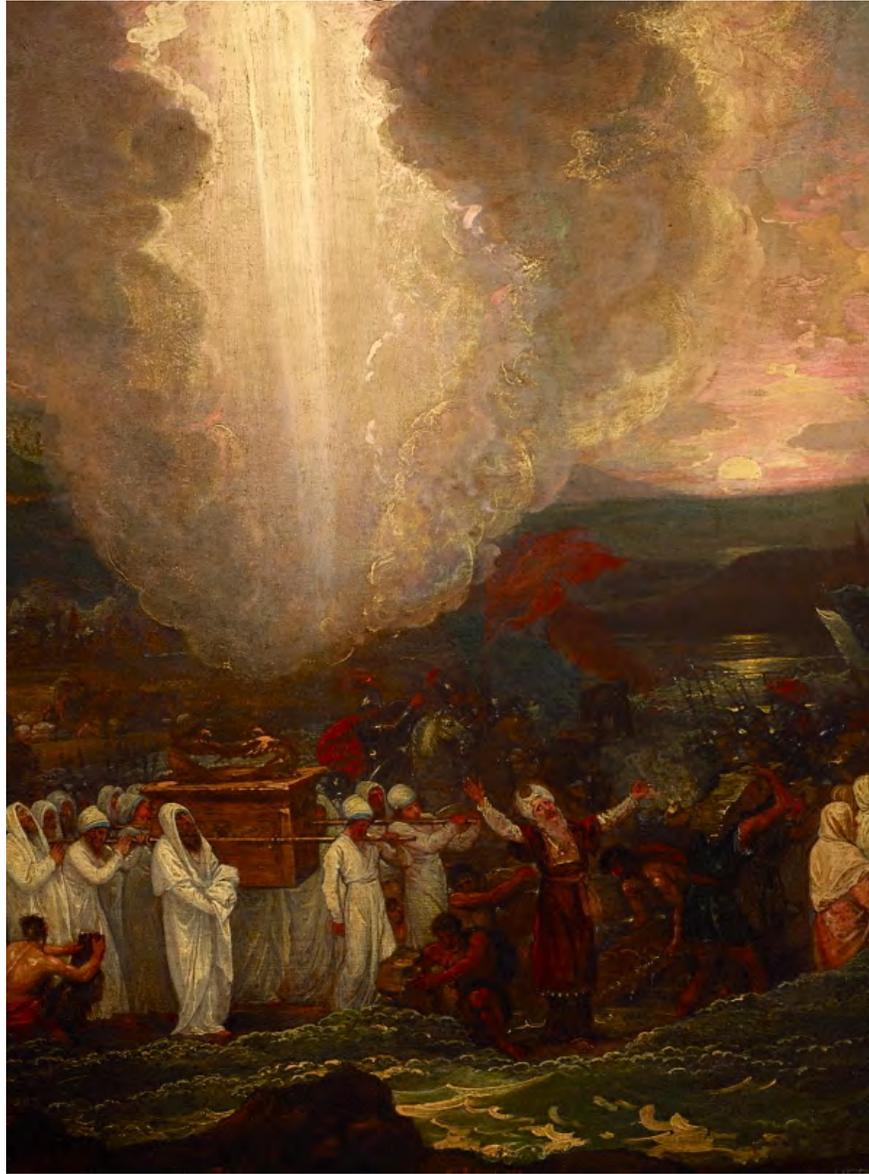


A Call to Courage— Joshua 1, Acts 13:19



Benjamin West, Joshua Crossing the Jordan River with the Ark

The time had come for Joshua to lead the people and take over the land promised centuries before to Abraham. Jesus' and Joshua's names both mean "salvation", and it has been traditional to see the promised land as emblematic of our entrance into the Kingdom of God, as representing freedom for slaves, confronting life's challenges, as well as looking toward the new heavens and new earth.

Joshua led the process of possessing the land, something that is repeated three times in the chapter. That the land was God's gift was repeated five times. Israel

served as a microcosm of God's Kingdom, preparing for Christ to come and extend it to all.

