

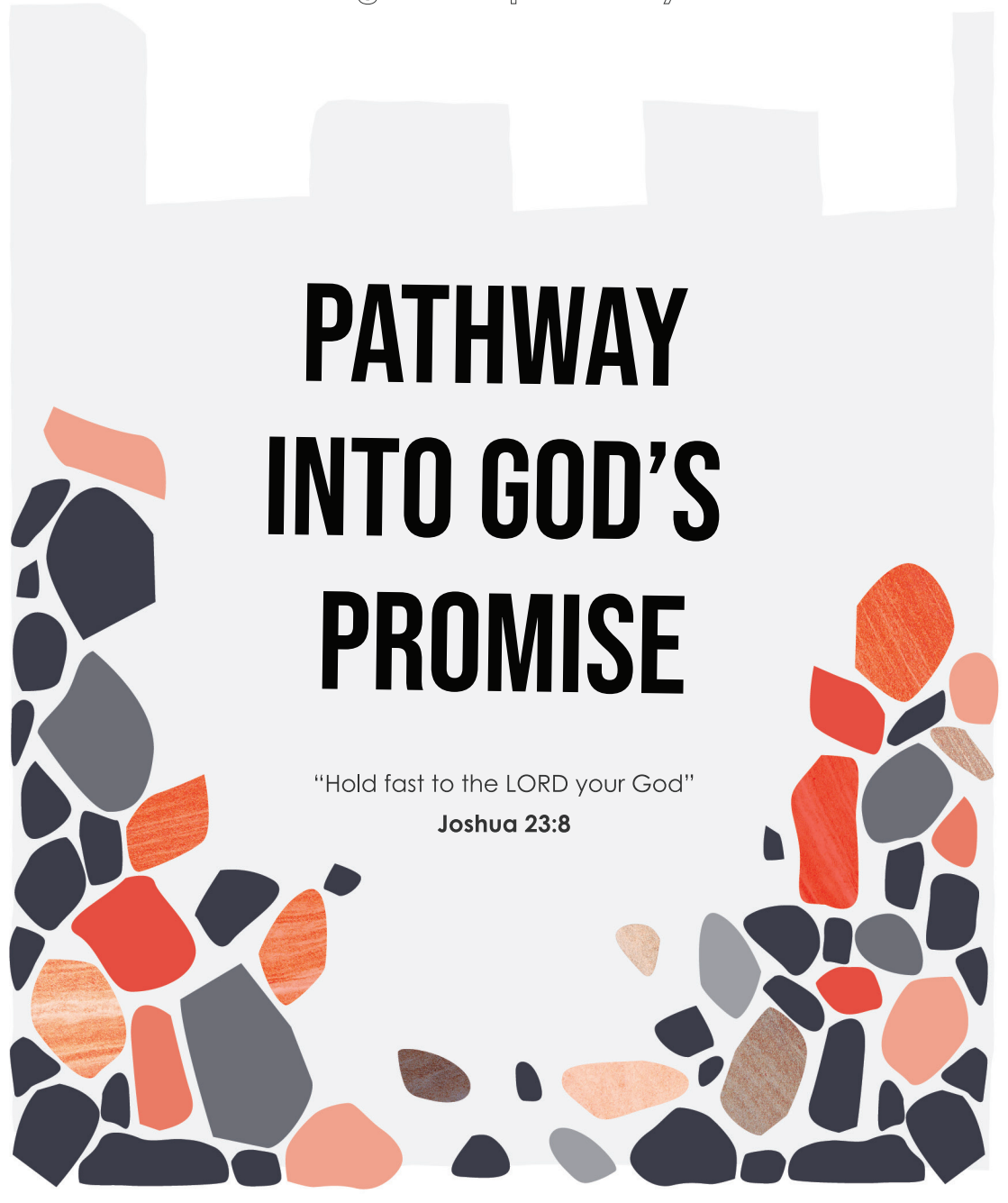
Joshua

Reading Plan: April to July 2026

PATHWAY INTO GOD'S PROMISE

"Hold fast to the LORD your God"

Joshua 23:8



St John's Church, Blackheath

Joshua

Pathway into God's Promise

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"Hold fast to the LORD your God" (Joshua 23:8, NIV)

Introduction

Between the middle of April and the middle of July this year, we will be looking at the book of Joshua in our Sunday morning sermons. This reading plan is designed to accompany the sermon series.

The book describes the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites over 3,000 years ago. This may seem so far removed from our experience that you may initially doubt that it has much to teach us, but such doubt would be misplaced: the book has much to teach us about, amongst other things, God's faithfulness, God's power, commitment to God and living lives of faith. Furthermore, many of the events that it describes are memorable and should help us to keep in mind key truths (e.g. the miracles of the crossing of the River Jordan and the fall of the walls of Jericho).

This reading plan takes you through the whole book at a pace that roughly matches the pace of the related sermon series. It would be good to ensure that you hear each of the sermons in the series. Hence, if you do not attend the morning service on a particular Sunday, it would be worth listening to the sermon during the following week. All our sermons are posted on the St John's Church website, normally within a few days of being delivered (see <https://www.stjohnsblackheath.org.uk/talks-at-st-johns-blackheath/>).

The Appendix (pages 65-76) contains sections about, among other things, the book of Joshua itself, its historical background, where various places mentioned in the book were located and the various kingdoms and peoples mentioned in the book. You may find it helpful to read the Appendix before starting the reading plan.

That said, as in relation to previous reading plans, a warning is appropriate: it is easy to get bogged down in the historical background to Joshua or particular issues relating to the book. It is important to remember that the book is part of the Bible because of its abiding relevance through time. In other words, be careful that you don't so focus on the past that you miss the things that are relevant to the present!

This reading plan is not a commentary on Joshua. It is not possible to do more than point to the main themes and teaching. On some occasions, you may wonder what a particular part of the passage you are reading means

and be frustrated that the plan does not address the issue. If so, please feel free to speak to me or email me and I will try to assist you.

The book of Joshua contains things that may challenge your view of the world and of God. You may find some of it difficult to understand, uncomfortable or worrying. If so, don't ignore the issue and move on. Note it and discuss it with others. For example, you could raise the matter in your small group or you could talk to a member of the Leaders & Preachers Team. It is only by doing this that we allow God, through the Bible, to change us.

In particular, you may have difficulty with the idea of God ordering a violent conquest. Section 3 of the Appendix contains some comments on this issue and, on 31 May, our evening service will comprise an *Open to Questions* service about the destruction of the Canaanites. During this, there will be an opportunity to hear more about the issue and to ask questions.

As with previous reading plans, I suggest that each day you:

- Pray that God would enable you to understand the passage that you will be looking at and would use it to change you;
- Read the passage and then the notes about it in this plan;
- Prayerfully reflect on what the passage is saying, considering the questions set out in italics at the end of the notes for the day;
- Thank God for the things that you have read; ask that he would enable you to absorb what he wants you to learn; say sorry for anything that the passage indicates you should have done which you have not (or vice versa); and seek the help of the Holy Spirit to do better in the future.

I first read Joshua about 45 years ago. I have since looked at it many times and heard various sermons about it. Nonetheless, as I studied it in order to prepare this reading plan, I found it very inspiring and challenging. My prayer is that you will have the same experience as you study it.

Richard Godden, 10th March 2026

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Overview of the sermon series

Our sermons on the book of Joshua between April and July will be in the morning services as follows:

Date	Title	Passage
19 th April	Going on and going in	Joshua 1:1-18
26 th April	A surprising work of God	Joshua 2:1-24
3 rd May	Courage for the unknown way	Joshua 3:1-5:1
10 th May	Signs of the promise	Joshua 5:2-12
17 th May	Whose victory?	Joshua 5:13-6:27
24 th May	The tragedy of hidden sin	Joshua 7:1-8:35
31 st May	Deception and devotion	Joshua 9:1-27
7 th June	The faithfulness of God	Joshua 10:1-12:24
14 th June	Inherit the earth	Joshua 13:1-19:51
21 st June	All Age Service	-
28 th June	Refuge and residence	Joshua 20:1-21:42
5 th July	United we stand	Joshua 21:43-23:16
12 th July	Whom will you serve?	Joshua 24:1-33

In addition, as indicated in the introduction, the evening service on 31 May will be an *Open to Questions* service about the destruction of the Canaanites.

Overview of the reading plan

The daily readings in this reading plan are as follows:

Week 1		Week 2	
Monday	Joshua 1:1-9	Monday	Joshua 2:1-24
Tuesday	Psalms 27	Tuesday	Luke 12:1-12
Wednesday	Psalms 1	Wednesday	James 2:14-26
Thursday	2 Tim 1:6-14/3:10-4:8	Thursday	Acts 10:1-48
Friday	Joshua 1:10-18	Friday	Nehemiah 4:6-23

Week 3		Week 8	
Monday	Joshua 3:1-17	Monday	Joshua 10:1-27
Tuesday	Joshua 4:1-5:1	Tuesday	Matthew 6:5-15
Wednesday	Acts 2:22-41	Wednesday	Joshua 10:28-11:14
Thursday	Gen 12:1ff/Gal 3:15ff	Thursday	Joshua 11:15-12:24
Friday	Psalm 145	Friday	1 Peter 1:3-21
Week 4		Week 9	
Monday	Joshua 5:2-12	Monday	Jos 13:1ff/Rev 21:1ff
Tuesday	Colossians 2:6-15	Tuesday	Joshua 14:1-15:63
Wednesday	Luke 22:7-23	Wednesday	Joshua 16:1-17:18
Thursday	1 Cor 11:17-34	Thursday	Joshua 18:1-19:51
Friday	Hebrews 3:7-4:11	Friday	Psalm 73
Week 5		Week 10	
Monday	Joshua 5:13-6:5	Monday	Joshua 20:1-9
Tuesday	Exodus 3:1-17	Tuesday	Joshua 21:1-42
Wednesday	Matthew 10:1-42	Wednesday	Hebrews 9:1-28
Thursday	Joshua 6:6-27	Thursday	Hebrew 10:1-25
Friday	Joshua 6:15-27	Friday	1 Corinthians 9:1-18
Week 6		Week 11	
Monday	Joshua 7:1-27	Monday	Joshua 21:43-45
Tuesday	Ezekiel 18:1-32	Tuesday	Romans 5:1-11
Wednesday	1 Corinthians 5:1-13	Wednesday	Joshua 22:1-34
Thursday	Mark 9:14-29	Thursday	Joshua 23:1-16
Friday	Joshua 8:1-29	Friday	1 Tim 1:3-20/6:11-21
Week 7		Week 12	
Monday	Joshua 8:30-35	Monday	2 Cor 6:14-7:1
Tuesday	Joshua 9:1-27	Tuesday	Joshua 24:1-15
Wednesday	Joshua 9:18b-27	Wednesday	John 6:25-59
Thursday	Isaiah 19:1-25	Thursday	Joshua 24:16-28
Friday	Matthew 15:21-39	Friday	Joshua 24:29-33

Week 1 (20th to 24th April)

Joshua 1:1-18: Going in and going on

Note: If you haven't yet read the introduction to this reading plan, would you do so now? It contains an explanation of how the plan should be used.

Monday: Joshua 1:1-9

The Israelites were camped just to the east of the River Jordan awaiting instructions to cross into Canaan. Moses, God's "servant" (v.2), who had led them for 40 years, had died and Joshua, previously his assistant, had been commissioned as his successor (see the Appendix, section 2.5). Both Joshua and the Israelites must have been anxious about what lay ahead.

We don't know how God spoke to Joshua (at this time or later) but he did so. He did five things: first, he reiterated his instruction that the Israelites were to move into the land of Canaan, stating that they were to prepare to do so at once (v.2); secondly, he reiterated his promise to give Canaan to the Israelites (vv.3-5a/6; Deut 11:24-26); thirdly, he assured Joshua that he would be with him as the leader of the Israelites as he had been with Moses (vv.5b/9); fourthly, he told Joshua that he must be "*strong and courageous*" (vv.6/7a/9b); and, finally, he told Joshua to be careful to meditate on his law and obey it (vv.7b-8). The themes underlying these five things recur many times in the book of Joshua. This week we will look at some of them.

The reiteration of God's command that the Israelites enter Canaan was important. The command had originally been given 40 years previously but the Israelites had refused to obey it (see the Appendix, section 2.3). This resulted in God requiring that they stay in the desert until all those who had rebelled had died (Nu 14:21-23/26-30). However, it did not alter God's plans (Nu 14:31): he had brought his people out of Egypt to settle them in Canaan and their rebellion was not going to divert him from this plan.

1. *What difference to the way in which we live should viewing the world in the light of God's promises, power and presence make?*
2. *Do you have this perspective all or most of the time? How can you ensure that you constantly have it?*
3. *Are you strong and courageous? Be honest! If not, why not?*

Tuesday: Psalm 27

God told Joshua to be *“strong and courageous”* (Jos 1:6/7a/9a) and said that he should *“not be discouraged”* (v.9b). He also gave Joshua reasons for being confident: first, *“the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go”* (v.9b); and, secondly, God said that he would ensure that Joshua would succeed in his task of leading the people into their inheritance (v.6).

Psalm 27 was written at least a couple of hundred years after the time of Joshua and the situation of its author, King David, was very different from that of Joshua. However, the basic message is the same as that delivered to Joshua: don't be afraid because God is with you (Ps 27:1).

We don't know when David wrote the Psalm. It may have been before he became king, when he was pursued by King Saul, or it may have been while he was king, during which time he faced many dangerous situations including rebellions against his rule from within his own family (e.g. see 2 Sam 15ff). Viewed from a worldly perspective, his situation on occasions looked bleak but he did not have a purely worldly perspective. He knew that God was sovereign, that God would hear his cry for help (vv.10/13) and that he thus had no reason to fear human enemies (vv.2-3).

David prayed for protection (vv.9/12) but that is only one of several petitions: he also asked that he might *“dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life”* (v.4; a picturesque way of asking that he would always be as close as possible to God); he asked for mercy (v.7); and he asked for guidance along God's ways (v.11). His priority was staying close to God and serving him. He was confident that, if he were to do this, all would be well.

David's final words are a reminder to himself: *“be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD”* (v.14). We may imagine that he was intending to sit down and do nothing but his life indicates that he realised that, like Joshua, he was called to trust in God and step out in faith. The same is true of us.

1. Are you confident that God will never leave or forsake you (Heb 13:5)? Why or why not? How do you think your confidence could be reinforced?
2. Is your priority staying close to God and serving him? What is the relationship between serving God and having confidence in him?
3. Do you pray like David did? Why not do so now?

Wednesday: Psalm 1

Joshua was told, *“Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it”* (Jos 1:8a; the *Book of the Law* was probably part of the first five books of the Old Testament, the only part of the Bible that then existed). Joshua was told that obedience was the way to being successful and prosperous, which does not mean having a lot of money but rather living a productive and fulfilled life in God’s service (Jos 1:7b/8b).

