

The War Behind All Wars



SABBATH—OCTOBER 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Joshua 5:13–15; 2 Kings 6:8–17; Nehemiah 9:6; Isaiah 37:16; Revelation 12:7–9; Isaiah 14:12–14; Ezekiel 28:11–19; Daniel 10:12–14; Exodus 2:23–25; Exodus 14:13, 14, 25; Exodus 17:7–13; Joshua 6:15–20.

MEMORY VERSE: “That had never happened before, and it has never happened again. That was the day the LORD obeyed a man. The LORD really was fighting for Israel!” (Joshua 10:14, ERV).

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA is filled with many wars. God commanded His people to fight these wars. God helped His people to win. We see this idea all through the book of Joshua (Joshua 10:11). God talks about fighting for Israel (Joshua 6:2; Joshua 8:1). Joshua also says that God will help Israel fight and win (Joshua 4:23, 24; Joshua 8:7). Rahab says the same thing (Joshua 2:10). So do the spies (Joshua 2:24) and God's people (Joshua 24:18). God also says that He starts these wars.

For sure, God's announcement may fill us with surprise. If God is love, why does He fight? Why did His people fight so many wars during Old Testament times? (Read Exodus 34:6; Psalm 86:15; Psalm 103:8; Psalm 108:4.)

This week and next, we will answer the difficult question about the wars that God commanded Israel to fight. Why did God command wars in the book of Joshua and elsewhere?



Joshua says that God will help Israel fight and win (Joshua 4:23, 24; Joshua 8:7).

COMMANDER OF THE LORD'S ARMY (Joshua 5:13–15)

Read Joshua 5:13–15. What does this verse say happened before Israel started to fight for the Promised Land?

Israel just crossed the Jordan River. The people now stand on the enemy's land. The city of Jericho lies in front of them. Its gates are closed (Joshua 6:1). The Israelites don't have a battle plan. Worse, they have only stone throwers, spears, and arrows to fight with.

Then a stranger comes to visit Joshua. Joshua asks this man who he is. The visitor's answer shows that He is not anyone Joshua thinks He is. In other words, the important question is not if He is on Joshua's side. But is Joshua on His side?

Compare Joshua 5:14, 15 with 2 Kings 6:8–17; Nehemiah 9:6; and Isaiah 37:16. What do these verses tell us about who the Commander of the Lord's army is?

The only time in the Bible that we read about the "Commander of the LORD's army" (NKJV) is right here. We won't find these words anywhere else in the Bible. Together, the words "Commander" and "army" always mean a military leader. The word "army" in the Bible can mean soldiers, angels, or the sun, moon, and stars.

Jesus appears to Joshua as a Friend and Helper. Jesus is the true Captain of Israel's army. More than all these things, Jesus is the Commander of the unseen army of angels. These angels help in the fight that is the biggest fight of all: the worldwide war between good and evil. Joshua's answer shows that he understands that the Commander is the Lord God. Joshua falls down in front of Him to show his respect and to worship Him (Joshua 5:14; Genesis 17:3; 2 Samuel 9:6; 2 Chronicles 20:18). Joshua is ready to follow the Lord's battle plan. Their fight for the Promised Land is part of a bigger war that includes God Himself and heaven's army.

The Commander of heaven's army is at work. He works hard to protect His people on earth. What hope should this Bible truth give us?



Joshua falls down in front of Jesus to show his respect and to worship Him (Joshua 5:14; Genesis 17:3; 2 Samuel 9:6; 2 Chronicles 20:18).

WAR IN HEAVEN (Revelation 12:7–9)

Joshua understood that the battle was part of a bigger fight. The name of this fight is the worldwide war between God and Satan. What do we know about this war? Read Revelation 12:7–9; Isaiah 14:12–14; Ezekiel 28:11–19; and Daniel 10:12–14.



The worldwide war between God and Satan, good and evil, was behind the wars that Joshua and Israel fought, too.

