

Small Group Study Notes: Joshua



Background and Health Warning:

Joshua is a story of warfare, conquest and God's people finally coming into the inheritance that they were promised. After 430 years in Egypt, mainly in slavery and 40 years wandering in the desert, they were finally allowed to enter the land promised to their ancestors. (Moses dies in 1406BC [although some date this to 1239BC] see NIV study bible for more).

So, these promises were now more than 600 years old. Abraham (2166BC – 1990 BC) was a nomad who God had chosen to reveal himself to, and who had shown great faith when God made promises to him. You can read his story in Genesis 12 onwards. God promised Abraham that his ancestors would inherit the promises (covenant) that He had made with this man of faith, (Gen 15:13, 16, 18; 17:8), and this included land.

You may have had a chance to watch Nicola talk on our Big Question Sunday about Violence in the Old Testament, and in particular, about the 'ban' or divinely sanctioned war. It is an excellent and sensitive talk which you may want to refer back to again and again as you read through Joshua. It is often useful to have a Study Bible with you when reading difficult bits of the New and Old Testaments. Here is an extract from the NIV Study Bible, which is well worth buying:

Many readers of Joshua are deeply troubled by the role that warfare plays in Joshua's account of God's dealings with his people. Not a few relieve their ethical scruples by describing the author's perspective as pre-Christian (and sub-Christian) stage of moral development, that the Christian, in the light of Christ's teaching, must repudiate and transcend.

It must be remembered however that the book of Joshua does not address itself to the abstract ethical question of war as a means for gaining human ends. It can only be understood in the context of the history of redemption unfolding in the first five books of Scripture, with its interplay of divine grace and judgement. Of that story it is a direct continuation.

Joshua is not an epic story of Israel's heroic generation or the story of Israel's conquest of Canaan with the aid of her national deity. It is rather the story of how God, to whom the whole earth belongs, at one stage in the history of redemption reconquered a portion of the earth from the powers of this world that had claimed it for themselves, defending their claims by force of arms and reliance on false (demonic) gods.

NIV Study Bible p.308 (NIV study Bible: new £26.07 / used £13.41 on AbeBooks.co.uk)

Week One: **Joshua 1: 1-18**

Background: Joshua, Moses and the task ahead...

In Deuteronomy 1 we find out that Joshua has been Moses's anointed successor for the whole forty years that the Israelites have been wandering in the desert. He is his right-hand man for that whole time.

As he nears the end of his life in Deuteronomy 31 Moses writes down all the law for the people and tells them all to be 'strong and courageous...do not be terrified or afraid because the Lord your God is with you...' (31:6)

Moses then tells Joshua the same thing, (31.7-8) and God speaks that same charge direct to Joshua later in the chapter (31:23) 'Be strong and courageous...for I will be with you'

The reason for being courageous is the task ahead: Getting an entire nation across a river and conquering the land God will give them to establish His Kingdom on earth.

Deuteronomy ends with 30 days of public mourning for Moses

Introduction

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross described five stages of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression & Acceptance.

Be Strong and Courageous: (See Deuteronomy 31)

Why is God so blunt with Joshua in v.2?

How have God and Moses helped prepare Joshua for this day?

What does Joshua need to know to get on with his God-given task of leadership?

Where do you think he is on the grief cycle at this stage? How have the forty years in the desert preparing and the thirty days of public 'weeping and mourning' helped?

God's key message to Joshua is what Moses and God Himself have already told Joshua before Moses died... why is this continuity important?

The Book of the Law – see Deut 31:24-29

Where did the Book of the Law come from?

What has Moses said about this book to the people already?

Why will it be an uphill battle for Joshua to get the people to keep the law?

Who does God want Joshua to focus on first in keeping the law... (Joshua 1:8)

Take Home

How has God spoken into your life through this passage?

Preparing others?

Going through grief?

Stepping up into leadership?

Studying his law so you don't go off track?

What is your take home today?

Final thought: Notice how God is already speaking to Joshua in Deut 31 before Moses died about what he will have to do in the future... how might God be trying to prepare you for your future today?

Week 2

Joshua 2:1-3

Who are the main characters?

What is surprising about where the spies end up? Why?

What do you expect Rahab will do at the end of v3?