Psalms 1 generalises and expands upon this, telling us that a certain type of person is *“blessed”* (v.1). This does not refer to a subjective happy feeling but to objective blessing, being blessed by God. A blessed person will *“yield fruit”* (i.e. be productive; v.3b) and *“prosper”* (v.3d). In addition, they will be firmly rooted and constantly refreshed (v.3a). In short, God will watch over their lives (v.6, *“righteous”* here meaning following God’s ways).

The Psalm mentions two fundamental characteristics of person who is blessed in this sense: negatively, they don’t copy ungodly people (v.1); and, positively, they focus on God’s law (v.2). It is not being suggested that it is necessary to avoid contact with those who do not follow God. The apostle Paul expressly denied that this is the case, pointing out that, to avoid association with immoral people in the world, one would have to leave the world (1 Cor 5:9-10). What is essential is that we don’t follow their ways or align our attitudes with theirs (v.1).

This is easier said than done. It is easy to absorb the attitudes and practices of the world around us without even realising that we are doing this. We need to ensure that we don’t conform to the pattern of the world and that we have our minds transformed by the Holy Spirit (Ro 12:2). Both Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1 indicate that, to do this, we need to take delight in God’s law and meditate on it so that we completely absorb it (v.2). We then need to ensure that we *“do not turn from it to the right or to the left”* (Jos 1:7b). The consequences of failing to do this are explained in vv.4-6.

1. *Do you ever ask yourself whether you have unconsciously absorbed attitudes or practices that are contrary to God’s will? Do so now.*
2. *Do you regularly read the Bible and think about its application to you? What practical steps could you take to enable you benefit more from it?*

Thursday: 2 Timothy 1:6-14 and 3:10-4:8

Timothy was much younger than the apostle Paul. Paul had recruited him as an assistant (Acts 16:1-5) and he remained with Paul for some years before being left at Ephesus to help the church there (1 Tim 1:3). Paul then wrote two letters to him, giving guidance for his work in Ephesus.

Timothy seems to have been of a timid disposition and, on occasions, may not have commanded respect (see 1 Cor 16:10-11). As Paul's two letters indicate, Paul loved him and worried about him. Timothy was very different from Joshua and David and his situation was very different from theirs. Nonetheless, the commands and advice that Paul gave him are strikingly similar to those given to Joshua and acknowledged by David.

Like Joshua, Timothy is called to be strong and courageous: he is reminded that the Holy Spirit gives "*power, love and self-discipline*" (Ch.1 v.7) and he is called boldly to proclaim the Gospel (Ch.1 vv.8/13-14, Ch.4 vv.1-2/5). He is also reminded of the reason why such boldness is rational and appropriate: God is with him by the Holy Spirit (Ch.1 vv.7/14).

Paul does not pretend that things will be easy for Timothy. He asserts that Timothy will suffer on account of being a Christian and being bold (Ch.1 v.8, Ch.3 v.12) and that many people won't listen to what he says (Ch.4 vv.3-4). However, Paul also reminds Timothy of God's faithfulness (Ch.1 v.12b) and gives his own experience as evidence of this (Ch.3 v.10-11). He also invites Timothy to look forward to final salvation (Ch.4 vv.7-8) and indicates that his current actions should be a response to God's salvation (Ch.1 vv.9-10).

Like Joshua, Timothy is also urged to meditate on God's word and base his life on it (Ch.3 vv.14-16). Paul's words are very different from those in Psalm 1 but the message is similar. There are two types of people: those who seek to walk in God's ways, as Timothy was being urged to do, and those who do not, whose way is to be noted and avoided (Ch.3 vv.12-13, Ch.4 vv.3-4). The message is of universal application.

1. *Imagine that today's passages were addressed to you. Which parts particularly encourage you? Which parts do you particularly need to heed?*
2. *When and why do you behave timidly? Are you conscious of the Holy Spirit's presence (vv.7/14)? Do you seek his empowering?*

Friday: Joshua 1:10-18

Joshua ordered the Israelites to get ready to cross the River Jordan “*three days from now*” (which was probably idiom, meaning “very soon”; vv.10-11). When doing so, he reminded the Israelites that God would give the land of Canaan to them (v.11).

Joshua displayed his obedience to God (see God’s command in v.2). He also displayed his faith in God: he did not merely repeat God’s promise to give the Israelites the land but instead asserted that God would do so. He was confident that, if God promised something, he would do it. Unlike most of the Israelites, he had long had this faith: 40 years earlier, as a young man, he had urged the Israelites to trust God and enter the land of Canaan but they had refused to do so (Nu 14:6-10). He was commanding the Israelites not to repeat their rebellion.

There was also a specific issue to which he had to attend. The tribes of Reuben and Gad and one of the clans of the tribe of Manasseh, Makir, had been allowed to settle to the east of the River Jordan on condition that their fighting men would fight alongside the rest of the Israelites in Canaan (see the Appendix, section 2.4). Joshua called on them to fulfil this promise (vv.12-15). It was very important that the Israelites remain one people and support one another. They needed to accept an obligation to one another and it was important that they *be seen to be doing so* otherwise suspicion and resentment could arise. This is probably why the so-called “Transjordan tribes” were required to commit to cross the Jordan *ahead* of the rest of the Israelites (v.14).

The Transjordan tribes did not try to wriggle out of their commitment to Moses. In fact, they not only confirmed it but committed to accepting Joshua’s leadership (v.17a) and declared that they would put to death any of their number who disobeyed him (v.18a). They then repeated God’s command to Joshua to be strong and courageous (v.18b). In essence, they were committing to him but reminding him of the part that he had to play.

1. *To be strong and courageous, Joshua needed to know God’s promises. How good is your grasp of his promises to you? How can you improve it?*
2. *Why was it important that the Israelites remained one people? Do you agree that we have an obligation to support other Christians? Why is this?*

Week 2 (27th April to 1st May)

Joshua 2:1-24: A surprising work of God

Monday: Joshua 2:1-24

Joshua saw no conflict between acting in faith and planning: he sent spies to find out what lay ahead of the Israelites (v.1). However, today's passage is not primarily about the spies, who got themselves into a very difficult situation, trapped in Jericho. It is about Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute (v.2).

Rahab clearly wanted to save her own skin when the Israelites defeated the people of Jericho (vv.12-13) but we need to be careful that we don't read history backwards: when Rahab harboured the spies, the defeat lay in the future; Rahab could not be sure that the Israelites would prevail; furthermore, the king of Jericho was suspicious that she was harbouring the spies (vv.2-3) and, if her actions had been discovered, she would have been killed immediately. Hence, she took a huge risk in acting as she did. Why?

The answer is that, extraordinarily, she had faith in God (vv.8-11). She acknowledged that the LORD is "*God in heaven above and on the earth below*" (i.e. not merely one tribal deity among many but the one true God; v.11). Consequently, she was sure that the Israelites would prevail (v.9). In other words, Rahab was not a mere traitor who aligned herself with the enemies of her people: she had switched her allegiance to the LORD.

The spies also wanted to save themselves and so cut a deal (vv.14/17-21a). This deal was a breach of the literal wording of both the command to destroy the Canaanites (Deut 7:2) and the prohibition on entering into treaties with them (Deut 23:6). Despite this, there is no hint of criticism of the spies or of Joshua for endorsing what they had done. Joshua recognised that people who turned in faith to God should be saved. In other words, as indicated in Hebrews 11:31, Rahab's faith saved her and her family, who must have been aware of what was going on (vv.13/18; see Jas 2:25).

1. *What caused Rahab to fear the LORD more than the king of Jericho and put her trust in him? Might people today come to God for a similar reason?*
2. *How did Rahab obtain knowledge about God? How did you do so? How do other people today do so? Consider Ro 10:14).*

Tuesday: Luke 12:1-12

Rahab doubtless assisted the spies in part because she was fearful. We may feel uneasy about this: we would prefer that people do the right things for more noble reasons. However, the Bible repeatedly indicates that fear is a legitimate motive for turning to God. We are told that *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom”* (Prov 9:10) and Rahab is a good example of this.

Some suggest that *“fear God”* merely means *“hold God in awe”* but, whilst we certainly should be in awe of God, we are also called to recognise his frightening power and the terrifying consequences of falling foul of him: *“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Heb 10:31).

Jesus recognised that fear motivates people to do wrong (or not do right), particularly when they are faced with the threat of physical harm. He instructed those in the vast crowd that had gathered to hear him (Lk 12:1) that they should not fear physical violence from evil people (v.4). We may observe that this is easier said than done. Jesus doubtless knew this but he also recognised that this is because we often have the wrong perspective: when under pressure, we may think only of our life on earth and the power of the person who is threatening us. We should instead consider eternity and the power of God (v.5): death is not the end (v.4) and, if the person threatening us is terrifying, how much more terrifying is God!

Jesus’s teaching in today’s passage was clearly particularly directed at people who might deny him on account of fear of others (notably the Pharisees, v.1) but his point is quite general. On other occasions, he warned of God’s judgment on all wrongdoing, the parable of the weeds in Matthew 13 being a notable example of this. We should fear this judgment.

However, Jesus also reminded his audience of God’s love and care for people (vv.6-7). As the apostle Peter was to find out after he denied Jesus on account of fear, forgiveness is available (Lk 22:54-62, Jn 21:15-19). God’s love ultimately casts out fear for those who trust in him (v.7; 1 Jn 4:18).

1. *To what extent do you fear God? How does this impact your behaviour?*
2. *You doubtless prefer to talk of God’s love than of his judgment but Jesus told his apostles to warn of God’s judgment (Acts 10:42; cf. 1 Cor 9:16). Why may this be necessary? Do you warn people? Why or why not?*

Wednesday: James 2:14-26

There is a danger that we think that, when the Bible calls on us to have “*faith*” or to “*believe*”, it is simply urging that we accept certain truths (e.g. the truths set out in the Nicene Creed). That is a serious misunderstanding: as James points out, even demons know that God exists (and much more besides) and that does not help them (v.19).

We may think that James is contradicting the apostle Paul’s emphasis on faith alone being necessary for our acceptance by God (e.g. Ro 3:21-28; Eph 2:8; see Jn 3:16) but he isn’t. James knew that salvation is by faith: it is those whose faith stands up under testing who receive God’s salvation (Ch.1 vv.2-4/12); we gain “*birth*” (i.e. salvation; cf. Jn 3:5-8) “*through the word of truth*” (Ch.1 v.18); it is those who are “*rich in faith*” who “*inherit the kingdom*” (Ch.2 v.5). Faith, faith, faith! There is no salvation without it.

James’s point relates to the nature of faith. He poses a question: “*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?*” (Ch.2 v.14). The implied answer is clearly “*none*”. Just as mere pious expressions of goodwill do not deal with physical need (v.16) so mere pious expressions of faith do not deal with spiritual need (v.17). Why? Because they are mere hot air! James’s point is **not** that faith is fine but, in order for us to be accepted by God, works need to be added to it; his point is that, without works, faith is in and of itself dead (v.18). It isn’t real.

By way of example, James reminds us that Abraham’s faith was shown to be real by his obedience in offering his son to God (vv.21-24). Many other examples could be given. In Hebrews 11, we are told that it was faith that “*the ancients were commended for*” (Heb 11:2) and there follows a long list of those had faith. In each case, their faith is displayed in what they did. One of those named is Rahab (Heb 11.31): her faith was shown to be real by her deeds. We need to make sure that ours is just as real.

1. *How did you move from knowledge of God to true faith in him (assuming that you have done so)? How do others do so?*
2. *How is your faith manifested in action? Does any of your behaviour stem from weaknesses in your trust in God? How can you strengthen that trust?*
3. *If someone were to examine your life, what things might they find that might cause doubt about whether your faith is real?*

Thursday: Acts 10:1-48

It is worth asking how the Israelites reacted to the idea that Rahab was to be saved and, indeed, to become part of their community. We don't know but we can have a good guess: they had been terrified of the Canaanites (see Nu 13:26-14:4) and were doubtless still apprehensive about them; furthermore, they regarded Canaanite practices as loathsome (which they were, see the Appendix, section 3.4); and Rahab herself was a prostitute. Yet she had turned to God and acted in faith.

The apostle Peter was faced with a situation that gave rise to some of the same issues. As a strict Jew, he avoided associating with non-Jews (v.28) and contact with Roman soldiers (the occupying force) would have been particularly obnoxious to him. Doubtless his time with Jesus had been unsettling in this respect: he saw Jesus speaking with a Samaritan woman (John 4:27); witnessed his ministry in the gentile region of the Decapolis (Mk 7:31ff); probably knew of his healing of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7:24-30); and heard his command to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19-20). Yet Peter's attitude to non-Jews was deeply engrained and it took a miracle to dislodge it.

Peter's vision (vv.11-16) was so shocking that he was unsure what it could possibly mean (v.17). Eating food that was prohibited by the Old Testament food laws would have been even more appalling to him than associating with non-Jews. In addition, the vision was not self-explanatory and it was only when it was put together with the vision of Cornelius (which Cornelius obeyed in faith; vv.3-8) that all became clear (vv.34-35).

Peter responded by proclaiming the Gospel (vv.36-43) and this led to a clear sign of God's acceptance of Cornelius and his entourage (vv.44-46). Peter drew the obvious conclusion (vv.47-48). All people who repent and believe the good news are accepted by God: even Roman soldiers!

- 1. Have you ever come to realise that you have failed to accept someone or recognise God's work in their lives because you have not fully absorbed the breadth of his grace? How can you avoid this? Consider Ro 3:20-26.*
- 2. Might social pressures cause you to disobey God's message of acceptance (or any other command of God)? It happened to Peter: take a look at Gal 2:11-21. How can you avoid it happening to you?*

Friday: Nehemiah 4:6-23

Like Joshua, Nehemiah is an example of someone who combined faith with action. He lived at least 750 years after Joshua and his situation was very different. He had gone to Jerusalem in order to rebuild it with the blessing of the Persian king, in whose empire it then lay (Neh 2:1-9). He focussed first on rebuilding the walls of the city and mobilised the people of the city to achieve this (v.6; Neh 2:17). This was wise but, unfortunately, the people of the surrounding area had no wish to see a revitalised Jerusalem in their midst and they set out to thwart Nehemiah's plans (vv.7-8).

The response of Nehemiah and the people of Jerusalem is instructive: *"we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat"* (v.9). This might sound like hedging their bets: *"We will seek God's help but, just in case we don't get it, we will post a guard"*! Yet, it is clear that Nehemiah did not lack faith: when addressing the people, he said *"Our God will fight for us!"* (v.20b; see also v.14). Like Joshua, he saw no conflict between having faith and acting prudently.