God's exhortation to be strong and courageous was repeated four times in this chapter, and three more times in the book. The theme of strength and courage to confront challenges and obstacles inspires me to toughen up when necessary. Joshua recalled how intimidating their opponents were, recalled that the ten discouraged companions had died, and recognized that of his generation, only he and Caleb were left after the forty years of wandering.

We need strength, courage, and not to let fear or discouragement take hold. We need to be able to let go of memories that would hold us back, and focus our energies on this present moment. Joshua is a model of courage in the face of an overwhelming situation, and we can emulate him in this.

How can I take to heart the exhortation to be strong and courageous?

A Call to Holiness— Joshua 2-5, Hebrews 4:8-11



Marc Chagall, Joshua armed by God

The still insecure people of God needed a series of encouragements to prepare them to take the land, and Christ himself appeared to encourage Joshua. Each of these experiences looked both back to Moses and forward to Christ.

The first encouragement was the report of the spies that the people were terrified of them. Rahab, who hid the spies, showed her faith that they would win as they came into the land, and she appealed for her life. Similarly, as Israel left Egypt the people were afraid, and yet some from Egypt accompanied them. In Christ he came with awe-inspiring spiritual authority and called his hearers to repentance and following him.

Second, they were reminded that the Ark of the Covenant meant that God was present with them in their journey. Much of the book of Exodus concerned the creation of the tabernacle, including the ark. In the case of Christ, his incarnation was described as tabernacling with us.

Third, they saw a miracle of waters piling up and leaving a dry river bed. Crossing the Jordan in this way looked back to crossing the Red Sea and looked forward to the baptism of Christ in that same place, all three events inaugurating a new kingdom.

Fourth, they placed twelve memorial stones in the Jordan and another twelve as an altar on the land to mark this moment, something to serve as a way of teaching their children. It was this extraordinary experience that made the people revere Joshua as their leader. This paralleled the altars of Moses and looked ahead to Christ's sacrifice.

Fifth, they recommitted to the covenant, and circumcised the uncircumcised. Moses had to circumcise his sons before he could take up leadership. As a Jewish child, Jesus submitted to this rite as well.

Sixth, they then celebrated Passover. Both of these ceremonies reminded them of God's mighty work on their behalf in the past, in Abraham and the promise of land to his descendants, and Moses' liberating them from Egypt. But the true fulfillment of Passover lay ahead in Christ's cross.

Seventh, Joshua encountered the commander of the Lord's army, and was told to take off his sandals because he was in a holy place. Moses had done this as well at his commissioning at the burning bush. This vision of Christ took place after the Passover, and symbolically parallels Christ's resurrection appearances. The new kingdom would be created with spiritual force and God himself in control.

Each of these encouragements can apply to us as well: we are on the winning side against spiritual enemies, God is with us, we have been baptized into Christ, the apostles are our foundation stones, we are made holy, we have been rescued from sin, and Christ is present to lead us. Most importantly, when we encounter Christ we are in the presence of holiness that invites awe and worship.

Do I celebrate God's encouraging acts when I am facing challenges? Do I know Christ as the Holy One?

A Call to Mercy— Joshua 6, Hebrews 11:31



Marc Chagall, Rahab and the Spies of Jericho

Rahab's scarlet thread has been seen as representing the blood of Christ. In the New Testament we are told her friendly welcome to the spies showed faith, whereas others from Jericho refused to obey God. Her reward is that she became an ancestress of Christ, redeemed from death.

Rahab's status as transformed prostitute recalls women in Jesus' ministry: the woman caught in adultery, the Samaritan, and the woman who anointed his feet. The disciples disapproved of his talking to the Samaritan, and the Pharisees were horrified Jesus would let a woman touch him. Mary Magdalene had seven demons, but became a new person and was honored as the first to speak to the risen Christ. The love he showed for marginalized women parallels the kindness and love of Salmon, the Israelite who married Rahab and integrated her into the community.

