

# JOSHUA

## The Good Word

Introduction by Bob Wresch:

Last quarter's study saw the people of Israel safely out of Egypt and to the borders of the land which God had promised. For the next three months we will discuss the book of Joshua.

For me, Joshua is a difficult book:

When I was a child, Joshua was much easier. I was born during the Second World War. When I was old enough to remember, the radio brought us news of war in Korea. War stories were exciting. I imagined that someday I might be part of a triumphant army.

We sang battle songs, like "Onward Christian Soldiers." I read about battles on land, at sea, and in the air. I read adventure stories from World War II. I was always sure who were the good guys, and who were evil.

I became a charter member of the Pathfinder Club, where a real soldier taught us to march. Desmond Doss came to our own church, and he told us stories. He wore his army uniform, and his Congressional Medal of Honor. He posed for photographs with children. And I was there.

When I became a young man, I knew that all young men would be drafted into military service. When I was seventeen, I became a member of the Medical Cadet Corps. No, it was not an option. My Christian high school required this preparation. Soldiers were our heroes.

My church cared about our future. When our country called us into armed service, we would be ready. We learned military discipline. We knew the ranks and their insignia. We learned first aid. We learned to navigate using map and compass. We learned that other young men might feel bewildered during their first six weeks of military training. But we had already mastered most of what we would then be taught.

My church organized, and my parents paid—for me to have two weeks of full-time simulated military training on each of two consecutive summers. I learned to obey; and I learned to command. Our instructors were Christians—who had experience in combat, and they told us stories.

Our church leaders were comfortable with the armed forces, and military officials appreciated the training provided by our church. We learned our rights. Because of our religious beliefs, we would not volunteer, and we learned to decline weapons training. But the U.S. military was already well acquainted with our church. And if we made clear our need to observe God's sabbath day, our religion would be honored.

But when I was a student on this campus, I was not drafted.  
When I was a student of medicine, I was not drafted.

During my medical internship and residency training, I was not drafted.  
When I was a missionary physician in Africa, I was not drafted.  
So, I have no military experience.

I have repaired wounds made by others.  
And as a surgeon, I have repaired many wounds that I made myself.  
But the wounds I made were always to save life; never to take life.

Now, how should I feel about the Bible's books of Exodus, and Joshua?

When a whole army drowned in the sea, God's people rejoiced.

Almost one hundred years ago, the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire quoted fellow rabbis as follows:

"When the Egyptian host were drowning in the Red Sea, the angels in heaven were about to break forth in songs of jubilation. But the Holy One, blessed be He, silenced them with the words, "My creatures are perishing, and you are ready to sing!"

The Pentateuch and Haftorahs with Commentary, (Forward to the Soncino Talmud), London, December 2, 1934, Edited by the Chief Rabbi Dr. J. H. Hertz, vol. 2, page 162.

[https://halakhah.com/talmud/nezikin\\_h.html](https://halakhah.com/talmud/nezikin_h.html)

In the book of Exodus, we learned that God saved his chosen people from tyranny and slavery.

What will be the next steps?

The land promised to Abraham some 400 years before had not, meanwhile, been empty.  
How shall the land now be prepared for God's chosen people?

Will God drive out Canaanites?

Exodus 23:27

I will send my terror ahead of you and create panic.  
I will make all your enemies turn and run.

Exodus 23:28

About Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites?  
I will send terror ahead of you.

Exodus 23:30

I will drive them out a little at a time...

Exodus 23:33

They must not live in your land...

Exodus 33:2

About Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites?  
And I will send an angel before you to drive out...

Exodus 34:11

About Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites?  
I will go ahead of you and drive out...

Deuteronomy 7:1

About Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites?  
The Lord your God....he will clear away many nations ahead of you...

Deuteronomy 7:19

Remember the great terrors the Lord your God sent....  
The Lord your God will use this same power against all the people you fear.

Deuteronomy 7:20

And then the Lord your God will send terror...

Will the chosen people drive out Canaanites?

Exodus 23:31

I will hand over to you the people now living in the land, and you will drive them out ahead of you.

Numbers 33:52

you must drive out all the people living there

Deuteronomy 9:3

He will subdue them so that you will quickly conquer them and drive them out, just as the Lord has promised.

