



ARM UP

I began this series by saying, “We are engaged in a war.” And we are – with worldviews that are opposed to the kingdom of God. So, let’s play a game of spot the ism ...

- All roads lead to God (pluralism).
- All roads might lead to God (post-modernism).
- Who cares if a road does lead to God? (secularism).
- No roads lead to God (atheism).
- I don’t care where *your* road leads (individualism).
- My road leads to God, and death if you disagree (extremism).

It’s true to say if we’re going to engage the world with the gospel, we need to understand the ism we’re in a schism with. But there’s something even more important ...

Joshua 10:29-11:23

The description of these 3 campaigns is a tough read, but what sounds like genocide almost certainly wasn’t.

For one thing, these cities were not population-centres but military bases / religious shrines, where child sacrifice and temple prostitution were commonplace. Second, the use of ‘annihilation’ language was a common

euphemism for total victory in the ancient world. Third, the Bible seems to offer 2 versions of what became of the Canaanites: 1) that they were destroyed; 2) that they were ejected from the land. Which is it? Probably a bit of both. Add to that the fact that some became a part of Israel, and you realise the picture is a bit more complicated than it seems.

But the most important thing to note is this was more than just a 'physical' war: it was a spiritual one – one we are still engaged in. This is what Paul was talking about when he says what he says, in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. What are these 'weapons' Paul refers to? They're the same weapons the Israelites were equipped with. Not swords and spears and axes (the Israelites could have gone into battle without those things and still won, hence the command to hamstring the enemy's horses, i.e. victory is achieved out of reliance on God).

No, in the Bible the weapons that really count are these:

Weapon #1: Prayer. Look back on this book and you'll notice: every successful military engagement begins with prayer. And the only defeat (Ai) is fought without it.

Now we can nod along and say, "Yes, prayer is very, very important." But do we really mean that? There are spiritual strongholds in people's lives, in our community: the 'isms' I mentioned earlier. And the only thing that'll bring down those strongholds is God, which means we've got to pray – on our own, yes, and with others. Why do you think Jesus said, "This one can come out only with prayer (and fasting)"? Why do you think the major turning points in the book of Acts are triggered by prayer?

Yes, it's certainly our job to share the gospel. But there are some things only the Spirit of God can do: changing people's circumstances, softening people's hearts, speaking into people's lives – in a way that we can't.

We can throw whatever we like at the society around us, but without prayer, it is almost certainly pointless.

Weapon #2: Scripture. The Israelites took God's words seriously – and ran with them (vs15). That demands:

- That they knew them.
- That they believed them.
- That they obeyed them.

What about us?

Today, we belong to a generation that has access to more literature than any other, and that includes versions of the Bible. And yet, we are probably the least literate in terms of our knowledge of scripture than any generation since the Reformation – partly because we want easy reads, and partly because there's so much competition out there: things to watch / listen to / play.

So why does it matter? Because victory means doing things 'by the book' (literally); but also, if we're going to share His story with those around us,

we've got to know it well, and live it well. Could you explain it to someone? Could you answer their questions? Could you do it now?

If you could, praise God! If you couldn't, you need to know it better. So ... get reading!

Weapon #3: Each other. In the ancient world, a warrior was equipped with more than just a sword in one hand, a shield in the other, and if he was lucky, a helmet on his head. He was also equipped with the rest of his unit – and they would fight side-by-side, watching each other's backs as well as defending themselves.

That is why church matters. And by that, I don't just mean turning up to a church service occasionally. I mean partnership – working together to further the Kingdom. The Israelites were more united in the days of Joshua than at any other time in their history – and it showed. That's why Jesus prayed these words on the night before His crucifixion: "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me." Partly because unity says something about God (how many gods do we worship?), but also because ... we need each other!

All of which means our view of church needs to change. Some people see church like a cinema: I've bought my ticket, taken my seat, now entertain me! Others see church like a restaurant: I've read the menu, placed my order, now feed me! The Bible, however, uses very different analogies: a family, a city, a body, an army, where people work together for the good of the whole.

Because ultimately, we get the church we are. Don't forget.

Do Not Be Afraid

So those are the weapons that God has made available. Now take a look at vs21-22 ...

The *Anakim* were the enemy Israel had feared most 40 years before: the people were big, their armies were big, their cities were big (Numbers 14). And yet here they are defeated ... in 2 verses. Just 2 verses!

What's the point? That the enemies of God may seem daunting to *us*, but not to Him. Victory is certain. As Jesus Himself put it, in Matthew 16:18, "I will build My church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

But to play a part in that, we need prayer, scripture and each other. So, let's make the most of the weapons God has given us.

And learn to use those weapons, well.