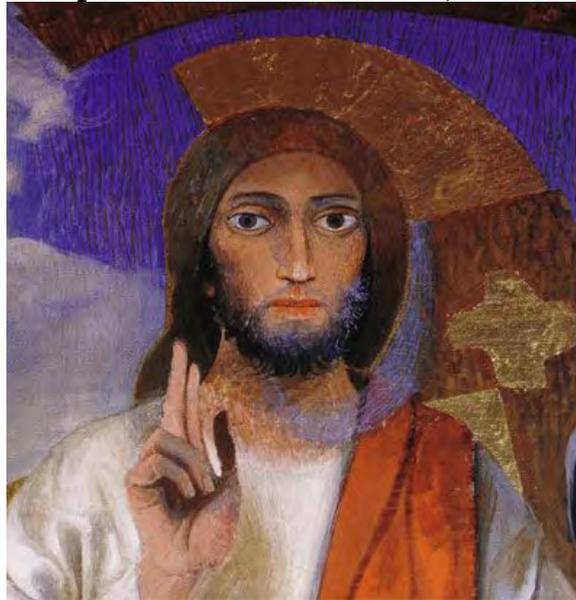
This first encounter with the Canaanite world started out far more like a demonstration than a military engagement, with Israel walking silently around the city for six days. On the seventh day the walls collapsed and they destroyed everyone, young and old, animals, and they burned the town. Only Rahab and her family were saved.

But I cannot forget the refrain: "completely destroyed". "Destroy" is repeated at least 24 times in the first half of Joshua, along with burned cities, and "men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep, donkeys—everything." Wrestling with the ethical implications is important. An excellent book that analyzes the problem of war in the Hebrew scriptures, particularly the holy wars of this book, is *Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence* by Preston Sprinkle.

Our reality is that Jesus came, accepted violence toward himself and overcame it. That drastically changed how we after him are called to overcome evil. Rahab offers a story of compassion in the midst of war. In Hebrews 11 and its stories of faith, walking around Jericho for seven days and Rahab's rescue are given as examples. Her faith saved her and their faith won victory. Our faith can do both.

Do I show mercy to the vulnerable? Am I living in faith for salvation and victory?

A Call to Repentance— Joshua 7-9, Colossians 2:15



Arcabas

Joshua's triumphs foreshadow Christ's spiritual conquests. Christ's opposition came from the demonic forces he overcame as he liberated those who suffered. On a human level his opponents were Pharisees and religious leaders. He was poor, provincial and politically powerless, yet his sarcastic diatribes spoke truth to power and confronted hypocrisy, and ultimately they killed him for it.

We can use the stories of Joshua and apply them to ourselves and our spiritual conflicts:

Command against taking things
Achan's secret greed led to death
Defeat led to repentance
Ai was defeated and burned
The old covenant was renewed
Gibeon deceived them

Stealing in ministry is stealing
The consequence of greed is defeat
We need to repent of our defeats
Second chances are possible
God wants a relationship with us
We should be discerning

Achan and his family died for his sins. For us, Christ has died in our place, and we do not die. Often we fail and we need to repent and renounce our sin before any more spiritual victories are possible. We must stay alert to deceptions and alert to greed. We must be quick to humble ourselves when we face any kind of defeat. We can ask for God's wisdom to know what is wrong. Forgiven, we can claim the promise that the humble will be exalted.

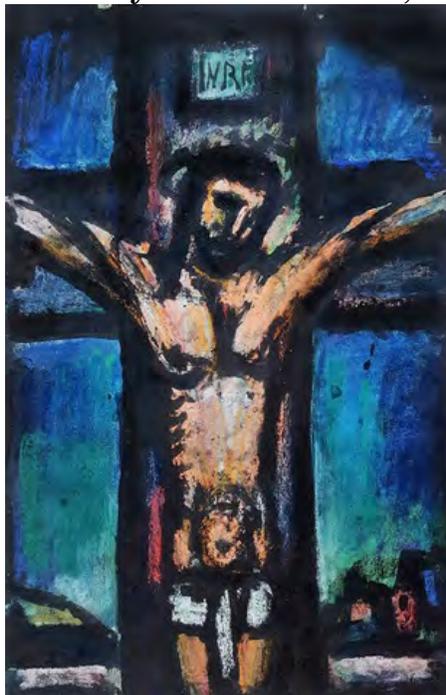
The largest change for us is that we follow Christ's way of prayer and prophetic speech, versus the literal physical battles of Joshua. While Christendom has had a history of using Joshua's methods, the people and periods we most admire followed in the way of Christ. In extending the Kingdom, we should not be afraid to call out hypocrisy, cruelty, foolishness, lies, and manipulation in our political and religious leaders. God is just as intent in correcting the errors among people who follow him as he is to overcome evil in the world. We are all on the same level playing field.