Some Christians have taken the view that praying for something and then taking steps to secure it yourself displays a lack of faith. James Hudson Taylor, the famous founder of the China Inland Mission, once threw his life jacket away in a storm at sea because he believed this. However, as he later came to realise, such an approach is misconceived. We are to trust God for help and use assistance that he provides, whether obviously miraculous or not. Hence, Nehemiah used the resources available to him (vv.13/21-23).

That said, we must also ensure that we don't rely on the things that God has provided rather than on God himself. Nehemiah had armed men and he used them but he did not rely on them. We may have all sorts of other things and, like Nehemiah, we should make use of them but we must not rely on them (Ps 20:7). On occasions, the difference between use and reliance may not be obvious to an outside observer but is nonetheless real.

1. *Do you tend to pray about things and then do nothing, or pray but in essence rely on yourself rather than God? How can you ensure that, like Joshua and Nehemiah, you combine prayerful trust and personal action?*
2. *How can we decide when, having prayed, we need to act and when we should simply await God's answer to our prayers?*

Week 3 (4th to 8th May)

Joshua 3:1-5:1: Courage for the unknown way

Monday: Joshua 3:1-17

The Israelites were probably astonished by the suggestion that they were about to cross the Jordan. There was a ford but it was over 15km to the north. Where they were to cross, the gradient caused the river to flow fast. Furthermore, it was spring and so the Jordan was in flood (v.15a). The idea of tens of thousand of people crossing it would likely have sounded absurd.

Joshua was told to arrange for priests to carry the *“ark of the covenant”* (also called the *“ark of the LORD; v.13”*) towards the river and then stand with it in the water (v.8). The ark was a large box containing the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written (Ex 25:16). It symbolised the presence of God. All the people were commanded to follow it at a distance, since they would not otherwise know which way to go (vv.4/14).

They did so and, as soon as the priests entered the water, the flow of the river ceased (vv.15b-16). The people were thus able to cross on dry ground (v.17). It was a remarkable miracle. There are examples of earthquakes in the Jordan valley stopping the flow of the river (most recently in 1927, when the blockage lasted for 20 hours) but, irrespective of how the miracle was effected, God had done what he told Joshua he would do (v.13). He has said that the flow of river would stop at a particular moment and it had.

Why did God do this? First, he wanted the people to know for certain that he, *“the living God”* (v.10), was with them as their ultimate leader and that he would fulfil his promise that they would occupy Canaan (v.10); they should neither fear what lay ahead nor rely on themselves. Secondly, he wanted to exalt Joshua before the Israelites (v.7); the Israelites needed to know that he was God’s chosen leader and that they should follow him.

1. *What aspects of God’s power does the miracle reveal? Why does it not matter how the miracle was effected?*
2. *Why do you think God chose that part of the river while it was in flood?*
3. *Why were the people told to “consecrate” (i.e. dedicate) themselves to God (v.5)? Did it relate to what God was about to do, their service or both?*

Tuesday: Joshua 4:1-5:1

You may find chapter 4 a bit confusing. The author uses a “backwards and forwards” approach that is designed to emphasise key points rather than methodically tell a story in strict chronological order. Hence, he keeps looping back to things and filling in extra detail as he does so.

The role of the ark of the covenant is stressed: the flow of the river was “*cut off before [it]*” (v.7); it remained in the river while the people crossed (vv.10-11); and, when it was carried out of the river bed, the river began to flow again (v.18). Of course, the ark was not in any way magical: it was a symbol reminding the people that it was God himself who was controlling the flow of the river and the destiny of the people.

We are also told of the miracle’s significance. When God called his people out of slavery in Egypt, he parted the waters of the Red Sea to enable them to escape (the “Exodus”; Ex 14:15-31); then 40 years later, he parted the waters of the Jordan to enable them to enter the land he had promised to them (the “Eisodus”; vv.21-23). The two miracles showed the Israelites that their salvation was entirely the work of God and this, together with the judgment that they had experienced in the 40 intervening years, pointed to the need to “*fear the LORD*” (v.24). They also served to show God’s power to “*all the peoples of the earth*” (v.24) and we know that they had this effect among the peoples of Canaan (Ch.5 v.1/Ch.2 vv.10-11). Lastly, as intended Joshua was exalted, with the result that he became a revered leader (v.14).

The miracle that the Israelites had witnessed was not something that God was going to repeat. Hence, he commanded that a memorial of it be set up. This comprised a pile of stones taken from the very place in the Jordan where the priests had been standing with the ark (Ch.4 vv.1-3). On its own, a pile of stones would not mean much but it would act as a reminder and a prompt for questions (vv.5-7). As in the case of the Passover ceremony, the Israelites were commanded to explain the significance of the stones to their children (vv.6-7; Ex 12:24-27; Deut 6:20-25).

1. *What role did the Israelites have to play in their salvation? What role do we play in ours? Consider Eph 2:8-10 and John 10:27.*
2. *Why were 12 stones taken from the middle of the Jordan used for the memorial (v.2)? What relevance does the significance of this have for us?*

Wednesday: Acts 2:22-41

Hebrews 3:7-4:11, which we will look at in a week's time, uses the Israelites' experience between the Exodus and the settlement in Canaan as an analogy for our lives: the Israelites were offered rest in Canaan and we are offered eternal rest following physical death; and like the Israelites, we need to ensure that we are following God so that we don't miss out on that rest.

Taking their cue from this, Christians have often likened death to crossing the Jordan and entering Canaan: *"When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside; death of death and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side"* (*Guide me o thou Great Redeemer*, verse 3). The comparison is instructive, provided that it is not pressed too far (e.g. the Israelites knew that they would need to fight after crossing the Jordan whereas we will not have to struggle after death).

We should think about the comparison between Joshua and Jesus, which is implicit in the Hebrews' passage mentioned above. Joshua was appointed by God to lead the Israelites into Canaan (Nu 27:18-23) and Jesus was appointed to lead his people into God's eternal kingdom (John 14:2). Furthermore, in order to succeed in his task, Joshua needed to be exalted before the Israelites and Jesus needed to be exalted before the world. Joshua's exaltation was achieved by the miracle of the crossing of the Jordan (Jos 4:14); as today's passage indicates, Jesus's came through his resurrection and ascension (Acts 2:32-33).

Jesus's miracles were signs of who he was (v.22) but much the biggest sign was the raising of Jesus from the dead (v.24). This was God's public endorsement of him. Like God's endorsement of Joshua, it represented a call to follow him (vv.37-38; cf. Phil 2:9-11). In Joshua's case, most people obeyed that call (Jos 4:14); in Jesus's case, many did, and do, obey (v.41) but many did, and do, not. This is tragic: the following of Joshua was both God's command and God's sole means of fulfilling his promise of salvation. The same is true of Jesus (Lk 14:27 and Acts 4:12).

1. Which aspects of the Israelites' crossing of the Jordan are analogous to death? Consider both the role of the Israelites and the acts of God.
2. Considering what we have read in the first four chapters of the book of Joshua, in what ways was Joshua like Jesus? In what ways was he different?

Thursday: Genesis 12:1-9 and Galatians 3:15-29

The promise of the land of Canaan underlies the book of Joshua. It was originally made by God to Abraham when he first arrived in Canaan having left his home country at God's command (Gen 12:7) and repeated on several occasions (Gen 13:14-17, 15:18-21, 17:8). It was then renewed when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Ex 3:17) and repeated expressly or implicitly on many occasions after the Exodus (e.g. Nu 13:1/Deut 7:1, 34:1-4/Jos 1:3,3:10). It was fundamental to God's plans.

The promise was, in fact, only part of those plans. God also told Abraham, *"I will make you into a great nation"* (Gen 12:2a) and *"all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"* (v.3c). Again, these promises were repeated on several occasions (Gen 13:16, 15:5, 17:2).

At one level, these promises were fulfilled in the centuries following the time of Abraham: the physical descendants of Abraham (the Israelites) did indeed greatly increase in number (Ex 1:7) and, as we shall see as we read Joshua, God did indeed give them the land of Canaan. Nonetheless, there were two issues: first, the promises were greater than the fulfilment (in particular, it is hard to see how *"all peoples on earth"* had been blessed by what had happened to the Israelites); secondly, it swiftly became clear that simple physical descent from Abraham was not the key issue (e.g. the line of promise was to be through Isaac and not through his older half-brother Ismael, Gen 21:12; cf. Gal 4:21-31).

In our second reading, Paul says that the promise about Abraham's *"seed"* (i.e. offspring or descendant, Gen 12:7) related to Jesus (Gal 3:16) and the promise of blessing all the peoples was fulfilled through him (v.26; see Gal 4:6-7). The promises to Abraham are fulfilled in Jesus: all those who put their faith in him, people of every nation, are heirs to those promises (v.29); the blessing is for those who are descendants of Abraham in the sense that they share his faith (Gal 4:28). God's gift of Canaan to the Israelites thus provides assurance that he will fulfil those of his promises to Abraham of which we are the beneficiaries.

1. *What does it mean to say that we are "heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:29) and "children of the promise" (Gal 4:28)?*
2. *What is the test to determine who God's people are (vv.26-29)?*

Friday: Psalm 145

God's acts in salvation, or any fulfilment of his promises, should cause us to respond in praise. When he wrote Psalm 145, King David did just this.

In this psalm, David does not refer to any specific events, although many such events must underlie what he says. Instead, he focusses on the big picture: the things that make God praiseworthy. He recognises that there is too much to mention, even too much to grasp (v.3b). Hence, his greatest praise is directed at the basic fact that God is who he is (v.3a).

David refers to God's "*awesome works*", "*great deeds*" and "*mighty acts*" and he may well have had in mind things like the miracle of the crossing of the Jordan (vv.6/12). He also remembers: God's upholding of those who fall (v.14); his giving of food to people (v.15), satisfying of their desires and protection of them (vv.16/18-19); his watching over those who love him; and his destruction of the wicked (v.20).

We are reminded of God's power (v.6) and might (v.11) as well as a number of aspects of his character: his goodness (v.7a); his righteousness (which refers to a number of things including his faithfulness to his promises, steadfast love and resolute opposition to evil; vv.7b/17); his graciousness and compassion (vv.8-9), including being "*slow to anger and rich in love*" (v.8b). David brings all of this together by referring to the glories of God's kingdom (v.12b) and the fact that it will endure for ever (v.13).

Of course, it is important that we give God thanks for specific acts, including in particular things that he has done for us. However, it is also important that, on occasions, we do as David did – pull back and recognise the general things that the specifics point to.

There one final point to note. David does not want his praise to be confined to him alone: he says that he will praise God and then calls on "*every creature*" to do so (v.21); and he anticipates that one generation will tell another of the wonders of God (v.4). We are back to Joshua 4:6-7!

1. *What acts of God of any kind (not merely the spectacular) have you experienced. Praise him for these things and for all his mighty acts.*
2. *Think about God's character as described in Ps 145. Which aspects of his character have you most benefited from? Again, praise him for these things.*

Week 4 (11th to 15th May)

Joshua 5:2-12: Signs of the promise

Monday: Joshua 5:2-12

Having crossed the Jordan, the Israelites were vulnerable to attack but the Canaanites had doubtless been taken by surprise by the crossing and they were paralysed by fear (v.1). The Israelites also had a reason to avoid immediate conflict: they needed to sort out their relationship with God.

Joshua 4:19 tells us that the crossing took place on the tenth day of the first month, which was four days before the feast of the Passover (which we will consider further on Wednesday; Ex 12:17-20). This commemorated God's rescue of the Israelites from Egypt and thus the fact that they were his people but there was a problem: God's law stated that only men who had been circumcised could eat the Passover meal (Ex 12:48-49) and the men who had crossed the Jordan were not circumcised (Jos 5:4-5/7b). We don't know why this was the case but, whatever the reason, it was essential that the men were circumcised at once and Joshua arranged this (vv.1-2).

This having happened, God declared that he had "*rolled away the reproach of Egypt*" from them (v.9). It is not clear precisely what this means but God had clearly put the past wrong-doing and humiliation of the Israelites behind them. The people could thus celebrate their first Passover in Canaan (v.10) and then enjoy the produce of the land (v.11). They had been promised "*a land flowing with milk and honey*" (v.6b) and they were getting their first taste of it. At the same time, the manna that God had provided for their sustenance since they left Egypt ceased to be supplied (v.12a; cf. Ex 16:13-36). They could now live off the land (v.12b).

The Israelites thus obediently accepted a sign of their being God's people, remembered their rescue by God and tasted his blessing. Subject to waiting for the men to heal, they were ready to take control of the promised land.

1. *What are the signs of us being God's people and acts of remembrance of our rescue? How significant do you consider these to be?*
2. *Consider the different ways in which God provided for the physical needs of his people (e.g. vv.11-12). How does he provide for you?*

Tuesday: Colossians 2:6-15

Although circumcision was practised by various peoples in the ancient middle east in addition to the Israelites (e.g. the Egyptians), God indicated that, for the Israelites, it was to be a sign of his covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:9-14). All male Israelites and male foreigners who wanted to be part of the covenant people (Ex 12.48-49) had to be circumcised.

Circumcision was not something that in and of itself secured acceptance by God: it did not guarantee salvation. As Joshua 5:4-6 indicates, the Israelites who rebelled had been circumcised but God still condemned them. Their circumcision should have reminded them of God's covenant and the commitment to following God that it implied but they did not live up to their circumcision. As noted yesterday, they lacked faith and missed God's rest.

There is no need for Christian men to be circumcised. In fact, the apostle Paul rejects any suggestion of this in the strongest terms, saying that we must refuse circumcision (Gal 5:2-12). His reason is that being circumcised is a legal requirement that is inconsistent with being justified by faith in Jesus (Gal 5:4). The covenant commitment symbolised by circumcision is now found in Jesus. When we put our trust in him, we are *"united with him"* (Ro 6:5/Jn 15:4) and, metaphorically, circumcised through him (Col 2:11).

Union with Jesus is symbolised by baptism. In today's passage, Paul talks of us being *"buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God"* (v.12). Christ died for us; by faith we are united with him such that it is as if we have suffered the death that our wrongdoing deserves (Ro 6:3-4); and Christ rose from the dead and by faith we are united with him such that we too may be resurrected (Ro 6:5).

Like circumcision, baptism does not guarantee salvation. We need to use it to remind ourselves of God's covenant and the commitment it implies. Our salvation comes entirely through what Jesus did (vv.13-15) and we need to ensure that we are *"rooted and built up in him"* (vv.6-7).

1. *Think of the ceremony of baptism. What aspects of our salvation does it illustrate? Why should all Christians be baptised? Cf. Jn 3:3 and Ro 6:1-7.*
2. *How can we ensure that we are "rooted and built up" in Jesus and "strengthened in the faith" (v.7)?*

Wednesday: Luke 22:7-23

The Bible refers to many memorials in addition to the stones at Gilgal (Jos 4:20). The most important in Old Testament times was the Passover.