Deuteronomy 12:2

"When you drive out the nations that live there....

Will God annihilate Canaanites?

Exodus 23:23

Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites?  
For my angel will go before you...And I will destroy them completely.

Deuteronomy 9:3

But recognize today that the Lord your God is the one who will cross over ahead of you like a devouring fire to destroy them.

Deuteronomy 12:29 “

When the Lord your God goes ahead of you and destroys the nations and you drive them out and live in their land,

Deuteronomy 31:3

But the Lord your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy the nations living there...

Deuteronomy 31:4

“The Lord will destroy the nations living in the land...

Joshua 24:8

“Finally, I brought you into the land of the Amorites on the east side of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I destroyed them before you.

Will the chosen people annihilate Canaanites?

Deuteronomy 7:2

You must completely destroy them... and show them no mercy.

Deuteronomy 7:16

“You must destroy all the nations...

Show them no mercy...

Deuteronomy 7:23

But the Lord your God will hand them over to you.

He will throw them into complete confusion until they are destroyed.

Deuteronomy 7:24

He will put their kings in your power, and you will erase their names from the face of the earth. No one will be able to stand against you, and you will destroy them all.

Deuteronomy 20

10 As you approach a town to attack it, you must first offer its people terms for "peace."

11 If they accept your terms and open the gates to you, then all the people inside will serve you in forced labor.

12 But if they refuse to make peace and prepare to fight, you must attack the town.

13 When the Lord your God hands the town over to you, use your swords to kill every man in the town.

14 But you may keep for yourselves all the women, children, livestock, and other plunder. You may enjoy the plunder from your enemies that the Lord your God has given you.

15 “But these instructions apply only to distant towns—not to the towns of the nations in the land you will enter.

16 In those towns that the Lord your God is giving you as a special possession, destroy every living thing.

17 You must completely destroy the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, just as the Lord your God has commanded you.

18 This will prevent the people of the land from teaching you to imitate their detestable customs in the worship of their gods, which would cause you to sin deeply against the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 31:5

The Lord will hand over to you the people who live there, and you must deal with them as I have commanded you.

Joshua 24:8

I gave you victory over them, and you took possession of their land.

Who will destroy Canaanite worship sites?

Exodus 23:24

You must utterly destroy them and smash their sacred pillars.

Exodus 34:13

You must break down their pagan altars, smash their sacred pillars, and cut down their Asherah poles.

Numbers 33:52

You must destroy all their carved and molten images and demolish all their pagan shrines.

Deuteronomy 7:5

You must break down their pagan altars and shatter their sacred pillars. Cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols.

Deuteronomy 7:25

You must burn their idols in fire.

Deuteronomy 7:26

Do not bring any detestable objects into your home, for then you will be destroyed, just like them. You must utterly detest such things, for they are set apart for destruction.

Deuteronomy 12:2

...you must destroy all the places where they worship their gods...

Deuteronomy 12:3

Break down their altars and smash their sacred pillars. Burn their Asherah poles and cut down their carved idols. Completely erase the names of their gods!

Motivated by the Book of Joshua, now what should followers of Jesus do?

Smash and burn idols?

Smash and burn people?

In the Book of Joshua, how many altars and idols did God's people destroy?

And in the Book of Joshua, how many people were smashed and burned?

What was the main reason behind all this expulsion and/or mass slaughter?

Deuteronomy 7:16? Deuteronomy 20:18?

How often did the Israelites show mercy?

Joshua chapter 6? Joshua chapter 9?

In these cases, did granting mercy entrap those who had shown mercy?

And after Joshua died, did the Israelites continue to perform total annihilation?

What should we learn from these stories, which to us may seem needlessly violent and ugly?

Before we finish these lessons, we will be caught up in the celebration of Christmas. How shall we remember the God who chose to be born as a helpless baby in Bethlehem? And when he lived among us, how many people did our Lord Jesus wound? How many did he kill?

We will tell our children about Jesus, who refused to allow evil to conquer him. Instead, Jesus conquered evil—by doing good. And to heal us, Jesus even allowed himself to be killed.

How shall we understand the God represented by Joshua, and the God represented by Jesus?

These are some of the questions that could stimulate our study.