Joshua becomes a model of our victories and of Christ's victories. Handel, best known for his oratorio *Messiah*, also wrote numerous oratorios on violent scripture stories, including *Joshua*. "See the conquering hero comes" in that oratorio was later translated into English as the Easter Hymn, "Thine be the Glory, Risen, Conquering King." This fits since ultimately it is Jesus' victory and creation of a peaceable kingdom that gives us hope. He is the new Joshua.

Am I quick to humble myself when faced with any kind of defeat?

May 23

A Call to Victory— Joshua 10-12, I John 5:4



Georges Rouault, Crucifixion

Christ's victory over evil was won at the cross, and he gives us victory. Four times these chapters tell us that victory came from God as they won the land. It encourages us today to realize that God is still giving victory to those who trust him.

Knowing the history of war, we may imagine mighty kings and massive bombed out cities. But in reality, the 31 "kings" who were conquered were leaders of each small town and its surrounding villages. The archaeology done for this period shows that Canaanite towns had a high status ruler in an extra large house surrounded by lower status people in smaller homes. But in many cases these settlements diminish or disappear without obvious signs of warfare. They were replaced by egalitarian towns, many more people, and simpler pottery. As it says in the text, most places were not burned, but Hazor, the site of a more powerful ruler, was an exception. The archaeologists have found evidence of Hazor's burning during this period.

Repetitions of conquest abound in history. In early Christianity, peacemaking was the norm, but starting in the 4th century Christian rulers began to compel conversion by means of the sword. Not only the Crusades, but the New World conquests were seen as holy wars. Jesus' call to be inclusive, "Compel them to come in" (Luke 14:23 KJV) was used to justify conversion at the point of the sword.

Today, even Christians who accept that our nation must go to war are horrified by the notion that they would force conversions violently. But, repeatedly throughout history, Christian leaders condoned violent "evangelism." They reverted to Joshua and ignored Jesus.

But Paul's model of conquering through preaching is to be our way. He and other apostles and ordinary Christians transfigured Greek and Roman society with words and love. The irony for a Christian reading the Joshua conquest narratives is that we have to recall that when God lived among us, he suffered and became one of the conquered, not one of the conquerors. He won his victory through the surprising method of losing his life and calls us to do the same.

Am I transforming the world around me through love and preaching rather than hostility and exercising power over others?

A Call for Wholeheartedness— Joshua 13-15, Matthew 4:25



Caroline Innis, Caleb, Achsah and Othniel

Caleb prefigures Christ's Judean identity. Caleb, one of the twelve spies who went into Canaan, was full of enthusiasm to take possession of the land. For the next forty years in the desert he saw his friends die, all but Joshua, fulfilling the prediction that only these two adults of their generation would enter the land. The chapters begin with reference to Joshua's age and all that remains to be conquered. Caleb was 85 years old when he came to ask permission to conquer Hebron. Both he and Joshua had seen first-hand the race of giants that so frightened their fellow scouts, but Caleb asked for the opportunity to conquer these challenging people and did so.

Abraham had lived in Hebron where he received the promise of the land. He bought a cave to bury Sarah, and was buried there by his sons. Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah were also buried there. Caleb links Abraham and David, not in Christ's ancestral line, but as a claimant of the promise of the land. Christ lived and died in Judea, a descendant of Judah. Today the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron

is Israel's second most holy site and the highest point in Israel. A divided city, it is the center of West Bank trade, the largest of Palestinian cities, with a small but determined population of Jewish settlers, and consequently a site of struggle.

Caleb inspired leadership in others. He gave his daughter in marriage to the brave conqueror of another impressive giant's city about eleven miles southwest. It is touching to realize that this daughter had lower status as daughter of a concubine. Nevertheless, she had the boldness to ask and receive two water sources from her father. The story is repeated in Judges 1, emphasizing this unusual woman, Acsah, and inspiring us to be bold. She must have been an encourager for her husband Othniel who became the first judge upon whom God's Spirit came, who overthrew their oppressors and brought forty years' peace.