After the Pharaoh had repeatedly refused to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt, God told them to sacrifice lambs, put some of the lambs' blood on their door frames and eat the meat while being dressed to depart (Ex 12:1-11). That night, God struck down the first-born of Egypt but passed over the households with blood on their doors (Ex 12:12-13/29-30). Pharaoh then commanded the Israelites to leave, which they did (Ex 12:31-39).

God commanded the Israelites to remember their rescue by means of an annual meal (the Passover meal; Ex 12:14-27) and, at the time of Jesus, well over 1000 years later, they continued to do so. Jewish people still do so.

The "Last Supper" was a Passover meal (Lk 22:7-13). Jesus and the disciples would have known what it symbolised but Jesus was to give it a wholly new significance. The first sign of this was his statement that the meal was to "*find its fulfilment in the kingdom of God*" (v.16). It was a memorial meal, so how could it be "*fulfilled*"? Then, instead of saying the normal words about the bread and wine (referring to the events of Exodus 12), Jesus said that they were to be consumed as a memorial of his death (vv.19-20). The disciples were doubtless astonished but later realised that the Passover pointed to a far greater salvation than that of their ancestors: the saving from eternal death of all those who turn to Jesus in faith (1 Pet 3:18).

We are commanded to celebrate the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion) in remembrance of that salvation (v.19; cf. 1 Cor 11:23-26). We do not obtain salvation by taking communion but if, having faith in Jesus, we use it to focus on his death for us, it will strengthen our faith and help to build us up. Its origin as a Passover meal should also remind us that we should not be keeping this to ourselves: we should be ensuring that children understand the significance of what we are remembering (Ex 12:25-27; Jos 4:6-7).

1. *What did Jesus mean when he said that the Passover meal was to "find its fulfilment in the kingdom of God" (v.16)? Consider 1 Cor 5:7.*
2. *What more can you do to ensure that the next generation remembers what Jesus did for us? What more might St John's Church as a whole do?*

Thursday: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

As Joshua 5:2-9 indicates, preparing for the Passover was a serious business. The Passover meal was a memorial of God's saving acts and the Israelites needed to ensure that they were in a right relationship with God before participating in it. Participation did not establish a right relationship: only those who were already part of the covenant community could participate.

As indicated yesterday, the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion) is similar: we are not forgiven and accepted by God by means of our participation in it; we need to make sure that we have responded to God in faith before we do so. Furthermore, as the apostle Paul points out in today's reading, we need to treat communion seriously otherwise we will be participating to our own condemnation.

Paul's criticism of the Corinthians is sweeping (v.17). The church clearly came together for a communal meal, during which the Lord's Supper was celebrated. Unfortunately, these meetings were an occasion for division (v.18). It appears that members of the church were eating and celebrating what they doubtless called the Lord's Supper in separate groups (v.21; cf. v.33). Paul declares that, whatever the Corinthians might call them, such meals were not the Lord's Supper (v.20). They had the external appearance of the Lord's Supper but not the reality of it. Furthermore, they resulted in the humiliation of some members of the church (v.22).

Paul then makes an important general statement: *"whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord"* (v.27). Guilty of sinning against Christ's act of redemption! In other words, treating it as if it were of no worth. Unsurprisingly, Paul says that anyone who does not participate appropriately, brings judgment on themselves (v.29). People need to be more self-aware and realise what they are doing (v.31). They also need to remember who instituted the Lord's Supper (vv.23-25) and what they are doing when they participate in it (v.26).

1. *"Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup" (v.28). What should you do in the light of this?*
2. *Consider Matthew 5:23-24. This is about sacrifices but what Jesus said is applicable to communion. What does it require of us? Do you do this?*

Friday: Hebrews 3:7-4:11

Joshua 5:6 mentions the rebellion of the Israelites following the Exodus, 40 years earlier, a brief description of which is set out in section 2.3 of the Appendix. The need to circumcise the new generation of men (Jos 5:2) would have reminded the Israelites of the rebellion and, equally importantly, of God's response to it.

Today's passage invites us to learn from these things. It begins by quoting Psalm 95:7-11, which urges a much later generation of the Israelites, if they hear God's voice (i.e. hear or read what God requires), to ensure that they "*do not harden [their] hearts*" (i.e. ensure that they obey God; Ch.3 vv.7-8). It then describes God's anger and vow that the Israelites who left Egypt "*shall never enter my rest*" (i.e. settle in Canaan; v.11; Nu 14:21-23/26-30). His promise to give Canaan to the Israelites would be fulfilled but the generation who had rebelled would not benefit from it.

Although written to the Israelites, the lesson of Psalm 95 applies to us. God has promised "*rest*" (i.e. eternal life in his kingdom) to all his people (Ch.4 vv.9-10) and we need to be careful that we don't miss out (Ch.4 v.1). We need to be careful that we don't follow the example of the Israelites in the desert by turning away from God and disobeying his call to follow him (Ch.3 v.12/Ch.4 v.11). We need to ensure that, when we receive the message of salvation, we hear in obedient faith since, if we don't, like the Israelites, we will find that the message is of no value to us (Ch.4 vv.2/11).

This is a warning that everyone needs to take seriously. God's grace is wonderful and he offers us eternal salvation. We have heard this offer and, as the apostle Paul says we should "*Consider the kindness ... of God ...*" (Ro 11:22). However, as the six dots in the preceding quote may imply, this is only part of the story. The full quote is "*Consider the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness*" (i.e. respond in faith). God's promise of salvation will be fulfilled. The question is whether we will benefit from it.

1. What does it mean to be "*hardened by sin's deceitfulness*" (Ch.3 v.13)? How can we avoid this?
2. Consider both the kindness and the sternness of God. In what ways is he kind and in what ways is he stern? How should we respond to this?

Week 5 (18th to 22nd May)

Joshua 5:13-6:27: Whose victory?

Monday: Joshua 5:13-6:5

Joshua clearly left the Israelite camp at Gilgal to get closer to Jericho, which was about 10km west of where the Israelites crossed the Jordan and was the first target of the Israelites in Canaan (v.13a). He was probably checking the lie of the land and his attempt to discover the allegiance of the man he met was natural in the context of his situation, but he wrongly assumed that the man was either fighting for the Israelites or for the Canaanites (v.13b). The man swiftly disabused him of this error tersely saying “Neither” and stating that he had come “as commander of the army of the LORD” (v.14a), whereupon Joshua fell down in reverence (v.14b). What was going on?

First, who was the man? He may have been an angel. However, he said that Joshua was standing on holy ground and the instructions in Ch.6 vv.1-5 are attributed directly to the LORD and so it is possible that the man was a manifestation of God (Jesus?) himself (cf. Gen 16:7-13/22:11-12).

Secondly, why did the man deny that he was fighting for the Israelites? What we are told in the earlier part of the book might lead us to expect that God would be on the side of the Israelites. However, this would be to misunderstand what God was doing: he did not tell Joshua and the Israelites that he was going to be on their side; he told them that they must ensure that they were on his side and that, if they were, he would bless them.

Thirdly, why did the man appear? Joshua assumed that he was bringing a message (v.14b) and, despite them being attributed directly to the LORD, the instructions in Ch.6: vv.2-5 appear to be the relevant message. In short, God (whether directly or indirectly through an angel) appeared to Joshua to inform him that he (God) was going to fight against Jericho (v.2) and tell Joshua the part that the Israelites were called to play (vv.3-5).

1. How does what the “man” said to Joshua help us to understand God’s action in relation to the Israelites? What about his actions today?
2. Why do you think that God chose such an extraordinary method of delivering Jericho to the Israelites? What does this teach us?

Tuesday: Exodus 3:1-17

The appearance of the man to Joshua has some striking similarities to the appearance of God to Moses. Of course, the circumstances of the two men were very different from one another. Furthermore, in contrast to Joshua, Moses saw no-one but the identity of the person speaking to him was soon crystal clear. However, as in the case of Joshua, Moses saw something that he was unsure about and, on going to investigate (vv.2-3), was confronted by something unexpected and told to recognise that he was on holy ground and to remove his sandals (Jos 5:15 and Ex 3:5), before receiving a message from God (Jos 6:2-5 and Ex 3:7-17).

Joshua doubtless realised that the appearance of the man was further confirmation that the LORD was with him as he had been with Moses and it should have prompted him to remember that, like Moses, he was commissioned by God to lead the people and that he needed to respond in obedience (vv.10/16; cf. Ex 4:1-17). It was also a reminder of two other very important things: God's nature and the reliability of his promises.

In answer to Moses's question about his name (essentially "Who are you?"; v.13), God responded, "*I am who I am*" (v.14). This is a declaration of eternal "being" and total self-sufficiency (God is uncreated); it implies competency and authority far beyond anything in the created order; and it implies that there is something unknowable, or beyond full comprehension, about God. God needs no external support for his authority and power: he is who he is. This is true "*from generation to generation*" (v.15).

Joshua needed to remember this and also that that God has acted in history: he was the God of the Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v.15) and God's promise to Moses had been half fulfilled: the promise was to "*bring you [i.e. the Israelites] up out of your misery in Egypt*" (which half had been fulfilled) "*into the land of the Canaanites ...*" (which half God had told Joshua he was about to fulfil; Ex 3:17). The partial fulfilment should have strengthened Joshua's conviction that the rest of the promise was about to be fulfilled.

1. *How does God's revelation to Moses affect your understanding of him?*
2. *Do you struggle to comprehend God? To what extent do you think that this is inevitable and to what extent do you think that you should understand more? How can you discover more about him?*

Wednesday: Matthew 10:1-42

Jesus's sending out of his twelve disciples may seem very different from God's sending of the Israelites to take Jericho but there are some significant underlying similarities.

Like the Israelites, Jesus's disciples would have been apprehensive about the mission that Jesus assigned to them. They might well receive a hostile reception and they would not be in control of what happened to them. Jesus did not reassure them by telling them that everything would be OK. In fact, told them that they would be *"like sheep among wolves"* (v.16) and that bad things would happen to them both at that time and later (vv.17-18/21-23). Despite this, he gave them solid grounds for confidence.

He assured them of God's presence and went on to say that the Holy Spirit would speak through them (vv.19-20). Then he called on them to ensure that their entire perspective was focussed on God: first, they should not fear the people in the towns that they were visiting but rather fear God (vv.26-28); secondly, they should recognise God's loving care of them (vv.29-31) and his promises of blessing (vv.32/39-42).

Having heard this, like the Israelites before Jericho, the disciples might have thought, "Excellent, God is on our side". However, like the man Joshua met, Jesus disabused them of this simplistic notion. The question was not whether God was on the disciples' side but whether they (and others) were on Jesus's side (vv.32-38). Jesus came to earth with good news (Mk 1:14-15). He proclaimed and displayed God's love and ultimately gave his life as *"a ransom for many"* (Mk 10:45) but he requires total allegiance and, as a result, causes division (vv.35-36). Paradoxically, the one who brings peace with God (Ro 5:1) and is the *"prince of peace"* (Isa 9:6), has also brought not peace between people but *"a sword"* (i.e. conflict; v.34).

The Israelites were called to follow God, execute his plans and obey his commands and God promised them blessings as they did this. Jesus's call and his promise to his disciples were substantively identical.

1. How does what Jesus said to his disciples apply to you?
2. Does what Jesus said cause you discomfort? Why or why not? How should it impact our attitudes and behaviour?

Thursday: Joshua 6:6-27

Even by the standards of the day, Jericho was not a big city at the time of Joshua (contrast Gibeon, Jos 10:2, and Hazor, Jos 11:10) but it was on an elevated site that was suitable for defence, it had walls (perhaps the exteriors of houses linked together) and its gates were securely barred (v.1). Left to themselves, the Israelites would have found it a hard nut to crack. However, they were not left to themselves (Ch.6 v.2).

As had happened in connection with the crossing of the Jordan, the ark of the covenant had a large role to play, being paraded around Jericho every day for a week (vv.11-15). Once again, it needs to be recognised that the ark did not possess some kind of magical qualities. It was simply a symbol of the fact that God himself was present and surrounding Jericho.

Some have suggested that an earthquake caused the walls to fall. This may be or may not be true. As in the case of the stopping of the Jordan, it doesn't matter how God achieved his goal: what matters is that he said that he was going to do something spectacular at a particular time and he did it.

Did the fact that God was going to act mean that the Israelites could sit back and wait for him to do so? Certainly not! They first had to obey God's command to march around the walls for seven days. Their obedience was not *the cause* of the walls falling but it was *God's precondition* for this occurring. In obeying, they acted in faith and the letter to the Hebrews commends them for this (Heb 11:30).

The Israelites were commanded to take Jericho once the walls had fallen (vv.5/17-20). We will consider what then happened tomorrow. Today, the key point to note is that the fact that the Israelites had to do some fighting does not mean that the capture of Jericho was anything other than an act of God: God used a miracle for the first part of the operation but used the Israelites for the second part. He delivered Jericho into the hands of the Israelites (v.2). The victory was his.

1. *Have you ever been conscious of God having acted through you as you have served him? Thank God for this and ask him to do it in the future.*
2. *Do you ever feel too weak and inadequate to serve God? How does today's passage assist in resolving this concern? Consider also 2 Cor 4:7-12.*

Friday: Joshua 6:15-27

Today's passage is the second half of yesterday's. There is more in it that we need to think about.

You may be troubled by the command to kill everyone in the city, which we are told was executed (vv.17/21). This is discussed in section 3 of the Appendix and it is suggested that you read this. It explains why the simplistic suggestion that God could not both be good and command widespread slaughter is wrong and why there is no contradiction between the book of Joshua and Jesus's teaching. In any event, for the reasons given in section 3.8 of the Appendix, there is no justification for using the destruction of the Canaanites as a model for actions by Christians today.

The Israelites not only destroyed everything in Jericho: they burned it (v.24) and Joshua uttered a curse on anyone who rebuilt it (v.26). Subsequently, other places were treated very differently (e.g. only two other places, Ai and Hazor, were burned; cf. Ch.8 v19 and Ch.11 v.11). Why was this? We are not told expressly but it seems likely that the ruins of Jericho were to be another memorial: positively, a memorial to what happens when God's initiative is met with faith in his people and, perhaps, negatively, a memorial to the judgment of God on those who do evil (as the Canaanites had done).

In most ancient warfare, the victorious soldiers plundered captured towns and shared what they seized but obedience to the command to destroy everything prevented the Israelites from doing this. The conquest of Canaan was to be on God's terms and, in the case of Jericho, not an opportunity for personal profit: the only goods exempted from the destruction (metals and metal objects) were to go into the treasury devoted to God (v.19).

