



“Reading the Bible Together”

Issue 6.

Book of Deuteronomy (cont'd) and the Book of Joshua:

God's people enter the Promised Land.

July 2009.

What's new this month?

“Well they think it's all over. Well, it is, *nearly!*” Various people I've been talking to have struggled, as have I, with certain parts of Leviticus to Deuteronomy, not to mention Numbers – what was it with Numbers? Still the Books of the Law – the Torah, are fast closing behind us and this month sees us move into not just another Book – Joshua, but into a whole new section of Scripture; in the Hebrew version of the Bible the Jewish people call this section, “the Former Prophets,” – Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. This whole section, written as it was to record the history of Israel as a nation between approximately 1250BC and the carrying off of Israel as a southern Kingdom into Exile in 587BC, focuses though not just on the history of Israel as a nation, and upon the rise and fall of Israel's Kings and political fortune in particular but, surpassing all else, upon the saving history of God played out as it is in the web and weft of six centuries of physical history. Our story begins, very appropriately, with the Book of Joshua – his name meaning “salvation” or “victory,” and with the entry of Israel into the Promised Land - journey's end, and at the same time journey's beginning.

What else do we know about Joshua?

The story begins by Israel crossing the Jordan once again on dry land. We then see Israel take part in a whole series of battles against the native Canaanites and others, and win – we'll come back to that part in the section below. As a man we know Joshua was considered “a man in whom God's spirit dwelt” (Numbers 27:18). In the Sinai desert he led the troops of Israel to victory over the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-13). He was the only one allowed to accompany Moses up the holy mountain to receive the two tablets the second time around (Exodus 24:13-14). And it was Joshua who stood watch over the Tent of Meeting when Moses was inside before the Tabernacle was erected (Exodus 33:11). So here is a man of honour, of faithfulness, and of courage, and it is he whom God chooses to take up the mantle of Moses and lead the people into the Promised Land.

The Ethical Question of War:

We have already met the rather uncomfortable fact that not only did Israel fight and destroy her near neighbours in order to gain supremacy but also that they believed the God, whom we hold as the God of love, told them to do so.

People have sought to answer this apparent contradiction in a number of ways.

One option is to see the God of Wrath of the Old Testament as very different from the God of Love of the New. This was basically the view of a man called Marcian in the second century. But it creates a Bad Cop, Good Cop mentality, and ignores, so it seems, that Jesus Himself worshipped and adored the Old Testament Father. It was following this view, and its subsequent literature, that much of the recent Divinci Code was based.

Another alternative is to conclude that our understanding of God has expanded in the knowledge and light of Jesus. God hasn't changed, but before Jesus came, the God we knew we knew principally as a God of power and God of might. In Jesus we see revealed a truer nature of God, as a God of humility, weakness, self-sacrifice and overarching love. This view has much to commend it in that even within the understanding of the name Joshua we see it develop in its interpretation from meaning “victory,” to meaning “salvation.”

A third view is to see the many battles of the Old Testament in the context in which it is claimed the authors wrote them, not so much that “my God is bigger than your God.” This is to assume a sort of tribal nationalism with one horse winning out over the other. Instead, it is claimed, the Books and the many accounts of battles are indeed a reflection of God’s overarching battle between God and sin. In this view God is not trying to destroy individual people, or indeed wipe out nations, but because these people turned to evil ways and worshipped foreign idols other than the one true God, well they were caught up in God’s righteous anger, battle and judgement against the forces that lead men [and women] astray. To reinforce this view supporters point to the fact that God Himself delivered His righteous anger on Israel herself when she also went astray, hence the exclusion into exile of both the Northern Kingdom in 721BC for worshipping the Baals, and the exile of the Southern Kingdom, focussed as it was on Jerusalem and its Temple, in 587BC for likewise being unfaithful.

Whichever view you take can war ever be justified by God’s people? Well our history and, so sadly, our graveyards, are littered with those who have been told to believe themselves to have been in the right and have paid the ultimate price. For me it points us to our shared common need as a humanity that each and every one of us has a need for God to do for us that which we cannot, because of our sin, do for ourselves. For we all fall short. Remarkable then that God Himself would raise up another Joshua – another Victor, another Saviour, His own dear Son – for the name “Jesus” is in fact a Greek translation of the Hebrew name “Yeshua,” this time to do battle not with people but with the author and effects of sin itself, this time not to use weapons of power or of mass destruction but instead the vulnerability, humiliation, shame and weakness, yet defying strength and victory of the Cross.

Two very different Joshua’s. Two very different ages. One consistent and never changing conquering love of God.

Scheme of Reading for June:

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reference:</u>	<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reference:</u>
Wed 1st July	Deut 10:1 – 10:22	Sun 19 th July	-----
(Morning Bible Together Meeting – 9.00am in Church)		Tues 20 th July	Deut 30:1 – 30:20
Thurs 2 nd July	Deut 11:1 - 11:32	Wed 21 st July	Deut 31:1 – 31:29
Fri 3 rd July	Deut 12:1 – 13:18	Fri 22 ^d July	Deut 32:1 – 32:47
Sat 4 th July	Deut 14:1 – 15:23	Fri 23 rd July	Deut 33:1 – 33:29
Sun 5 th July	-----	Sat 24 th July	Deut 34:1 – 34:12
Mon 6 th July	Deut 16:1 – 16:20	Sun 25 th July	-----
Tues 7 th July	Deut 16:21 – 17:20	Mon 26 th July	Josh 1:1 – 1:18
Wed 8 th July	Deut 18:1 – 18:22	Tues 27 th July	Josh 2:1 – 2:24
Thurs 9 th July	Deut 19:1 – 19:21	Wed 28 th July	Josh 3:1 – 4:24
Fri 10 th July	Deut 20:1 – 20:20	Thurs 29 th July	Josh 5:1 – 5:12
Sat 11 th July	Deut 21:1 – 21:23	Fri 30 th July	Josh 5:13 – 6:27
Sun 12 th July	-----	Sat 31 st July	Josh 7:1 – 7:26
Mon 13 th July	Deut 22:1 – 23:14	Sun 1 st Aug	-----
Tues 14 th July	Deut 27:1 – 27:26	Mon 2 nd Aug	Josh 8:1 – 8:35
Wed 15th July	Deut 28:1 – 28:68	Tues 3 rd Aug	Josh 9:1 – 9:27
(Evening Bible Together Meeting – 8.00pm in Church)		Wed 4 th Aug	Josh 10:1 - 10:28
Thurs 16 th July	Deut 29:1 – 29:29	Thurs 5 th Aug	Josh 10:29 – 11:23
Fri 17 th July	Deut 30:1 – 30:20	Fri 6 th Aug	Josh 12:1 – 13:33
Sat 18 th July	Deut 31:1 – 31:29	Sat 7 th Aug	Josh 14:1 – 15:63