Hebron became one of the sites where Aaron's priestly descendants lived (21:13), inspiring companions for Caleb who claimed "I wholeheartedly followed the Lord." May our families be bold, distinguished, wholehearted, and companions of others who put God first.

Do I teach my family to be bold and courageous and to follow God wholeheartedly?

Called to receive an inheritance— Joshua 16-21, Matthew 13:44



Darius Gilmont, Entering the Promised Land

The land Joshua distributed to the people was the formation of the kingdom in his time and foreshadowed Christ's gift of the kingdom to us. In the second half of Joshua the word "inheritance" reoccurs 47 times (KJV), and the emphasis in these chapters is the practical side of the fulfillment of that long-ago promise of land to the patriarchs. Joshua affirms that not a single promise remained unfulfilled. Today we can look up a map on the internet that condenses the information from seven chapters into one page (so do not feel bad skimming!)

One can see this as Joshua setting up his administration, giving tribal leaders the areas and cities for which they were responsible, arranging for the priests and Levites to be available for all their social tasks, including dealing with manslaughter and murder cases.

From the lack of battles, and the refrain in Judges 1 that they failed to drive out the people, we can see that they perhaps moved into their territory and lived alongside others. The prediction that they would succumb to idolatry and be dominated by other nations did, unfortunately, happen. Ultimately ten tribes lost the inheritance altogether and two tribes lost it temporarily but were able to return.

In a remarkable modern parallel, today's Jews entered the land nineteen centuries after being evicted, reclaiming their inheritance and displacing others. The political consequences are still problematic, and there is a great irony in that a post-holocaust nation has displaced others into camps. But once again it affirms that not a single promise has remained unfulfilled.

To apply this to ourselves, we are reminded that we have a great inheritance, the Spirit is the downpayment on our inheritance, and that we have a priceless inheritance in heaven beyond the reach of decay. Earthly inheritances of land are minor matters by comparison. Three occurrences of "all" in 21:43-45 tell us not only what Israel received, but what we can receive: all our promised inheritance, victory over all our enemies, and all God's good promises fulfilled.

Do I live in gratitude for the inheritance God has given me? Do I stay aware of how he fulfills his promises?

May 26

A Call to a Renewed Covenant— Joshua 22-24, Luke 22:20



Marc Chagall, Joshua reads the words of the law

Joshua instituted a covenant with the people before he died, just as Christ made a new covenant before his death. Joshua warned them of consequences if they failed to keep their promise to serve God. His relationship with them and with us is the

right balance between love and high standards, like a wise parent who is both emotionally responsive and sets appropriate limits.

Joshua reviewed Israel's history, and the people declared they would not follow foreign gods, but would obey God. This covenant renewal indicated their reaffirmation of their political/social/religious constitution. Joshua rolled a large stone beneath the oak tree, near the tabernacle at Shechem, which served as a memorial. He buried Joseph as had been promised. This looked back to Jacob's prophecy 500 years previously, and looked forward 1500 years to when Christ would sit there with the woman at Jacob's well.

Preparatory to this, Phinehas served as a mediator and averted civil war. He verified that the Transjordan tribes were not worshipping idols, but honoring God with a memorial. Joshua, the warrior, and Eleazar, the high priest, both died, ending an era.

Despite this renewal of the covenant, they quickly failed. In the next chapter, Judges 1, we are told of all the Canaanites among whom they lived that they did not defeat and were not trying to defeat. Soon they were diligently intermarrying. God's messenger, perhaps Christ himself, came to tell them they had broken their side of the covenant, and God would allow them to be defeated and would allow the gods of their neighbors to be a source of constant temptation.

Like Israel, our past victories do not mean we always stay strong in the face of the next challenge. Life is difficult, and there is always another struggle that challenges our faith. But the reminder that promises are fulfilled encourages us to expect God's good promises to come about today. The covenant renewed by Joshua was broken, but Christ came with a new covenant where he kept both sides of the bargain and we can be restored and live in wholeness.

Am I willing to repeatedly renew my commitment to love and obey God? Does his new covenant hold me even when I fail him?