God filled heaven and many planets in outer space with people. God gave these people and us free will. Because we are all free to choose, we are free to love. We can choose to serve God. Or we can fight against Him. Lucifer chose to fight against God. Lucifer was the most powerful of the angels. Many angels chose to join Lucifer in his war.

Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 talk about this war. (Some Bible thinkers say that these chapters talk only about the king of Babylon and a leader in Tyre. But there are clear hints that these chapters in Isaiah and Ezekiel talk about something more.) The Bible says that the king of Babylon wanted to put his throne above God's throne (Isaiah 14:12, 13). The Bible also says that the king of Tyre lived in Eden. He was as an angel on God's holy mountain (Ezekiel 28:12–15). None of these things are true about the real kings of Babylon and Tyre. But they are true about Lucifer.

The real kings of Babylon and Tyre weren't perfect. But Lucifer was perfect before he sinned. For sure, the kings of Babylon and Tyre in the verses are symbols of something much more. So, what are those symbols talking about? Isaiah is really telling us a picture story. He uses the king of Babylon as a symbol for fighting against God and pride. In the same way, Ezekiel also uses symbols. Ezekiel tells us that the real prince of Tyre (Ezekiel 28:2) is not the same as the king of Tyre (Ezekiel 28:11, 12). The prince is a leader on this earth. He is a symbol for the king who is invisible to human eyes. This king lived in heaven before he was thrown out. This king says that he is the leader of the whole earth.

According to Daniel 10:12–14, Satan and his angels try all the time to stop God's work on this earth. This worldwide war is going on behind everything that we see happening around us. The worldwide war between God and Satan, good and evil, was behind the wars that Joshua and Israel fought, too. So, Israel's wars were part of this worldwide war.

How do we see this worldwide war going on around us?

THE LORD IS A WARRIOR (Exodus 2:23–25)

What does it mean that God is a warrior? Read Exodus 2:23–25; Exodus 12:12, 13; and Exodus 15:3–11 for the answer.

During their long stay in Egypt, the Israelites forgot about God. They started to mix false religious ideas with true worship (compare with Exodus 32:1–4). The Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves. So, the Israelites cried to God to save them (Exodus 2:23–25). At the right time, the Lord came to save them.

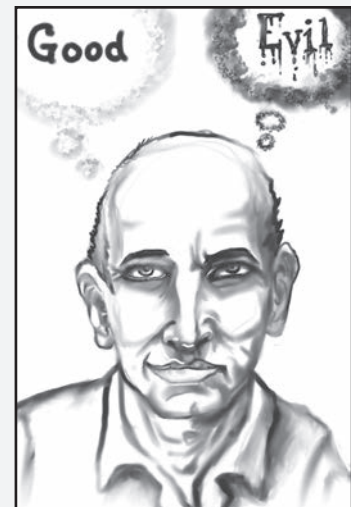
But the fight in Exodus 1–12 was more than a war between Moses and Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. In the Near East, people believed that fights between people groups were really fights between their gods. Exodus 12:12 announces that the Lord judged both Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt. The gods of Egypt were really powerful demons (Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17). These demons were the real power behind the throne of Egypt. They were the reason the laws weren't fair.

God is at war with sin. God won't allow sin or the worldwide war between good and evil to happen forever (Psalm 24:8; Revelation 19:11; Revelation 20:1–4, 14). God will destroy all the evil angels and sinners who love to break His law. This promise helps us to understand the wars in the Bible better. Israel's wars were part of the bigger worldwide war between good and evil. This war led to the Cross. The war will end when God judges all things. Then we will see that God was fair and loving in everything that happened in human history.

The worldwide war between God and Satan also helps us better understand why God destroyed the Canaanites. God is at war with evil. Satan lied about God. God will show everyone in heaven and on earth that Satan's words are lies (Romans 3:4; Revelation 15:3).