To help us seek answers, we are blessed by the same excellent professors who last quarter discussed the book of Exodus:

Dr. Mathilde Frey is Professor of Biblical Studies at Walla Walla University School of Theology.

Dr. Jody Washburn is Associate Professor of Sociology and Social Work at Walla Walla University.

And I, Bob Wresch, am a retired ophthalmologist who lives near Walla Walla University.

Credit for Bible quotations:

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We have recently studied the book of Exodus:

Question:

As God led Israel's escape through the Red Sea, how many battles did Moses have to win against the Egyptians?

Question:

How did Moses respond to an unprovoked attack by Amalekites?

Question:

On this urgent occasion did Moses ask for specific guidance from God?

Question:

And did this impromptu battle give Israel lasting protection from raids by Amalekites or from other brigands?

Question:

On later occasions God would send a destroying angel, or rain down hailstones. He might create auditory hallucinations, produce blindness, plague enemies with "terror," or maybe afflict them with stinging insects.

So, was it necessary for God's untrained people to go out, in God's name, and personally take the lives of many other people?

Question:

Have we heard of too many deadly fights, especially in the former land of Canaan?

How can the fighters and the politicians on both sides of these fights claim that they are simply doing what God told them to do?

Question:

As we read through week after week of difficult texts, what kinds of questions should we ask?

## Lesson 2 Surprised by Grace, for October 11

"Grace is simply receiving what we don't deserve."

Question:

Or perhaps is "grace" the usual, natural behavior of a gracious person?"  
Is it a difficult struggle for God to be gracious?

Question:

Do we get to decide who "deserves" grace?  
And should we decide that in this case, grace is "deserved," is it still "grace?"

Question:

Was God also using psychological warfare?

Question:

If so, was God's psychology proving effective? Joshua wanted to find out:

Joshua 2

1 Then Joshua secretly sent out two spies from the Israelite camp at Acacia Grove. He instructed them, "Scout out the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho."

Question: Why "especially around Jericho?"

Joshua 2

So, the two men set out and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there that night.

Question:

If the two Israelite spies were performing a mission for God, why would they choose to find a prostitute, and stay with her?

Bob Wresch: U.S. Army veterans from World War II have told me [in 1960] some details of their official training:

Should they find themselves behind enemy lines, and in need of help from someone they could trust, the Army taught them to seek first...

A Christian pastor,

or

A prostitute.

Question: Why?

Because these two professionals were the least likely to betray soldiers who needed their protection.

Question: Were there any other reasons to trust a prostitute?

Maybe she also managed an inn, that offered overnight housing, with no questions asked?

Maybe spies who stayed in her inn might overhear information that could prove useful to Joshua?

Question:

Is it important that spies conceal their own identity and the purpose of their presence in hostile territory?

Question:

Are spies the kinds of people who always keep their promises?

Question:

Why would Rahab trust these spies?

Question:

Did these two spies successfully conceal their identity?

Question:

Did anyone correctly guess the purpose of their visit to Jericho?

Question:

Did the king of Jericho learn about the Israelite spies, their purpose, and even where they were staying?

Joshua 2:2

But someone told the king of Jericho, "Some Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land."

Joshua 2:3

So, the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab: "Bring out the men who have come into your house, for they have come here to spy out the whole land."

Question:

If Rahab were a loyal, dependable, respectable citizen of Jericho, how should she respond to such demands?

Question:

And was Rahab in fact loyal, dependable, and respectable?

To whom?

Joshua 2:4 Rahab had hidden the two men...

Lesson Guide Monday, October 6:

"Central to Rahab's story is the lie that she told to protect the spies."

Question:

Can we believe that on some previous occasions, as she practiced her profession, Rahab might have been asked, "Have you seen him?" "Is he here?"

Question:

Might she have formed a habit of saying, "No, I haven't seen him." "No, he isn't here?"

Question of Theology:

Imagine that you are one of the two Israelite spies, on Rahab's roof, quivering under bundles of flax. If you overheard some of the noises and voices from downstairs, would this be an excellent time for prayer?

Question:

Might you pray for Rahab?