Read Joshua 2:4-7

What does Rahab do?

Read Joshua 2:7-11

Why is Rahab hiding the spies?

Who does she see as the power behind Israel?

What are the signs that she has great faith already?

Read Joshua 2:12-24

What agreement does Rahab make with the spies?

What will protect her family?

Why do you think the scarlet cord symbolised for the Israelites from their history of being rescued from Egypt? What does it symbolise for Christians today?

Look at v.24: What has this encounter with Rahab done to the faith of the spies...

Afterword:

In Matthew 1:5 we find out that Rahab marries Salmon and becomes mother to Boaz who marries Ruth. King David is among their descendants and Matthew is writing to say that Jesus comes from this royal line that includes Rahab.

For today:

There is a high chance that Rahab's early life story was not of her choosing, but when she had a chance to choose life and choose God, she took it. Today over 3 million children a year end up in slavery of some sort (see www.ijm.org). Pray that Rahab's story of rescue may be there story too.

Week 3

Joshua 6.1-27

Intro: "The Israelites have finally crossed over into the promised land. But they cannot just move in and settle down; they have to take possession of it (Josh 1.11). And they must do it God's way. Mercifully, God makes every step of that way clear. What is required of them is to listen and obey. May we understand the same requirement for us!" Kathleen Buswell Nielson

Time for a spiritual health check-up: How are you doing at 'listening' and how about the 'obeying' part? This is quite personal and so you may want to take a moment in quiet to do this alone with God – perhaps put some quiet background music on. But it is also corporate – how are we doing corporately at listening and obeying.

What examples of listening and obeying are found in this passage? What are the people of God told to do?

Go through verses 6-27 and list all the commands that Joshua gave to the people.

Why is it that distraction often leads to doubt? How does the instant command and then obedience keep us from a lot of temptation?

What is going on with the different encounters with the 'LORD' in 5.13-15 and 6.2-5? What is surprising in these encounters? What do they reveal about God's feelings about warfare? (remember to have a listen to Nicola's sermon on violence in the OT).

What role does the Ark play?

What is the significance of the number 7 here in this passage and in the whole of scripture?

Why do you think God chose to have them achieve victory in this way? It was indeed the Lord's battle, the Lord's strategy, the Lord's victory but what was required of the people? See Hebrews 11.30

The destruction is difficult for us to take in. What did you take in from Nicola's talk on violence in the OT and more importantly in this instance what was God's perspective – see Genesis 15.12-16 (not 'Amorites' and 'Canaanites' are often used as general names for the lands inhabitants).

The destruction by fire gives a vivid picture of God's judgement over those that ultimately reject him and his ways. But we have another very vivid and parallel picture. Whilst God is Judge – God is also Merciful. Find

every verse that speaks about Rahab? Why are they arranged in this way? What do they teach us of God's mercy?

Whom did Rahab marry (Matthew 1.4-5)? What do we know about her husband's family from Matthew 1 and Numbers 7.2, 12? Who was Rahab's son and who did he marry (Matthew 1.5; Ruth 4.13-22)?

What will you take from today's passage? What do you need to let challenge you? How can you be challenged by it in such a way that you walk closer to God and receive more of God's love and mercy for your life?

Week 4

Joshua 8.1-35

Context 1) first read Deuteronomy 9:4-6 – an extract from Moses' final speech to the Israelites that explains why God wants them to conquer Canaan.

What reasons does God give for invading Canaan.

Context 2) Joshua 7 & 8 remind us that God takes sin seriously. In chapter 7 the Israelites have attacked a small fortress at Ai and been unexpectedly defeated. It turns out this is because God has withdrawn his support for their cause because of the sin of one person – Achan – who has taken treasure designated for the Lord's tabernacle. So, his fierce anger burns against his own people and they are roundly defeated. Chapter 7 shows the reasons for Achan's sin, which is that he coveted something beautiful and valuable and wanted it for himself and so stole it and lied about it.