The other exception from the destruction was Rahab and her family (vv.22-25). They were initially settled outside the Israelite camp at Gilgal (v.23) but later lived among the Israelites (v.25b), with other foreigners who, we will hear, did likewise. Rahab was to be an ancestor of Jesus (Matt 1:5b).

1. *Do you have questions or concerns about God's commands? If so, write them down and come the Open to Questions service on 31st May.*
2. *Why was it important that the Israelites did not personally profit from the capture of Jericho? What lessons were they (and we) being taught?*

Week 6 (25th to 29th May)

Joshua 7:1-8:29: The tragedy of hidden sin

Monday: Joshua 7:1-27

Joshua seems to have been planning to head from the Jordan valley into the hill country to the west and so sent a small detachment to capture Ai (vv.2-4a; see the Appendix, section 4.1). The defeat of this force (vv.4b-5b) was a huge shock. Joshua and other Israelite leaders were devastated (vv.5c-6) and, in essence, accused God of breaking his promise to be with them (v.7).

God responded robustly: he commanded Joshua to stand (v.10): action was required not abasement; it was not he, God, who had broken his promise but the Israelites (v.11). Joshua himself had told the army that they must not appropriate things God required be destroyed or put into the treasury, since doing so would result in the destruction of the person responsible and *"make the camp of Israel liable to destruction"* (Ch.6 v.18). This command had been disobeyed and, as a result, the Israelites were threatened with the same destruction that God had brought on Jericho (v.12). The people thus needed to reconsecrate themselves (i.e. rededicate themselves to the service of God) and deal with the sin in their midst (vv.13/15).

God then indicated that he had not abandoned the Israelites, saying that he would reveal the identity of the person who had disobeyed (v.14). Joshua obeyed God's command and Achan was identified (vv.16-18). He confessed his sin (vv.20-21) and, proof having been found (v.23), he and his family were executed (v.25b). His burial place was marked by the second memorial raised by the Israelites in Canaan (v.26a). This and the name given to the valley (which means "trouble"; v.26c) were to remind the Israelites that God's promise was conditional on their obedience. The *"commander of the army of the LORD"* had said that he was not for either the Israelites or their enemies (Jos 5:14) and they needed to understand the implications of this.

1. *What was it about Achan's actions that made God so angry? Why was what Achan did so serious? Is there a gap between God's view and yours?*
2. *What two concerns did Joshua draw to God's attention (v.7-9)? Do you ever pray like this? Why or why not? See Moses's prayer in Nu 14:13-16.*

Tuesday: Ezekiel 18:1-32

Yesterday's reading may well raise a question in your mind: are we being told that people may be blamed and punished by God for the wrongdoing of others? Today and tomorrow, we will look at this issue.

We considered Ezekiel 18 when, in 2024, we studied the book of Ezekiel in detail. The Israelites had been driven into exile and some clearly believed this was a consequence of their ancestors' behaviour not their own (v.2). This view may have been based on a serious misunderstanding of Exodus 20:5, which asserts that God punishes *"the children for the sins of the parents"*. God's rebuttal was comprehensive.

First, if a person is righteous (i.e. orientated towards God such that they follow his ways) then they will live (vv.5-9). Conversely, if such a person has a son who does evil then the son will die (vv.10-13/18). Righteousness before God is not inherited! And taking the matter further, if that son himself has a son who is righteous then the grandson will live (vv.14-17; cf. Ex 20:6, which shows that Ex 20:5 does not contradict Ch.18). Guilt before God is not inherited! Our standing before God turns on our own behaviour, not that of our ancestors or our successors (vv.19-20; cf. Deut 24:16).

Equally importantly, if a wicked person repents and turns back to God, they will live. There will be no weighing of their good and bad acts: their offences will be forgotten (vv.21-22; cf. Matt 20:1-16). Conversely, if a righteous person turns away from God, they will die. There will be no weighing: their righteous acts will not be remembered (v.24). The present matters not the past so we must avoid both fatalistic resignation and arrogant presumption.

God asks, *"Is my way unjust?"* and turns the question back on the Israelites (v.25). The problem was not God or their ancestors: it was they themselves; they needed to repent and turn back to God, seeking a new heart and a new spirit (vv.30-31). If they were to do so, they would be welcomed back by God since he *"take[s] no pleasure in the death of the wicked"* but is *"pleased when they turn from their ways and live"* (vv.23/32; see Ro 2:4/2 Pet 3:9).

Are you clear about the basis for God's acceptance and condemnation of people (including you)? If not take another look at 1 John 1:1-2:2, John 3:16 and 2 Cor 5:20-21 and speak to a member of the Leaders & Preachers team.

Wednesday: 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

You may wonder whether God's actions in relation to Achan's disobedience were consistent with Ezekiel 18. Today's passage should help to draw the strands together and also remind you of some other important points.

There was a serious problem relating to sexual sin within the Corinthian church (v.1). It appears that only one man was implicated in this (v.2b) but the apostle Paul condemns the rest of the church for not having done anything about the problem: they should have put the man out of their fellowship (vv.2b/5). The reason that Paul gives for this is that *"a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough"* (v.6).

This is a principle of general application: the toleration of serious sin corrupts the whole church. Dealing with it is thus the responsibility of the church (v.7) and this involves taking decisive action to separate the church from wrongdoers who claim to be brothers and sisters in Christ (vv.12-13). Of course, many questions arise regarding how this should be applied in practice and, down the centuries, different churches have erred both in failing to apply it and in applying it inappropriately (even officiously). Nonetheless, the principle is clear and it explains why the Israelites had a duty to deal with Achan once his wrongdoing was known.

There is also a related point: some sin is so serious that its existence is inconsistent with God's plans being fulfilled. Achan's wrongdoing was an example of this: the invasion of Canaan had to be conducted in a way that glorified God and displayed his holiness; total commitment to God was thus a requirement of the fulfilment of God's promise so God would not permit the conquest of the land to proceed until the Israelites had become aware of the wrongdoing and dealt with it.

In summary, the Israelites were not being punished for Achan's sin. God was reminding them of the conditional nature of his promise and requiring them to uncover the wrongdoing and deal with it.

1. *How might serious sin make God angry today and impact the church as a whole or the people inside or outside of it?*
2. *Why do churches often tolerate such sin among their members? How should it be dealt with?*

Thursday: Mark 9:14-29

The spies that Joshua sent to find information about Ai reported that it was lightly populated and so only a small detachment of troops would be required to capture it (Jos 7:3; in relation to the numbers of soldiers, see the Appendix, section 1.5). Joshua took their advice and defeat followed. You may thus wonder whether complacency played a part in this.

The issue was clearly not complacency about the strength of the defenders of Ai since we are told that the reason for the defeat was not their strength but the fact that God was opposing the Israelites (Ch.7 v.12a). Nonetheless, complacency or, more accurately and seriously, presumption played a part.

Why did the Israelites not know about Achan's sin before the attack on Ai? The absence of any reference to them seeking God's blessing prior to the attack may be significant: had the Israelites done so, he would surely have revealed the issue; but they assumed he would be with them. Joshua and the other Israelite leaders don't seem even to have considered the possibility that there might have been a issue within their camp (v.7).

Presumption is a problem that has beset God's people down the ages and we see another example of it in today's reading. Jesus had sent his 12 disciples on a mission and, among other things, given them power to drive out demons (Mk 6:7). We know that, when they went out with a larger group later, they returned delighted that *"even the demons submit to us in your name"* (Lk 10:17) and they were doubtless similarly delighted on the previous occasion. However, to their surprise, they could not drive out the spirit possessing the boy mentioned in our reading (Mk 9:18/28). Why?

Jesus was exasperated with the disciples (v.19). He later told them that *"This kind can come out only by prayer"* (v.29). He was not indicating that there is another kind of demon that does not require prayer; he was saying that, to deal with demons (*"this kind"*), you need to pray. By implication, the disciples had failed to do so. They had been guilty of presumption.

1. *Can you recall situations in which you have been guilty of presuming upon God? How should we seek to avoid this?*
2. *How can we pray about "unknown unknowns" (i.e. the possibility of there being something relevant to us that we haven't considered)?*

Friday: Joshua 8:1-29

Joshua and the Israelites were doubtless shaken by the events recorded in chapter 7. God reassured them, saying that he had delivered Ai into their hands (v.1; note the past tense, “*I have delivered*”, which emphasises the certainty of the fulfilment of God’s word).

Joshua was commanded to destroy Ai (v.2) but there were to be two important differences between the taking of Ai and that of Jericho: first, there was to be no miracle of the kind seen at Jericho and so the Israelites were going to have to fight; secondly, the Israelites were permitted to keep the plunder and, in particular, the livestock for themselves.

The miracle of the crossing of the Jordan and that of Jericho were one off events. That is why the Israelites were commanded to set up a memorial in the case of the former and left Jericho as a ruin in commemoration of the latter. They were not to expect such miracles to be God’s normal way of working. Instead, they were to remember the miracles as evidence that God was with them and would fulfil his promises to them, albeit normally in less spectacular ways. Despite the difference in means of its capture, God was just as responsible for the delivery of Ai into the hands of the Israelites as he had been responsible for the delivery of Jericho.

Coming straight after the crisis caused by Achan’s actions, God’s permission to the Israelites to keep the plunder and livestock of Ai was highly significant. The issue in relation to Achan had not been that, in principle, the taking of plunder was wrong; it was that Achan had disobeyed a command of God that applied to the taking of Jericho. That command was probably issued so as to force the Israelites to recognise that they were to rely on totally on God, not on their ability to seize things. The lesson having been learned, God could allow them to take things, as it were, as a gift from him. This was particularly relevant in the case of livestock since the Israelites required animals to live and being forced to burn them at Jericho must have required great faith in God.

1. *In prayer, do you tend to tell, or at least “advise”, God how to act? Are you open to God working however he wants?*
2. *Do you acknowledge that everything you have comes from God? See Ps 139:13-18 and 1 Chron 29:10-14. What are the implications of this?*

Week 7 (1st to 5th June)

Joshua 8:30-9:27: Deception and devotion

Monday: Joshua 8:30-35

It is unclear when the events of today's passage occurred. The place where they happened (Mount Ebal, v.30) is about 30km north of Ai and the holding of a ceremony there indicates that the Israelites had control of the nearby town of Shechem. Unless the Shechemites surrendered without a fight, this implies that there had been a further (unknown) military campaign.

The Israelites fulfilled the requirements of Moses set out in Deuteronomy 27:1-8 (relating to the altar) and 11:26-29 (the ceremony itself). Years earlier, the Israelites had been reminded of both God's blessings (if they obeyed God's commands) and his curse (if they disobeyed) and they were told that, when God brought them into Canaan, they were to "*proclaim on Mount Gerizim the blessings, and on Mount Ebal the curses*" (Deut 11:29).

It must have been a dramatic scene. The two mountains lie opposite one another and form a natural amphitheatre. "*All the Israelites*" were there together with the foreigners living among them (including presumably Rahab; v.33a-b). The ceremony required the presence of the whole nation and also the ark of the covenant, which would have reminded the Israelites of the giving of God's law on Mount Sinai (Ex 20:1-17) since it contained the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written (Ex 24:16). Joshua wrote "*a copy of the law of Moses*" on the altar (v.32) then read "*all of the words of the law*" as written in the "*Book of the Law*" (vv.34-35). Exactly what he wrote and read is unclear. He may have written the Ten Commandments alone but what was read was clearly much more than this (e.g. the blessings and curses in Lev 26 and Deut 27). The Israelites could not have missed the message: their decisions whether to obey or disobey God's commandments would have life changing consequences.

1. *What was the purpose of the reading of the blessings and curses?*
2. *Do you think that a dramatic reading of Jesus's promises and warnings would have any benefit in the church today? What might it achieve?*
3. *Many churches have the Ten Commandments written in a prominent place. What are the pros and cons of this?*

Tuesday: Joshua 9:1-27

The defeat of the Israelites at Ai probably gave confidence to some of the Canaanites and also provided time for them to organise resistance (contrast vv.1-2 with Ch.5 v.1). However, the people of Gibeon (an important town about 9km north-west of Jerusalem) took a different course. They decided to submit to the Israelites but they appear to have realised that this course potentially suffered from an apparently insuperable problem: the Israelites were not willing to enter into treaties with the peoples of Canaan (owing to the prohibition of this in Deuteronomy 7:2b and 23:6). This resulted in the Gibeonites resorting to the ruse described in today's reading.

They carried it off well: by stating that they came from outside Canaan (v.6), they took themselves outside the prohibition on the making of treaties by the Israelites; and their reference to the Israelites' defeat of Sihon and Og (kings to the east of the Jordan; v.10), coupled with the lack of mention of the destruction of Jericho and Ai, cleverly implied that they were scared about what had happened outside, rather than inside, Canaan.

The Israelites were initially suspicious (v.7) but were then taken in. They were clearly confident of their position, since they ratified the treaty with the Gibeonites by an oath in the name of the LORD (v.15). In fact, they were so confident that they did not seek God's will before doing so (v.14), perhaps because they considered this to be necessary only when they were uncertain what to do - a mistake that many have made to their cost.

The resulting situation is all too familiar: a bad decision left the Israelites with no good options. Either they could take the view that, since the treaty had been procured by deception, they should breach it or they could decide that, since they had sworn by the LORD, they must keep it ("two wrongs don't make a right"). Many people took the former view (v.18b); Joshua and the other leaders took the latter and were able to enforce this view (vv.18a/26). God approved of this decision (Ch.10 v.8/Ch.11 vv.19-20).

- 1. Can you think of a situation in which you have been sure you know the right thing to do but it has turned out to be wrong? How can we avoid this?*
- 2. Have you ever been in a situation in which, owing to your or another person's wrongdoing, there are no good options? How should we decide what to do in such situations?*

Wednesday: Joshua 9:18b-27

Today's reading is the second half of yesterday's. We need to reflect on the position of the Gibeonites and foreigners living among the Israelites.

We are not told that the Gibeonites gave their allegiance to the LORD but it appears to be implied. Ancient treaties normally required that the vassal (in this case, the Gibeonites) accepted the god of the overlord (in this case, the Israelites). Such acceptance would usually be non-exclusive since, apart from the Israelites, the peoples of the ancient middle east were polytheists. However, it is unlikely that the Israelites would have agreed a treaty that required anything other than exclusive allegiance to the LORD, particularly since the Gibeonites were to be assigned to the service of the altar of the LORD (v.27; the altar was to be at Shiloh, Ch.18 v.1). Furthermore, the Gibeonites were to retain their separate identity and live peacefully with the Israelites for centuries (e.g. see 2 Sam 21:1-6). So it appears that, like Rahab, the Gibeonites were saved by turning to the LORD.