Question:

And if you made earnest prayer to God, might your prayer be, "Oh Lord, please help Rahab to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

Question:

Might Rahab have learned that the God of the Israelites had forbidden his people to "bear false witness against your neighbor?"

Question:

Could Rahab have reasoned that she had no intention of bearing false witness *against* her guests.

But might it be a good idea to bear false witness to *protect* her guests?

Question:

If Rahab were accustomed to telling a short and simple lie, why would she behave differently this time?

Joshua 2:4

Rahab had hidden the two men, but she instead replied,

"Yes, the men were here earlier, but I didn't know where they were from."

Question:

Why on this occasion would Rahab invent a new lie—one that was creative, complex, and brilliant?

Joshua 2:5-6

"They left the town at dusk, as the gates were about to close. I don't know where they went. If you hurry, you can probably catch up with them."

(Actually, she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them beneath bundles of flax she had laid out.)

Question:

If Jericho's authorities knew this much about the two spies, would they already know that these spies were members of the invading nation of Israel?

Would they have heard that the Israelites had already destroyed two powerful kings named Sihon and Og on the east side of the Jordan?

Would they know that Israelites, lots of Israelites, were at this moment encamped at a place called Acacia Grove on the other side of the Jordan River.

[Opinions differ about the exact location of this camping site, but it would not have been more than sixteen miles from Jericho.]

Lesson Guide Monday, October 6:

While it is true that the New Testament commends her faith, a careful analysis of the New Testament references to Rahab's act reveals that none endorse everything about her, and none validate her lie.

Question:

Rahab asked only that her life, and the lives of her family, be protected. Did she ask anyone to "validate" her lie?

Question:

Was Rahab concerned about how she might be regarded by other followers of God, who might live more than a thousand years in the future?

How did one early Christian author consider Rahab?

"It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies." —Hebrews 11:31.

Question:

Might it have been part of Rahab's professional policy to give "a friendly welcome" to any who chose to visit her?

Question:

Was Rahab's welcome an act of faith?

Question:

Was it a response to terror?

Question:

Was it an act of treachery toward her own nation?

Lesson Guide Monday, October 6:

"God valued Rahab for her exceptional courage, for her brave faith, for being an agent of salvation, and for choosing Israel's God."

Question:

If Rahab had:

1. exceptional courage,
2. and brave faith, if she was
3. an eager agent of salvation, and if she was

4. one who chose Israel's God—

Could it have been God who inspired Rahab to tell a bold and creative lie?

Question:

If Rahab's questioners thus far believed her story, might they also accept her counsel to hurry toward the Jordan, hoping to overtake the spies who were fleeing east from Jericho to rejoin their army?

Lesson Guide Monday, October 6:

Joshua 2:7

7 So the king's men went looking for the spies along the road leading to the shallow crossings of the Jordan River. And as soon as the king's men had left, the gate of Jericho was shut.

Our suspenseful spy story continues:

Joshua 2:8-10

8 Before the spies went to sleep that night, Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them.

9 "I know the Lord has given you this land," she told them. "We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror.

Question:

Was God's psychological warfare proving effective?

10 "For we have heard how the Lord made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt. And we know what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River, whose people you completely destroyed."

11 "No wonder our hearts have melted in fear! No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things.

Question:

OK, So Rahab is scared, and is motivated by fear. What more has she learned about the God who is leading Israel?

"For the Lord your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below."

Let us imagine that Rahab is comparing reports of Israel's God with the gods with which she is already well acquainted.

Ancient records report that the gods of Canaan, as a routine part of their fertility worship, incited sexual perversion and violence. Canaanite people, as a part of their devotional lives, even killed their own children.

Rahab knows that her traditional gods are NOT kind gods.

Question:

In Rahab's world, how did dominant gods treat the lesser competing gods?

Question:

Given so many gods, how would worshippers decide which gods to worship?  
Today, in polytheistic cultures, what kinds of gods get the most worship?

Question:

Are the most popular gods the kindest and most benevolent gods?  
Or the most evil and dangerous gods?

Question:

And why do people choose to worship the gods that are most evil?  
Because those are the gods that are most likely to hurt you?

Question:

Does Rahab also know that the Israelites are forbidden to swear in the name of any of the Canaanites gods?

Let's read from Deuteronomy 6:

12 be careful not to forget the Lord, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt.

