

Last year we looked at a number of incidents in the life of Joshua. The story of the fall of Jericho begins at the end of Joshua 5 where we read of an extraordinary encounter that Joshua had. **Josh 5:13-15** Jesus is the Commander of the Army of the Lord. By the time of Samuel we find a new name of God being used **The Lord of Hosts**. Hosts = armies, warfare. i.e Lord of a great Army, Lord of warfare! It is the concept of God as a warrior God, a military God. After Sam 1:3 *Lord of Hosts* is used a further 228 times in the OT. When men came to David to support his God ordained military coup we read these words, "Day after day men came to help David, until he had a great army, like the army of God." 1 Chron 12:22

Then in 2 Kings 6:13ff we read the account of Elisha's servant whose eyes were opened to see the chariots of God and their horses.

So how do we feel in 2009 with the idea of God as a warring military commander? In the cultures of those days every King or Ruler was a military leader whose responsibility it was to protect and defend the people over whom he ruled. If God is King of Kings, then he has the supreme responsibility to protect and defend his subjects, but also to enlist from amongst his subjects men of valour to fight in his army. The Psalms are full of such ideas. But how are we to relate to this concept in our 21st C culture?

Wars & Rumours of Wars

This world has hardly ever known any period of time where there have not been wars raging in some part of the globe or another. Warfare has not gone away, and according to Jesus there will be wars and rumours of wars right up until he comes back. The return of Christ itself is full of military imagery. So while human idealism would love to see an end of war, it continues in even more horrific forms than ever before and will do so until the very end. So the concept of God being the Lord of Hosts is just as relevant today as it ever was.

Human wars are based on human greed, pride and a desire for conquest and control. James speaks about this in his letter (chap 4). In many wars we see a defending side, seeking to resist the conquest of a predatory foe.

So when Britain went to war with Germany it was a defensive war, not only seeking to protect our own lands from Nazi invasion but also to defend and liberate other people who had already been occupied by the invading Germans. One of the most notable days in human history was D-Day on June 6th 1944 when the allies invaded Normandy in order to drive back the Germans and liberate the French. It was a notable turning point in the second world war.

More recently there have been wars of liberation such as the Falklands war and the latest wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but although we see a noble principle of liberation it has all been muddied with other motives and partisan interests.

Setting Captives Free

What kind of warfare does God engage in? Well at this stage I don't want to focus on what we often call 'spiritual warfare' - setting individuals free from demonic strongholds. I want us rather to consider the broader image of **spiritual liberation**. God is about setting captives or prisoners free. (Luke 4:18-21) What prisoners would they be? Prisoners of war, those who have been taken captive by the invading forces, (e.g. Daniel & Babylon) then re-educated until they lack neither the strength, vision or willpower to resist they are eventually integrated into the Reich, the dominion of darkness as scripture call it.

Colossians 1:13. Satan's Reich stands in stark contrast with the Kingdom of the Son he loves.

- Rescued/delivered = liberated.
 - The dominion, domain, jurisdiction - it primarily means authority in this case the unrestrained freedom of Satan to command whatever he desires. He is a dictator, who controls the whole world. Everything in this world is part of his evil empire, his original Reich.
 - Transferred - relocated into the Kingdom of the Son of his love. What a contrast between a Kingdom ruled over by a kind, caring and righteous King who is wholly motivated by his Father's love and the malign and deceptive authority that Satan exercises in the domain of darkness!
- Note that God does not depose the dictator and free the land so we can live in peace under his rule. No he relocates us - people from every tribe and tongue - and makes us all citizens of a new realm - the Kingdom of Love.

From this new location we become part of his rescue mission. We are his soldiers, his army with a great commission from the commander in chief to liberate others who are blinded by the darkness, to get them out of there into the Lord's Kingdom. This is not a matter of age, sex, fitness. Unlike humans armies, the army of God is made up people of all ages and strength. An elderly lady at home can wage warfare in prayer with immense power. Let us recognise that people will never be rescued unless we go into battle – We might “pray the Lord of the battle field to thrust out soldiers into the battle.” “Here I am send me!” But what is involved? How do we get trained up to be the Lord's Army?

There are a number of military references in the NT - fight the good fight (warfare not boxing) soldiers who don't get entangled in civilian affairs, put on the whole armour of God, the weapons of our warfare which can tear down strongholds, being more than conquerors. There are also some brilliant OT stories that illustrate aspects of winning spiritual victories. David and Goliath, The battle is the Lord's in 2 Chron 20. We will be looking at various aspects of this over coming weeks.

Next week we have an open meeting. This is meant to be just as instructive and to teach us the word of God as a Sunday when we have a monologue style preach. So we will be giving some focus scriptures before these meetings. Please pray over these verses, see if God give you a prophetic word, a picture, a short teaching, a relevant word of testimony, or any other kind of contribution like a mime or song that will enable us to go away and say “God has said.” So come prayerful, prepared, ready to speak the word and hear the word next Sunday. Will we take hold of that for which Christ took hold of us? This is not a year to sit back in our seats as a spectator but to be a participator in **God's liberation mission.**