Some pagans may have thought that the LORD was merely the tribal god of the Israelites but, as Rahab realised (Ch.2 v.11), this was completely wrong. He called (and calls) on all people to give their allegiance to him. Those who did so, whether racially Israelites or others, were part of his people and saved. This included the majority of the Israelites at the time of Joshua (though not earlier) together with Rahab, the Gibeonites and all the other foreigners who we are told were part of the assembly of Israel (Ch.8 v.35).

Conversely, those who did not follow God whether, Israelite or Canaanite, were subject to judgment. The Israelites were threatened with the exactly same destruction as was visited on Jericho and Ai (Ch.6 v.21/Ch.7 v.12/Ch.8 v.2) and Achan, an Israelite who defied God, was destroyed. Achan's death and that of the king of Ai were memorialised (Ch.7 v.26a/Ch.8 v.29c). These memorials together with the saving of Rahab and the Gibeonites gave a clear message: *"God does not show favouritism"* (Ro 2:11).

- 1. Have you ever encountered a situation in which God's will has been done despite serious wrongdoing by those involved? What does this tell you about the relationship between human action and God's will?*
- 2. Think about other parts of the Bible that show that God does not show favouritism. How does this both encourage and warn us?*

Thursday: Isaiah 19:1-25

The Israelites' ancestors had been slaves in Egypt (Ex 1:8-14) and Egypt was viewed as the archetypal enemy of God's people. The indication at the end of Isaiah 18 that Egyptians would be part of God's people might, therefore, have received a mixed reception from Isaiah's contemporaries. If so, chapter 19 would have been even more troubling to them.

The chapter begins with a prophecy against Egypt. Earlier in his book, Isaiah indicates that, before God, the greatest power of the time, Assyria, was powerless, merely a tool in his hands (Ch.10 vv.5-19). It should thus not come as a surprise that the other great power was similarly powerless (vv.11-14). The conclusion is that Judah should not be terrified of Egypt but rather Egypt terrified of Judah or, rather, the God of Judah (vv.16-17).

We might expect the prophecy to stop at this point and we might not notice if vv.18-25 were missing from the book but Isaiah is not simply denouncing those who opposed the Israelites. He has told us that the Israelites themselves will be punished by God (Ch.17 vv.3ff) and that the Moabites, Aramaeans and Egyptians may join God's people (Ch.16 vv.4-5/ Ch.17 v.3c/Ch.18 v.7). Now he reveals the full import of what God is saying.

Christians disagree as to whether vv.18-22 should be taken literally but the overall thrust of the passage is clear. People from the great pagan powers will pledge allegiance to God (vv.18/23c); having punished them, God will heal them (v.22), reveal himself to them (v.21a) and send them a saviour (v.20b; the language suggests that God will save the Egyptians just as he had saved the Israelites from the Egyptians at the time of the Exodus). In fact, the Egyptians and Assyrians will be God's people just as the Israelites are God's people (vv.24-25)! There will be one unified people under God (v.23).

This probably sounded incredible to the Israelites of Isaiah's time and it may seem improbable today but Jesus called all people and, over the centuries, a huge number of people in Egypt and Assyria have turned to the LORD.

1. *Do you have any problem accepting that God plans to draw people of all nations to himself (Matt 28:19-20)? Why or why not?*
2. *Can you accept that even people who have oppressed others may turn to God and be forgiven? Do you rejoice about this?*

Friday: Matthew 15:21-39

Jesus went to the area to the north-west of Galilee inhabited by Phoenicians. The Phoenicians were descendants of the Canaanites, which is why the woman who spoke to Jesus is called a “*Canaanite*” (v.22). His initial reaction to the woman was surprising: he did not respond to her (v.23a); and he then asserted that he was sent only to “*the lost sheep of Israel*” (v.24) and compared the Canaanites to dogs (v.26). Despite this, the woman pressed on: she accepted that Jesus’s ministry was to the Jews but argued that she should benefit indirectly (v.27); and she showed great faith, even recognising Jesus as the “*Son of David*” (i.e. the Jewish Messiah; v.22). Jesus then responded to her faith and granted her request (v.28).

Jesus’s words might lead us to expect that this healing of a non-Jew would be a one off but it wasn’t. Jesus then left Tyre and went to the Decapolis, a non-Jewish region on the far side of the Sea of Galilee (v.29; cf. Mk 7:31). There, showing no reluctance, he conducted a ministry substantively identical to that which he had conducted among the Jews (Matt 15 vv.29-31), including healing a deaf and mute man (Mk 7:32-37) and repeating the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (Matt 15 vv.32-39). The result was that pagans turned to the God of Israel (v.31b). What was going on?

When Jesus was rejected in Nazareth, he reminded the people that, as a sign of judgment on the people who rejected him, the prophet Elijah had not ministered to Israelite widows but had healed a Canaanite widow’s son (Lk 4:24-26). Thus, in going to the area of that healing and himself healing the Canaanite woman’s daughter, Jesus was issuing a warning on those who rejected him. Furthermore, as prophesied, Jesus was both the saviour of the Israelites and “*a covenant to the people and a light for the Gentiles*” (i.e. non-Jews; Isa 42:1-7). Thus, he both asserted that his ministry was to the “*lost sheep of Israel*” and prophetically ministered to other people.

The Canaanite woman’s situation was like that of Rahab but Jesus’s ministry was part of a far greater revelation of God than that in Joshua’s time.

1. *Have you ever been jealous of God blessing someone else? Pray about it.*
2. *Do you consider cross cultural mission to be appropriate? Why or why not? How can we distinguish unobjectionable cultural matters from the issue of exclusive allegiance and obedience to Jesus?*

Week 8 (8th to 12th June)

Joshua 10:1-12:24: The faithfulness of God

Monday: Joshua 10:1-27

The alliance of the Gibeonites with the Israelites understandably alarmed the king of Jerusalem (vv.1-2). Gibeon was close by and the cities that were ruled from it together controlled the route west (Ch.9 v.17). The king thus organised an alliance of kings to the south with a view to attacking the Gibeonites and detach them from the Israelites (vv.3-5).

Joshua could have decided that, they having deceived him, he would leave the Gibeonites to their fate but, once again, he led the Israelites in being faithful to their promises and sent his army to rescue their ally (v.7). They were learning from the faithfulness of God and God then stated that he would give the Israelites victory (v.8). In doing so, he implicitly confirmed his endorsement of the treaty with the Gibeonites and, of course, he was faithful to his promise (vv.9-11).

We should note that, once again, God's promise of victory did not exclude the use of human initiative: Joshua's army marched by night and, having gained surprise, immediately attacked the Canaanite coalition (v.9). However, on this occasion something spectacular happened (vv.11-14).

Unfortunately, the meaning of vv.12-13 is obscure. The translators of the Church Bibles have taken these verses to mean that daylight lasted well over 24 hours but that is not the only way that they can be construed. In particular, the Hebrew translated "*stood still*" could mean "*took their stand*" and, since the language is poetic, it may be that the passage is intended figuratively or at least not literally (e.g. asking God to use the elements to come to the aid of the Israelites). God's intervention was certainly spectacular (e.g. v.11) but the main thing that we are asked to marvel at is not this but the fact that God listened to a human being (v.14).

1. *Do you pray while doing things during the day, as Joshua did during the battle? Should you do so more often? How might you manage to do this?*
2. *Have you ever experienced a spectacular answer to prayer? Are you conscious of God's hand in less spectacular situations? Should you be?*

Tuesday: Matthew 6:5-15

You may find it surprising that Joshua 10:14 asserts that, other than that on which the Israelites fought the five kings, there has never *been* “a day when the LORD listened to a human being”. On its face, this appears to imply that God does not normally answer prayer but it is more likely that it means that it was astonishing that God did a great nature miracle at the behest (even, perhaps, demand) of a man. You might regard some of Jesus’s healings in response to pleas from people as equally dramatic and doubtless over the years there have been other answered prayers for nature miracles. However, down to the time when the book of Joshua was written, the event was unique: there is nothing equivalent even in the case of Moses.

Joshua 10:14 should, nonetheless, cause us to reflect on prayer. Is it not astonishing that the creator and sustainer of the universe invites us to talk to him and promises to hear us when we pray (e.g. 2 Chron 7:14)? Is it not wonderful that we are told. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil 4:6)? We should not take this for granted but should marvel at it. God listens to us, mere human beings!

We should also remember that we are commanded to prayer. The apostle Paul says, “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Eph 6:18). If the creator and sustainer of the universe asks for our prayers, failing to comply is a most outrageous snub.

That said, it is also important that we fully absorb Jesus’s famous teaching about prayer: we mustn’t do it for show (Matt 6:5-6) and we mustn’t end up babbling on as if God either did not know the facts or needed our advice (or, worse, instructions) as to what to do (v.7). Instead, we should remember that God knows what we need (v.8). He has infinitely more wisdom than us and the most honest prayer of faith may be simply “Lord, I don’t know what to pray for; may your will be done” (v.10).

1. *Joshua’s prayer may have been quite close to giving God instructions yet God answered it. Why? What does that tell us about God’s character and what he is looking for in prayer?*
2. *Consider what realistic steps you can take to become more prayerful.*
3. *Think about prayers of yours that God has answered and give thanks.*

Wednesday: Joshua 10:28-11:14

Following the victory over the five Amorite kings (Ch.10 vv.9-11), Joshua took his army through the southern hills of Canaan, destroying the various Canaanite towns as he went (Ch.10 vv.28-42). The account of this raises the question whether we are intended to take what is said literally or whether it is hyperbolic. To put the matter another way, are we being told that the Israelites “*put to the sword*” (vv.30/32/35/39) absolutely everyone in the various towns or are the things said about each place merely indicating that the Israelites won overwhelming victories in them? This question is discussed in section 3.2 of the Appendix.

Whether or not all the Canaanites were killed, the Israelites were still engaged in raids rather than outright conquest of the land, since the army returned “*with all Israel*” (v.43, which is clearly hyperbolic!) to the camp at Gilgal. Soon, they had to depart to deal with a new, and far bigger, coalition of Canaanite kings centred on Hazor, a very large town to the north of the Sea of Galilee (Ch.11 v.1-5). This coalition army was even more frightening than that assembled by the king of Jerusalem since it was equipped with horses and chariots (neither of which were possessed by the Israelites).

In the face of this threat, God once again reassured Joshua (Ch.11 v.6) and, acting in faith, Joshua went onto the offensive (v.7). The result was another overwhelming victory (v.8) and afterwards Joshua was careful to do all that God had commanded (v.9-11). This included destroying the horses and chariots, which was significant because it must have required a strong faith: they would have been useful to the Israelites in future battles. God normally allows people to keep things that will help them but, on this occasion, he wanted to ensure that the Israelites did not forget that they were not winning on account of being better armed than their opponents and that they could say with conviction, “*Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God*” (Ps 20:7).

1. *Are there things that God has commanded you to give up but you are reluctant to part with? How do you deal with such situations?*
2. *If you were told or felt that God had required you to give something up, how would you test whether this was the case? Consider 1 Thes 5:20-21, 1 Cor 14:29 and 2 Tim 3:16.*

Thursday: Joshua 11:15-12:24

Today's passage comprises a summary of the conquest of both the Transjordan and Canaan. It sets out some very important points and forms a bridge between the account of the conquest and the account of the division of the land and the end of Joshua's life in chapters 13 to 24.

Although Joshua 11:15 is linked to 11:14, it is also linked to v.16 by the word "So": Joshua did everything that God commanded, "so" he took the entire land. As the events in relation to Ai had demonstrated, obedience was a pre-condition of conquest. Canaan was a gift of the LORD to the Israelites "as an inheritance" (v.23) and it was received by obedient faith (cf. Eph 2:8).

Joshua's success is mentioned many times in chapters 10-11 but, as always, the focus is on what God did. Some Israelites probably thought the conquest impossible but God had achieved it. He had used various different means and we are now told of one not previously mentioned: as part of his judgment of the Canaanites, he had hardened their hearts such that they waged wars that they would lose (Ch.11 v.20). The exception, of course, was the Gibeonites, who by implication God had decided to save (v.19).

The book of Joshua doesn't tell us about all aspects of the conquest (e.g. there is no mention of the conquest of the centre of Canaan and the list of kings (Ch.12 vv.9-24) includes some, such as the king of Bethel, that are not otherwise mentioned). We may imagine that the conquest was swift but we are told that it took a long time (Ch.11 v.18; see also Ch.14 v.10, which implies that it took at least seven years).

One loose end is tied up: the Anakites were defeated (Ch.11 vv.21-22). The Anakites were a very tall race (Deut 9:2) and the Israelite spies' encounter with them over forty years earlier had induced fear in the Israelites, causing them to rebel (Nu 13:26-33). At that time, Joshua had joined Caleb in urging the people to trust in God but without success (Nu 14:6-9). Fortunately, a new generation had learned their lesson and did not repeat the rebellion.

1. *Does the idea of God hardening people's hearts trouble you? Consider Ro 1:18-32 and Ex 7:3-5/13 and 8:15/32. What are we being told about human responsibility and God's judgment?*
2. *Reflect on God's faithfulness to the Israelites and its implications for us.*

Friday: 1 Peter 1:3-21

As we read yesterday, God promised the land of Canaan as an *"inheritance"* (Jos 11:23). Today's passage indicates that, God has promised those who put their faith in Jesus a far greater *"inheritance"*: the hope of God's final salvation (vv.3-5), of entry into his eternal kingdom. The promise of the inheritance of the Israelites was not made on account of their merits (Deut 9:4-6) and the same is true of his greater inheritance. In both cases, the promise shows God's *"great mercy"* (v.3b).

As we have read, God fulfilled his promise to the Israelites and, in doing so, he showed both his faithfulness and his power. Since God does not change (Heb 13:8), we can thus rely on him showing the same faithfulness in relation to his promise to us and exercising the same power to secure its fulfilment. We also have evidence of that power that was not available to the Israelites: we know of the resurrection of Jesus (v.21). We can thus be sure that our inheritance is *"kept in heaven"* for us (v.4b).

Again, as we have read, the conquest of Canaan required perseverance over some years and the Israelites had to go through many trials and dangers on the way to settling in their inheritance. We too must persevere in faith as we wait for our inheritance and we too have trials and dangers in our lives. The apostle Peter was particularly conscious that the Christians to whom he was writing were experiencing such things (v.6) and he reminded them that they were *"through faith shielded by God's power"* (v.5) and that they were *"receiving the end result of [their] faith, the salvation of [their] souls"* (v.9). The same is true of those of us who share their faith.

We have also read that the Israelites were called to obedience, which did not mean that God would abandon them if they fell short of perfection but required that they give God their exclusive allegiance and seek to follow his laws. The same is true of us (vv.14-17). They were called to be holy (i.e. set apart for God; Lev 19:2) and so are we (v.16). In obeying this call, we must remember the means by which we have been redeemed (vv.18-20).