13 You must fear the Lord your God and serve him. When you take an oath, you must use only his name.

14 You must not worship any of the gods of neighboring nations,

15 for the Lord your God, who lives among you, is a jealous God. His anger will flare up against you, and he will wipe you from the face of the earth.

Rahab continues:

Joshua 2

12 “Now swear to me by the Lord that you will be kind to me and my family since I have helped you. Give me some guarantee that

13 when Jericho is conquered, you will let me live, along with my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all their families.”

Question:

Will the Israelite spies accept Rahab's appeal? And what will be the terms of their deal?

14 “We offer our own lives as a guarantee for your safety,” the men agreed. “If you don’t betray us, we will keep our promise and be kind to you when the Lord gives us the land.”

Question:

Was this deal an ordinary *quid pro quo*, [Latin: something for something]? This Latin fairness formula has been part of our English language for more than four hundred years.

Question:

Did Rahab give the spies any concrete evidence of her new commitment?

And since they were already known and being searched for, might she still be able to accomplish their safe escape?

Did she also offer the two Israelites wise tactical counsel?

15 Then, since Rahab’s house was built into the town wall, she let them down by a rope through the window.

16 “Escape to the hill country,” she told them. “Hide there for three days from the men searching for you. Then, when they have returned, you can go on your way.”

Question:

Before the two men slid down Rahab's rope, did they make any last-minute amendments to their mutual agreement?

17 Before they left, the men told her, “We will be bound by the oath we have taken only if you follow these instructions.

18 When we come into the land, you must leave this scarlet rope hanging from the window through which you let us down. And all your family members—your father, mother, brothers, and all your relatives—must be here inside the house.

Question:

Do we also make legal agreements?

Once we have considered a contractual understanding, have agreed in principle, and are about to sign it, how do we then feel about having to read several paragraphs of fine print?

19 "If they go out into the street and are killed, it will not be our fault. But if anyone lays a hand on people inside this house, we will accept the responsibility for their death.

20 If you betray us, however, we are not bound by this oath in any way."

Question:

At this point in the story, how might Rahab feel? Have negotiations produced an atmosphere of mutual dependence and mutual trust?

21 "I accept your terms," she replied. And she sent them on their way, leaving the scarlet rope hanging from the window.

Lesson Guide Monday, October 6:

"God valued Rahab for her exceptional courage, for her brave faith, for being an agent of salvation, and for choosing Israel's God."

Question:

May we hope that in Rahab's later life as a member of Israel, she learned new ways to

Become an agent of salvation,

and

Follow Israel's God—

WITHOUT LYING?

Question:

If this story did not have a clear ending, would we feel frustrated?

22 The spies went up into the hill country and stayed there three days. The men who were chasing them searched everywhere along the road, but they finally returned without success.

Question:

Let us again imagine that you are one of the two spies. You might have died during your one night in Jericho. But you have made beneficial contact with a prostitute who is willing to protect you by betraying her own nation. She already knows something about your nation and about your God.

Like her fellow citizens, she is terrified of you. Yet she is willing to make a solemn oath, not in the name of any of her gods, but in your God, whom she now wishes to worship as her only God.

Now, how much detail will you include in your "mission report" to Joshua?

Joshua 2

23 Then the two spies came down from the hill country, crossed the Jordan River, and reported to Joshua all that had happened to them.

24 "The Lord has given us the whole land," they said, "for all the people in the land are terrified of us."

Question:

Can we imagine a different story?

Let's suppose that the two Israelite spies had strolled through the streets of Jericho, preaching a message of God's mercy.

Question:

How many in Jericho might have paid them respectful attention, and happily joined Israel in worship of the true God?

Question:

Perhaps the most successful evangelist in history was the prophet Jonah, who according to the book named for him, was able to save more than 120,000 people, in just a few days.

Did Jonah preach a message of mercy, or of impending destruction?

Question:

Do evangelists still attract crowds by warning of impending destruction?

Question:

Does God try to meet people where they are, speak in language they can understand, then lead them to mutual confidence as they are able to follow?

Shall we end with 1 John 4:17-18?

17 And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So, we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence, because we live like Jesus here in this world.

18 Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear.

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