So, we must choose: God's side or the side of evil. When we understand these ideas, we will understand better why God destroyed the Canaanites. Their death shows us the final work God will do as Judge of everyone on earth.

In the worldwide war between God and Satan, there are only two sides. How do you know which side you are really on?



**So, we must choose:
God's side or
the side of evil.**

THE LORD WILL FIGHT FOR YOU (Exodus 14:13, 14, 25)

What was God's first plan for the Israelites in war? Read Exodus 14:13, 14, 25 for the answer.

When the Israelites were in trouble, Moses said, “ ‘Don't be afraid! Don't run away! Stand where you are and watch the LORD save you today. You will never see these Egyptians again. You will not have to do anything but stay calm. The LORD will do the fighting for you' ” (Exodus 14:13, 14, ERV). The Bible says that the Egyptians understood that God fought for His people: “The Egyptians shouted, ‘Let's get out of here! The LORD is fighting against us. He is fighting for the Israelites' ” (Exodus 14:25, ERV).

What happened at the Red Sea shows us God's plan for how God would help Israel. God will fight the battle. While God fights for Israel, Israel must not fight (Exodus 14:14). God is the warrior. He is in control of the fight. God makes the battle plan. He decides how and when He will fight to protect His people. God is in charge of the battle. If the Lord doesn't fight for Israel, they will have no chance of success.

History shows us that whenever the Israelites trusted in God, they did not need to fight (read 2 Kings 19; 2 Chronicles 32; Isaiah 37).

In God's perfect plan, Israel never needed to fight their own battles. God showed His people that they didn't need to use a weapon against the Egyptians in the desert. God fought the battle for Israel. In the same way, the Israelites didn't need to fight the Canaanites to win the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 7:17–19). But the Israelites didn't trust God enough to let Him fight for them. So, God allowed them to fight in the war against the Canaanites.

“The Israelites complained against the Lord. So, the Lord allowed their enemies to make war with them.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, page 134, adapted. What happens today when we complain against the Lord?



History shows us that whenever Israel trusted in God, they did not need to fight (read 2 Kings 19; 2 Chronicles 32; Isaiah 37).

THE SECOND-BEST CHOICE (Exodus 17:7–13)

Read Exodus 17:7–13 and Joshua 6:15–20. How are these two war stories the same? How are they different?

In Exodus 17, we read about the first time Israel fought after leaving Egypt. The Israelites fought against the Amalekites. A few weeks earlier, Israel saw God's mighty power when He judged the Egyptians. Then God helped the Israelites escape Egypt. We also saw that God's first plan for the Israelites didn't include their needing to fight (Exodus 23:28; Exodus 33:2). But shortly after God led the Israelites from Egypt, they started to complain on the way to the Promised Land (Exodus 17:3). The Israelites wondered if God was even with them. At this moment, the Amalekites came to fight against Israel. This fight didn't happen because of bad luck. God allowed the Amalekites to attack the Israelites so that they would learn to trust Him again.

God meets His people where they are. God is always inviting His people to come back to Him and His perfect plan for their lives. We must trust in Him. That's why God waited 40 years before He gave His people the rules about war. The people doubted God. So, they wandered in the desert for 40 years. Now the 40 years are over. The Israelites are ready to enter the Promised Land. New fights need new war plans. That was the time when God commanded the Israelites to completely destroy the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 20:16–18).

Now Israel must fight against their enemies. God used war as a test. The test showed the Israelites what was in their hearts. Would they be loyal to God and trust in Him? God didn't give up on His people. He allowed them to see His power. But before Israel went to war, they first needed to show God that they totally depended on Him.

In Joshua 24:11, we read that the Canaanites fought against the Israelites. God caused the walls of Jericho to come down. But the Israelites also had a part to do. They went with the Lord into battle. They stood against the stubborn people of the city who refused to serve God.