1. Use today's passage to help you think about the underlying similarities between the situation of the Israelites and that of Christians today.
2. What difference should having a *"living hope"* (v.3) make to you? Does it make that difference? If not, why not?

Week 9 (15th to 19th June)

Joshua 13:1-19:51: Inherit the earth

Monday: Joshua 13:1-33 and Revelation 21:1-22:5

It is unlikely that you will find this week's passages from Joshua exciting! However, they are important. The Israelites had defeated the Canaanites by means of raids and, doubtless, had established ad hoc settlements but the land needed to be allocated before they could settle down properly.

Even by the end of Joshua's life, the conquest of the land was incomplete: large areas had not been taken (vv.1-5) and even within the parts of the land that were largely conquered, there were pockets of Canaanites remaining (e.g. v.13). Nonetheless, most of the land was in Israelite hands.

In chapter 13, we are reminded of the allocation by Moses of the land east of the Jordan to the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the Makirite clan of the tribe of Manasseh. The next eight chapters comprise a description of allocation of the land of Canaan. First, we hear of the allocation to the largest tribes, Judah and Joseph (Chs.14-17). Then we hear of the allocation to the other seven tribes (Chs.18-19) before learning about the cities of refuge (Ch.20) and the special case of the tribe of Levi (Ch.21). The website mentioned in section 4.3 of the Appendix has a map of the allocations.

As we saw when we looked at Galatians 3 (Thursday, Week 3), the promise of the land was only partially fulfilled at the time of Joshua. Its greater fulfilment is coming through Jesus and we are its beneficiaries. In many places, we are told about our "*inheritance*" (e.g. Gal 3:18, Eph 1:14, Col 1:9-14, Col 3:23-24, 1 Pet 1:3-5) and our second passage today describes a vision of this inheritance. It is clearly not intended to be a literal description of what lies ahead but it graphically illustrates the glory of the promised inheritance, which puts the inheritance of the Israelites in the shade.

1. *What are the most significant features of our inheritance as described in our second passage? Consider in particular Ch.21:3-4/22-26 and Ch.22:1-5.*
2. *Look at Ps 37:9 and Matt 5:5. The word translated "earth" in the latter could be translated "land". What are we being told about how we come into our inheritance? How does this relate to the book of Joshua?*

Tuesday: Joshua 14:1-15:63

We are told that the allocation of the land was done by Eleazar the priest (the son of Aaron), Joshua and *“the heads of the tribal clans of Israel”* (v.1). This was in compliance with God’s will (v.5; cf. Nu 34:13-29).

A considerable amount of detail is given about the allocation to the tribe of Judah. The fact that Caleb spoke to Joshua at Gilgal (Ch.14 v.6) suggests that the allocation may have happened quite quickly after the entry into Canaan (perhaps after the event of Chapter 10). The allotted land comprised most of Canaan south of Jerusalem, including many towns and villages.

We are told a lot about the individual allocation of Caleb within the allocation of Judah. Caleb had been one of the spies sent to explore Canaan some 45 years earlier (Nu 13:6; Jos 14 v.10) and, supported by Joshua, he had sought to persuade the Israelites to trust God and move into the promised land (Nu 13:30ff). God noted that Caleb *“has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly”* (Nu 14:24). As a result, he was promised that he would settle in that land (Nu 14:24; Jos 14:9). He was receiving his reward from God for resisting peer pressure and taking a stand in faith.

Significantly, we are told that he was a Kenizzite (Ch.14 v.6). We should note the significance of this: he was not racially an Israelite; the Kenizzites were a clan of Edomites some of whom had turned to the LORD and attached themselves to the tribe of Judah (cf. Gen 36:11). Caleb was thus the most prominent non-Israelite at the time of the conquest and one of only two people (the other being Joshua) given an individual allocation of land.

We see his faith in what he said to Joshua (Ch.14 vv.6-12): he repeatedly spoke of God’s promises and the blessings that he had received; and he expresses confidence that, despite Hebron being occupied by the much feared Anakites (cf. Nu.13:21-33), with the LORD’s help he would take possession of it (Ch.14 v.12). His faith produced action (Ch.15 vv.13-15) and, as we shall see, contrasted markedly with the timidity of others.

- 1. Have you been in a situation in which peer pressure is in conflict with your loyalty to God? How well have you coped? What should help you to do so?*
- 2. Take another look at 2 Tim 1:6-7. We, literally, have another Spirit. How does that help us follow Caleb’s example?*

Wednesday: Joshua 16:1-17:18

Like the tribe of Judah, the tribe of Joseph received its allocation prior to the other tribes. It had divided into two sub-tribes (Ephraim and Manasseh; Ch.16 v.4) and, after a summary of the whole allocation (Ch.16 vv.1-3), their allocations are described separately. Ephraim received a swathe of land in the middle of Canaan (Ch.16 vv.5-9) and Manasseh (excluding the Makirites, who had received land to the east of the Jordan) received a large amount of land to the north of the allocation to Ephraim (Ch.17 vv.1-11).

There were some oddities. First, mention is made of the territory of the Arkites and of the Japhletites (Ch.16 vv.2-3). They were Canaanites but it appears that, for reasons that we don't know, they were permitted to remain. Secondly, we are told that the Ephraimites failed to dislodge the Canaanites living in a place called Gezer (Ch.16 v.10) and the Manassites were not able to take control of various other towns (Ch.17 v.12), but they eventually subjected the people of these places to forced labour (Ch.16 v.10/Ch.17 v.13). The reasons for these arrangements are again unknown but the events related in chapter 17 vv.14-18 suggest a lack of faith.

The leaders of the Ephraimites and Manassites came together to complain that they were being treated as a single tribe for the purpose of the allocation (v.14). This was literally true but, as chapters 16-17 make clear, the sub-tribes had their own areas and, in any event, the area allotted to the Josephite tribes was huge. Their real gripe may have been that the area was not easy to occupy: first, a lot of it was forested (v.15) and, secondly, the plain near the coast was occupied by powerful Canaanite groups (v.16).

Joshua was unsympathetic. He may not have mentioned God but his point is clear: the conquest had demonstrated that God was with the Israelites and, notwithstanding natural problems and opposition, they could take the land; so the Ephraimites and Manassites needed to get on with it (Ch.17 vv. 15/17-18)! They acknowledged that God had blessed them (Ch.17 v.14b) but they then forgot him. They needed to show Caleb's faith and enterprise.

- 1. What might have happened had Joshua given in to the Josephites? Have you ever encountered an analogous situation? How did you handle it?*
- 2. Why might the Josephites have lacked faith despite knowing all that God had done for the Israelites? How can we avoid following their bad example?*

Thursday: Joshua 18:1-19:51

The allocation to the seven tribes mentioned in today's reading was clearly made after that to the tribes of Judah and Joseph. The allocation took place at Shiloh, a place in the centre of Canaan, north of Bethel (and not far from Ai). Significantly, we are told that the *"tent of meeting"* (sometimes known as the *"tabernacle"*) was set up there (Ch.18 v.1) and that the allocation took place *"in the presence of the LORD at the entrance to the tent"* (Ch.19 v.51).

The tent of meeting was the predecessor of the temple: it was set up in the desert as the symbolic place of meeting with God and the ark of the covenant was kept in it (see Ex 26-30/33-40). We are told that God said that, when the Israelites entered Canaan they were *"to seek the place the LORD your God will chose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling"* (Deut 12:5). At the time Joshua determined the role that the Gibeonites were to perform, that place had not been identified (Jos 9:27) but by the time of the allocation of the land it had. The location of the tent of meeting at Shiloh symbolised that God was dwelling with his people in the midst of the land that he had given them.

The allocation of the land involved two parts: first, the land was surveyed and then lots were drawn to determine the allocations (Ch.18 vv.4-10). The lots were not viewed as a process of randomisation but were used in faith that God would determine the outcome (cf. Prov 16:33). The eleven disciples used the same process to chose Judas's successor (Acts 1:15-26) but the Bible does not encourage us to do the same when another option is available.

After the tribal allocations had all been made, there was one final task to be performed: the making of an allocation to Joshua himself from within the allocation of his tribe (Ephraim; Ch.19 vv.49-50). He was allowed to chose this (v.50b). Like Caleb, with whom the description of the allocation of land in Canaan began (Ch.14 vv.6-15), Joshua was receiving his reward for faithful service of the LORD over a period of well over 40 years.

1. *Why was it important that there be a single central sanctuary? What might have happened had there been none? Of what was it a reminder?*
2. *Was it right to give a special allotment to Joshua? Was this appropriate recognition or unfair inequality? Consider 1 Tim 5:17-18.*

Friday: Psalm 73

You may be tempted to think that the triumphs of the Israelites in Canaan are far removed from the life that you experience. If so, Psalm 73 may be of assistance because Asaph (the psalmist) clearly had a similar feeling: he acknowledged the fact that God is good to his people (v.1) but he found that his own life raised challenges for that simple proposition (v.2).

Asaph's problem was two-fold: first, it appeared that God did not deal with the wicked as they deserved but instead allowed them to prosper (vv.3-5/12) and, as a result, grow arrogant (vv.6-10) and even scoff at God (v.11); secondly, Asaph's own experience, as a man of God who sought to be internally and externally righteous (v.13), was that he habitually suffered (v.14). Bluntly, what was the point? Had he followed God in vain (v.13a)?

He acknowledges that this issue caused him to be deeply troubled (v.16), become embittered (v.21b) and behave badly before God (v.22). In fact, he was on the brink of letting go of God (v.2). However, he did not "*speak out*" in his bitterness (v.15) and ultimately drew back from the brink.

Like his problem, the solution that he found was two-fold: first, he gained understanding of the fate of those who reject God (vv.17b-20/27); secondly, he realised that God was in fact with him and would be with him for ever (vv.23-26). Both these things required a different perspective from his previous one: the change in him came when he "*entered the sanctuary of God*" and saw things in the light of God himself (v.17a).

This enabled him to see that God will act and the wicked will be judged and destroyed (vv.18-19). Whatever their situation on earth, they have no future (v.20). In contrast, God is always with those who trust in him (vv.23-24a), even when they are weak (v.26a), and not only in this life but eternally (vv.24b-26). God is, in fact, their "*inheritance*" (v.26; translated "*portion*" in the Church Bibles). Hence, Asaph was able to conclude with a ringing declaration of faith (v.28).

1. *Do you ever feel like Asaph? In what ways does Ps 73 help you?*
2. *Asaph obtained a better perspective on the world when he "entered the sanctuary of God" (i.e. the temple). What might enable us to do so?*
3. *Is there a danger of confusing faith in faith for faith in God?*

Week 10 (22nd to 26th June)

Joshua 20:1-21:42: Refuge and residence

Monday: Joshua 20:1-9

The Israelite cities of refuge appears to have been unique in the ancient world. They indicate the value God places on human life. In general, the Mosaic law imposes less severe punishments for property offences and more severe punishments for personal offences than other ancient law codes: a murderer had to be put to death (no ransom was to be accepted in lieu; Nu 35:31); causing death by a reckless action is within meaning of the word translated “murder” in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:13); and even accidental killing could result in the culprit’s death (Nu 35:26-27).

The Israelites had no police force and so the victim and their family and community had responsibility for dealing with wrongdoers. Thus, a relative of someone who had been killed (the “*avenger of blood*”) was permitted, and in some cases required, to put the culprit to death (cf. Nu 35:16-34).

There was a danger that a member of the family of someone who had been killed would exact vindictive retribution prior to a proper investigation. The wrongdoer’s town or village could not realistically be expected to protect the wrongdoer and so the Israelites were required to set aside six towns to which wrongdoers could flee for protection (Nu 35:6). Moses designated three on the east side of the Jordan (Deut 4:41-43) and, in today’s reading, we hear about the designation of the three on the west side, which were in the far north, the centre and the far south of Canaan, respectively (v.7).

These towns were to be run by the Levites (Nu 35:6), who had responsibility for conducting a preliminary investigation (v.4), protecting the wrongdoer (v.5) and ensuring a proper trial (v.6). Murderers would still die but those who had killed unintentionally could go home after the death of the high priest (v.6; the reason not being stated). It was a sophisticated system.

1. *What does the provision of cities of refuge tell us about God’s justice?*
2. *Why might the death of the high priest trigger the freedom for a person in such a city to return home in safety? Might the death point towards the death of Jesus (our “great high priest”, Heb 10:21) resulting in our freedom?*

Tuesday: Joshua 21:1-42

The tribe of Levi was set aside for various kinds of service of God: Levites ran the tabernacle and later the temple and this included having responsibility for both the protection of them and liturgical matters like the music (cf. Nu 3:5-10/18:4-7; 1 Chron 15:16-22); some of them were priests (Nu 18:7; all priests were Levites but most Levites were not priests); they were responsible for teaching the law to the Israelites (Deut 33:10); and they had some judicial responsibilities (e.g. in relation to the central sanctuary, Nu 18:1-3, and the cities of refuge; see also 2 Chron 19:8-11, which tells us about Levites being appointed as judges).

Because of their functions, the Levites needed to be spread around the whole area occupied by the Israelites. They were to be like yeast in the dough of the Israelites. Hence, they were not given an allocation of land like the other tribes. Instead, God instructed Moses that they were allocated 48 towns in which to live, together with the pastureland around these towns (Nu 35:1-5). The leaders of the Levites, therefore, went to Joshua at Shiloh (the place where the allocation of the land was taking place) to claim their towns (vv.1-2) and the relevant towns were duly designated (vv.4-42).

Some Levites might have felt that, since they received no tribal allocation of the land, they were hard done by, but they were repeatedly reminded that they should regard their service of God as a privilege. As both Moses and Joshua put it, *“the LORD is their inheritance”* (Deut 10:9/Jos 18:7).

Of course, the Levites had to rely for their protection on the tribe in whose territory their town was located and it is unlikely that the allocation of pasture-land around their towns was enough for them to live on. However, the rest of the Israelites were commanded not to neglect the Levites (Deut 14:27) and, in addition to the food that they produced themselves, the Levites were entitled to a tithe from the other Israelites (Nu 18:21-24; these tithes also being described as their *“inheritance”*). The Levites were thus the servants of God’s people and were entitled to their support.

1. *Think about the mutual relationship between the Levites and the rest of the Israelites. What, if anything, does this teach us about God’s priorities?*
2. *Why were only priests allowed to come near the sanctuary (Nu 18:7)? What does this teach us about God and ourselves?*

Wednesday: Hebrews 9:1-28

The reference to the establishment of the central sanctuary (Ch.18 v.1) and the information about the Levites should alert us to the fact that the arrival in the land of Canaan enabled the sacrificial system that had been prescribed in the Mosaic law to be put on a stable footing. That system as a whole was undeniably complex (see especially the description of various forms of offering and the priestly roles in Leviticus 1-9) but some of the key things that we can learn from it are not complicated.

