleansing, bloodthirsty massacres carried out with xenophobic relish, acts that are 'morally indistinguishable from Hitler's invasion of Poland, or Saddam Hussein's massacres of the Kurds and the Marsh Arabs' (Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 247).

Is God a moral monster? These are tough questions, and to respond to them, we may not find the answers satisfying to us. We have to go back to God's promises to Abraham that he would receive this land, but that it when they would come to take their inheritance, the sins of the Amorites would have increased so much that they would have hardened their hearts to God and their wickedness would be great (Gen. 15:16). Because of the great sexual perversion of the people in the land (Lev. 18:24-25), things so grotesque that we cannot speak of them publicly, along with their love of demonic magic and child sacrifice (Deut. 18:9-13), God would use Israel to bring his punishment upon this evil.

But Israel was not to have a holier-than-thou attitude, thinking that they deserved this land. God had told them that 'it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you' (Deut. 9:4-5). God was bringing his wrath upon the inhabitants of the land through Israel.

God will not tolerate evil forever. He will bring his just punishment upon sin. Perverted sexual practices, the killing of children in or out of the womb are the practices of a society that have turned from God. God is patient – he gives the inhabitants of the land 400 years to repent. And this reminds us that the wrath of God against sin is a terrible thing.

4. See his salvation (6:22-25)

But if we get the idea that Israel is just pro-Israel and that God is xenophobic, we have to look no further than Rahab. Here is the prostitute of Jericho. And when the Israelite spies had come into Jericho to check out the land, when the people came to look for these spies, she hid them as an act of faith. Seeing and experiencing the perversion of the land, Rahab had switched her allegiances from the gods of the Canaanites to the God of Israel. And in response to her faith, Rahab and her family were brought out safely and lived with Israel the rest of her days.

God's wrath has a limit – and it is limited by his mercy. Those who repent and turn to him, trusting him will find his salvation, regardless of what you've done in the past. Since a prostitute from a perverted people can be saved, what is clear is that God does not have a xenophobic people, but a people who are under the rule of his law and mercy. And all of these things are intended to help us...

5. See the Glory of Christ

In an article for the Gospel Coalition, Justin Taylor summarizes how we can understand this idea of being 'devoted to destruction. I'm merely summarizing his main points and supplementing it with a few of my own:

1. The Lord is the maker and ruler over all, therefore he is free to do as he wishes.
2. The Lord is righteous and just in all of his ways (Deut. 32:4)
3. Everyone deserves God's justice, no one deserves mercy
4. The Canaanites were enemies of God and deserved his justice
  - a. Israel did not inherit the land because they were righteous, but because the Canaanites were wicked (Deut. 9:5)
  - b. If Israel did not obey God's law, the land would vomit them out (Lev. 18:26-28; Deut. 28:25-68)
5. This is not ethnic cleansing, for those who repent find mercy (Josh. 2:9-10; Josh. 11:19); ethnic cleansing is destruction based on ethnicity. This was destruction based on religious treason against a holy God
6. The Canaanites were removed after God's incredible patience with these people who heard the call to repent but refused, for God calls all people to follow him and those who rebel will face his justice.



THE STORY OF  
*Everything*  
LUKE 24:27

7. Being devoted to destruction is a picture of God's final judgment (Acts 10:42; 1 Pe. 4:5); in some way the saints will judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2).

While these points don't answer every question, what it reminds us is that the Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. But there will be a day, as Revelation describes, that the seven trumpets of the Lord will again resound, and God's justice against evil will be unfurled. Evil will be dealt with once and for all. He will not let evil win, nor will he let his earth be destroyed.

But one day, the when the seventh trumpet is blown, his people will let out a loud shout from heaven and say, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." And there will be the song of worship from heaven (READ Rev. 11:17-18)

For now, we may see evil flourishing. We may be confused about how evil can carry on so long. We may not like the way the world is going. But when we trust in God, we will believe that he fights for us, that his kingdom shall endure, and that the conquest of the world will one day come. And all who trust in our Lord and his Christ will know the truth that the apostle John said: "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world – even our faith" (1 Jn. 5: 4).

So flee from the wrath of God. Trust his Christ. For his conquest of the world will happen and he will bring everyone who has repented of sin and trusted in his Son – regardless of what you've done or who you are – into the land of promise to reign with him forever!