(This story of Achan from the start of the Israelite nation entering the promised land parallel's the story of Ananias and Saphira in Acts 5 at the start of the Church. In both cases greed causes people to try and cheat God out of what is his, he is jealous for his glory, and they face similar consequences. Both stories help keep God's people going in the right direction at the beginning of their new journey, at a time when God is very obviously and tangibly present with his people. At other stages (including today) people seem to get away with more and God may seem to be further away – perhaps so he can bear with the sin. Why might God seem stricter at the start of the journey? Is it a curse or a grace to be disciplined? How close do we want God in our lives/church today?).

Read Joshua 8:1-2

How do these verses strike you in the light of Joshua 7?

Read Joshua 8:3-23

God's instructions on how to capture Ai are very different to how he told them to conquer Jericho. Why does God not always want us to keep doing things the same way? What contrasts can you see?

Whereas in their first mission to conquer Jericho they were not allowed to keep plunder in this subsequent one they were. Why might God have wanted them to destroy everything in the first city, but allow them to use the plunder after that?

In your life: Where has God sometimes given you a high bar challenge to get you started in the right direction, but allowed you an easier time after that when he knows he has got your heart?

Read Joshua 8:30-35

Why is it important to renew covenant (promises) again after all that they have been through?

Are there any ways you need to make a public covenant with God (baptism/confirmation/witnessing to him)? How about a private covenant? Are there things you have promised him that you need to renew?

Week 5

Joshua 9.1-27

God means us to ask: God wants us to 'ask counsel from' or 'inquire of' him. Joshua 9 shows us what happens if we do not, Joshua 10 shows what can happen when we do. In all these stories of the Israelites learning to be God's people are parables for our life today. God wants us to know that we can and should turn to him and humbly ask for wisdom and help.

As success increases and both Jericho and Ai are defeated, Joshua returns to the secure base camp of Gilgal. All the cities in the hill country ally against him and against God. But one group led by the Gibeonites try a more subtle tactic.

When the enemy (the devil) can't defeat us in the obvious ways – attack, discouragement, temptation, he will often try to trick us. This story is a great parable of how it can go wrong if we forget to take the time to enquire of the Lord.

Background:

Read Deuteronomy 7:1-2 and Deuteronomy 20:10-18

God gives two sets of rules: One for making peace/fighting with those outside of the promised land (20:10-15), the other for completely cleansing the promised land (20:16-20).

Read Joshua 9

What do the Gibeonites do in this story?

What do the Israelites do?

Why is it so easy to rush into things without enquiring of the Lord?

Look ahead to Joshua 10 – what does Joshua have to do as a result of this treaty?

How might this story inform a church wanting to make a vision for the future?

What would be good practice?

What would we need to be careful of?

What role does Joshua give the Gibeonites?

Centuries later the Gibeonites are still helping with God's tabernacle/temple... cf Neh 3:7, 7:25. How does Psalm 84:10 see the role of someone helping in the temple? What is it about closeness to the Tabernacle/Temple that may have brought this once powerful people into relationship with God?

Week 6

Joshua 22.15-34

In Joshua 20-22 God is settling his people into the promised land according to his word. In Chapter 20 he establishes cities of refuge for them. In Chapter 21 he provides cities for those who lead them in worship. Then in Chapter 22 he sends the warriors from the eastern tribes back home across the River Jordan to enjoy their inheritance. But those warriors build their own imposing altar to God, closer to home, at their own convenience and away from the Tabernacle. This nearly leads to full blown civil war. The other tribes accuse Reuben, Gad and Manasseh of committing a sin like that of Achan.

Read Joshua 22:15-34

Why do the majority of tribes confront Reuben, Gad and Manasseh? What does this show about how they have learned to obey God over the years of conquest?

How do the tribes defend their actions?

What motivations does this reveal?

How is their response received by the other tribes?

What can we learn about conflict from this story?

Read Hebrews 10:19-25 for some instructions on how we should live together as Christians today.

Week 7

Joshua 23.1-16

Joshua finishes with two great occasions and speeches to finish this period of conquest.

Read Chapter 23

What does Joshua have to say about the past?

What commands does he give the people to follow? Which seem most important?

What are the consequences for how they follow these instructions?

Having recently studied the book of Hebrews, why is it important for us as Christians to keep covenant with God too? Why does the book of Hebrews say God 'disciplines' us?

What do you think God wants to say to you personally and to the church from the book of Joshua?

What have you learnt about God? What have you learnt about humanity?