Israel's wars became a way of learning to trust in God's help completely. At the same time, the Israelites always knew that God decided if they won or lost (Joshua 7:12, 13; Joshua 10:8). The only way the Israelites could win a war was with faith in the promises of God. The choice to trust Him was their own.



God caused the walls of Jericho to come down.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Fall of Jericho,” pages 487–493, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

When Satan and his angels fought against God, God had a choice. God could choose to give up the leadership of heaven to an evil angel. Or God could continue to be who He was. He was the holy, loving Father of everything that lived. The Bible shows us that God chose to be who He was. So, His choice meant that Satan went to war against Him.

Today, Satan and his army of evil angels and people continue to fight against God. Long ago, the Lord chose to enter this fight to save sinners from sin and Satan. In Old Testament times, the Lord came to help His people. The Lord is a mighty warrior. This picture of God helps us understand that He will fight for us in the end times. God finally will end the worldwide war between good and evil (Revelation 20:8–10). Israel’s wars in Old Testament times are a picture of this worldwide war. Israel’s wars also give us hope that God will judge in favor of His people.

“God chose the time when His people should enter into the Promised Land. But the people didn’t trust in the Lord. So, God removed His offer to His people to let them enter at that time. . . . God didn’t want His people to fight to win the land. He wanted them to obey His commands. When they were obedient, He would reward their obedience. Then He would give them the Promised Land as a gift.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 392, adapted.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How does the worldwide war between good and evil help you understand why God commanded Israel to go to war?
- ② Talk about the question at the end of Monday’s study. How do we know that the worldwide war is happening around us? What is our part in this war? How can we do what God asks of us in this fight?
- ③ What does it mean to “stand still” and wait for God to fight for us in our spiritual life?
- ④ Many times when we disagree about things in the church, we want to see who is on our side. How should Joshua 5:13–15 change our hearts?

“WHAT DO YOU WANT?”

A Bible worker and his local partner visited a non-Christian neighborhood to sell Bible books. The neighborhood was in a big city in southern Asia. The Bible workers saw that the people who lived there were very religious because of the type of clothing they wore. Women wore long scarves or head coverings. Men had long beards. Some people had dark spots on their skin above their eyes. The spots came from bowing their faces to the floor during long prayers.

At one house a man with an angry face came to the front gate. He didn't open the gate. In a mean voice, the man asked the Bible workers, “What do you want?”

David, one of the Bible workers, said, “We are selling books in your community. Do you want to look at the books?”

The man said very angrily, “I'll be back in just a minute.” Then he left.

The Bible worker's partner, Maria, was afraid. She said, “Let's pray. That man looks scary.”

David said, “Maybe he's just hungry.” At that time of year, non-Christian religious men in that county didn't eat any food during the day for a whole month.

Then the man came back. He said, “Why don't you come in?”

Inside the house, he said, “What do you want?”

David pulled some health books from his bag.

The man looked interested. He said, “My wife is a health worker. She will be very interested in those books.” The man called his wife to come and look at the books on health.

As the man and his wife looked at the books, the man said, “Wow! These books are really good. The information looks helpful.” Then the man asked, “Who do you work for?”

David said, “We are Seventh-day Adventists.”

The man stood up and walked away. Then he came back and sat down. He stared at the visitors. No one said anything.

Then the man's wife broke the silence. She said, “You know, I have Adventist patients. They are very good people. But I don't really know much about them.”

Her husband started to walk back and forth. He appeared to be upset. Then he sat down again.

His wife asked, “What other books do you have?”

David opened his bag and pulled out *The Great Controversy*. He said, “This book is all about love, forgiveness, and peace.” The wife was happy to look at it. She asked, “What are your religious beliefs?” When the woman said this, her husband stood up and walked over to where they stood. The man pulled out his cell phone and started to record their conversation!

Read the rest of this story next week.

INSIDE
Story
by LAURIE DENSKI-SNYMAN



In a mean voice, the man asked the Bible workers, “What do you want?”