Today's passage begins by telling us a bit about the tabernacle (vv.1-5; cf. Ex 25-31). The writer (whose identity we don't know) then adds some detail about the rules relating to entry into the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle and, later, the Temple (vv.6-7; cf. Lev 16:11-19). This, we are told, showed two things: first, that the way into God's presence for people in general had not yet been disclosed (v.8) and, secondly, that the sacrifices were not of themselves sufficient to clear people's consciences (vv.9-10).

The writer then explains the reality to which the arrangements relating to the tabernacle pointed. The high priest symbolically went into the presence of God with the blood of goats and calves as an atoning sacrifice; Jesus went into the presence of God with the blood of his own sacrifice; he is both the high priest and the sacrifice (vv.11-12; the "*greater tabernacle*" is heaven, where God dwells). The Old Testament sacrifices provided only ceremonial (symbolic) cleansing; what Christ has done secures genuine spiritual cleansing (vv.13-14). The result is a new covenant to which the covenant entered into at Mount Sinai (the "*Mosaic covenant*") pointed: a covenant that secures the forgiveness of sins and acceptance by God (v.15).

More detail of what Moses did and its significance is given in vv.16-23 and then the writer returns to the reality of Jesus: Jesus's death was a once and for all event that will never need to be repeated (vv.25-26a; as he said on the cross, "*It is finished*", John 19:30); what Jesus has done deals with people's sin (vv.26b-28); what remains is his return in glory to complete the work of salvation (v.28).

1. Read vv.11-14 again. Do you understand the purpose of Christ's death?
2. What are the implications for you, and for the church as a whole, of Jesus's sacrifice being "*once and for all*" (v.10)?

Thursday: Hebrews 10:1-25

Having thought about Hebrews 9:1-27, today's passage should be easier to understand than it would otherwise be. It should be like a revision exercise!

When you first read about it, you may have assumed that the sacrificial system in the Old Testament was instituted as some kind of primitive, naïve way of propitiating God. Some pagan religions teach that animal sacrifices are adequate to win the favour of a deity and, in ancient Israel, some people may have believed that the sacrifices in the tabernacle, or later in the temple at Jerusalem, were the effective cause of a good relationship with God. If so, they were wrong. The sacrifices were merely *"a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves"* (v.1).

The sacrificial system was a constant reminder that our wrongdoing offends God and breaks our relationship with him and that sacrifice is necessary to make propitiation and restore that relationship. But the animal sacrifices could never result in our acceptance by God (vv.4/11). The need to repeat them again and again pointed to this fact (v.2). They were merely pictures, which in fact served to remind people of their sins rather than dealing with those sins (v.3). The reality is Christ: his sacrifice of himself is effective (v.10) and there is now a new covenant (v.16). There is no longer a need for animal sacrifices: no need for the shadow now that the reality has been revealed (v.18).

This enables us to approach God with confidence (v.19). The arrangements in the tabernacle were designed to remind people of the unapproachability of God but the curtain preventing entry into the symbolic place of his presence was torn in two when Jesus died (Mark 15:38). Metaphorically, we can now enter the Most Holy Place (vv.19-20). We can *"draw near to God with a sincere heart the full assurance that faith brings"* (v.22). That is why Charles Wesley was able to write (in the hymn *"And can it be?"*), *"Bold I approach the eternal throne and claim the crown through Christ my own"*. He probably had vv.19-22 in mind as he wrote this.

1. Do you recognise the sufficiency of Jesus's sacrifice for you and thus approach God with confidence? If not, what is your concern? Discuss it in your small group or with someone else in the church.
2. How should we respond to all of this? Look at vv.23-25.

Friday: 1 Corinthians 9:1-18

It is important that we recognise that, despite sometimes being called “priests”, modern ordained people are not comparable to Old Testament priests, who were essentially intermediaries between God and his people and whose main responsibility was carrying out sacrifices. We have no need of intermediaries. In this sense, we are now all priests (Heb 4:16/10:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5/9) and, as we have seen over the past two days, Christ’s sacrifice once for all removes the need for further sacrifices (Heb 10:11-14).

Nonetheless, there are things that we can learn from the responsibilities of the Israelites in relation to the Levites. As we have seen, they were obliged to provide places of residence and the means of livelihood to the Levites and generally to support them. Furthermore, the Levites were entitled to their share of the food offered as a sacrifice (Deut 18:1). Likewise, as we see in today’s passage, full time ministers of the Gospel, evangelists, pastors and teachers (including ordained ministers, other church workers and missionaries), should be supported by the Church (v.14).

You may not have thought of such people as being analogous to soldiers but they both serve in a way that results in them needing support from those they serve (v.7a). Likewise, you may not have thought of the analogy of the tenders of vineyards and shepherds (v.7b-c) but, like them and, indeed, all farmers today, full time ministers of the Gospel, evangelists, pastors and teachers have to devote themselves to their responsibilities and should surely be provided for out of the things in their care.

Paul’s use of the quote from the Deuteronomy 25:4 in v.9 may at first seem surprising but the context of this verse is teaching about people’s responsibilities to one another not about animals. The image of muzzling an ox while it is treading the grain is a powerful one. It illustrates Paul’s comparison with the tenders of vineyards and shepherds: how ridiculous (and unreasonable) it would be to stop the worker benefiting from his work. In fact, it would also be contrary to common sense (cf. Prov 27:18).

- 1. How might we apply the principles underlying the requirements in relation to the support of the Levites in a modern church setting?*
- 2. What implication does this have for members of St John’s (not merely in relation to finance)?*

Week 11 (29th June to 3rd July)

Joshua 21:43-23:16: United we stand

Monday: Joshua 21:43-45

Today's reading is short and invites us to think about the things that we have read over the past ten weeks. It is almost a hymn to God's faithfulness: three times God's gifts are mentioned ("*the LORD gave Israel all the land*", v.43; "*the LORD gave them rest on every side*", v.44a; "*the LORD gave all their enemies into their hands*", v.44c) and three times God's fulfilment of his promises is mentioned ("*... the land he had sworn to give their ancestors*", v.43; "*just as he had sworn to their ancestors*", v.44a; "*Not one of all the LORD's good promises to Israel failed*", v.45).

You may wonder how this fits in with the comments in chapters 13-19 about the land that had not been occupied by the Israelites (e.g. Ch.13 vv.1-7) and the fact that it appears that some enemies remained (e.g. the Philistines, Ch.13 v.3). Imagine for a moment that you are an elderly Israelite settled in Canaan contemplating the events of your life: you remember the hardships of desert life; you can still almost feel the fear as you approached the hostile lands east of the Jordan and then as you looked west across the Jordan valley; you recall the miraculous crossing of the Jordan and events at Jericho and Ai; you also recall the struggles of the ensuing years as the land was taken and settled; but you note that you and your people are now settled safely from Hebron in the south to Hazor in the north and from the Jordan to the coastal plain; you reflect that worship has been established at God's sanctuary in Shiloh, that Levites are settled across the country ministering to the people, that cities of refuge have been established and that the people are living under God's law.

Would you not then praise God for his faithfulness? The fact that parts of the land were untaken and that some enemies remained at large would not alter this. God had done what he had promised to do.

1. *Do you sometimes focus more on the things that are not as you want (the land not taken) than the blessings of God? How can you avoid doing this?*
2. *Are you uncomfortable about the reference to enemies (v.44b)? Why? Consider Lk 1:68-75/20:41-44, 1 Cor 15:25, Heb 10:13 and 2 Thes 1:6-9.*

Tuesday: Romans 5:1-11

The Israelites could praise God and celebrate since they were living free in the promised land in the presence of God! However, they still had many problems, not least the fact that death remained and their tendency to stray from God. God had saved them but their salvation was not complete.

In chapter 3 of his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul has told us how Christ has died as a *“sacrifice of atonement”* (Ro 3:25) and that those who put their faith in him are *“justified”* (i.e. declared righteous in God’s eyes) irrespective of who they are or what they have done (Ro 3:21-24). As a result of this, speaking of himself and those with faith in Jesus, he explains: *“we have peace with God”* (Ch.5 v.1); we stand in God’s grace (v.2a); *“we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son”* (i.e. God is no longer angry with us on account of our sin; v.10); he accepts us and his love *“has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us”* (v.5). Furthermore, as Paul explains later in his letter, *“thorough Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who give life has set you free from the law of sin and death”* (i.e. we are no longer captive to our sinful natures; Ro 8:2).

All this is true now. We should praise God since we live free in the world in the presence of God. God has saved us. However, we live in a world that is hostile to God and that has many problems. As a result, as Paul implies (v.4), we suffer. We also have a strong tendency to stray from God, even on occasions hiding our allegiance to him. What is more, we still die. We are in a much better position than the Israelites were, but our salvation is still not complete. As a result, *“we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies”* (Ro 8:23).

The good news is that we know that, having been justified, we will be saved from God’s wrath and, having been reconciled, we will live with Christ (vv.9-10). We can *“boast in the hope of the glory of God”* (v.2b) and even *“glory in our sufferings”* (v.3).

1. Do you get impatient that there is a large *“not yet”* element to our salvation? What are the implications of this for our expectations of life?
2. On what do you base your confidence that you will come to enjoy the *“not yet”* element? Consider 1 Cor 15:12-28 and Eph 1:13b-14).

Wednesday: Joshua 22:1-34

Having noted God's faithfulness at the end of chapter 21, the book of Joshua concludes with three chapters considering the people's response to that faithfulness: they were called to respond in faithful obedience to God.

At the beginning of the book, we heard about the commitment of the Transjordan tribes to stand alongside the other tribes in Canaan (Ch.1 vv.12-18). They had faithfully fulfilled this commitment and Joshua commended them (vv.1-3). He then fulfilled his side of the bargain (Ch.1 v.15b) by allowing them to return to their homes on the other side of the Jordan (v.4) and blessing them on their departure (vv.6-8). However, before doing that, he stressed the need for obedience (v.5). That was crucial.

What followed was not merely a story of miscommunication (although that was certainly involved) and over reaction (which probably was not): the issue was faithfulness to God. God had commanded that there should be a single central sanctuary (Deut 12:4-7) and that his people should worship him there as one people. Hence, when the tribes settled in Canaan heard that the Transjordan tribes had set up an altar near the Jordan (v.10) they were horrified (v.11). It appeared that the Transjordan tribes were rebelling against God (vv.16-20) and the memory of the baal of Peor (v.17; Nu 25:1-9) and Achan's rebellion (v.20; Ch.7) showed them the grave consequences of this. Preparing to go to war (v.12) may seem an extreme reaction but there seemed to be an extreme crisis threatening the unity of the people and, more importantly, the worship of God.

Fortunately, the Israelites in Canaan sent a high-level embassy to plead with the Transjordan tribes (vv.13-14). Those tribes then swore their allegiance to the LORD in the strongest terms (vv.21-23). They said that the altar was not a rival sanctuary for sacrifices but a reminder to the Canaan tribes that the Transjordan tribes were also God's people (vv.23-29). The Israelites in Canaan were, naturally, relieved to hear this (vv.30-33). Unity was restored, based on the worship of "*The Mighty One, God, the LORD*" (v.34; cf. v.22).

1. *How do you react when Christians appear to be doing something seriously contrary to God's will? How should we react?*
2. *How might the Transjordan tribes have avoided the misunderstanding? What can we learn from this?*

Thursday: Joshua 23:1-16

By the time of the events recorded in today's passage, the Israelites had been settled in Canaan for some years (v.1). Joshua was old and was clearly preparing for death (v.14a). He wanted to ensure that the next generation of leaders did not forget the fundamental things that the LORD had taught him, which all the Israelites should have learned from their experience.

He reminded the leaders of what God had done for them and his faithful fulfilment of his promises, repeating this reminder several times (vv.3/9/14b). He asserted that God would continue to be with them as they took possession of the parts of Canaan not then in their hands (v.4-5). God had acted: they were called to respond to him in obedience (v.6).

Obedience involved doing all that was written in the Mosaic law (i.e. the law set out in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy; v.6). More fundamentally, it involved full commitment to God (*"hold fast to the LORD your God"*, v.8) and loving him (v.11; cf. Deut 6:5).

The leaders were warned not to associate with the Canaanite people who remained in the land (v.7a) and, specifically, to have nothing to do with their gods (v.7b/c). Joshua warned of the dire consequences of disobeying this command and, more generally, of turning away from God. Put simply, they would forfeit the land of Canaan (vv.12-13/15-16). God's faithfulness extends not just to his promises but also to his warnings (v.15).

Sadly, the Old Testament tells us that later generations of Israelites failed to heed the warning and the result was disastrous (e.g. Jdg 2:6-10/20-23).

Our situation is very similar to that of the Israelites. Like them, we are called to remember what God has done for us and his faithful fulfilment of his promises (e.g. Eph 2:12-13); like them, we are called, in response to these things, to obey his requirements (albeit not the full law of Moses; Ro 13:11-14) and to give our full commitment to God (Ro 12:1-2); and, like them, we are warned of the dire consequences of not doing so (Eph 5:6).

1. *Think again about whether and how you ensure that you know and regularly remember the acts of God. How do you go about this?*
2. *Look at Revelation 3:15-16. What is the difference between the full commitment required by God and lukewarm allegiance to him?*

Friday: 1 Timothy 1:3-20 and 6:11-21

The situation of the apostle Paul when he wrote his letters to Timothy was very different from that of Joshua at the time of the address to the Israelites that we looked at yesterday. Yet there is an important connection: in both cases, an elderly leader is addressing the next generation. Timothy was much younger than Paul. He had been Paul's assistant for many years but he was now a leader of the church in Ephesus.

The first letter of Timothy is like a sandwich: Paul begins and ends with the most important general instructions and warnings; in the middle, he deals with various specific matters.

Paul's biggest concern was clearly to ensure that the church at Ephesus did not depart from the fundamentals. He reminded Timothy of God's grace, stressing his personal experience of this (Ch.1 vv.12-17) and commanded him to *"fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience"* (Ch.1 vv.18-19), to *"fight the good fight of faith"* (Ch.6 v.12) and to *"guard what has been entrusted to your care"* (i.e. the Gospel of life through repentance and faith in Jesus; vv.20-21). Some people were teaching things contrary the Gospel and Paul begins and ends by telling Timothy that he must actively oppose such people (Ch.1 vv.3-4/Ch.6 vv.20b/21).

Paul does not want Timothy to oppose only wrong belief: doctrine and behaviour are interlinked and thus Paul refers to behaviour that *"is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God"* (Ch.1 vv.10b-11). He later describes other sins and tells Timothy that he must *"flee from all of this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness"* (Ch.6 v.11) and also *"command"* the rich to be *"rich in good deeds"* (v.18).

As the references to fighting indicate, Paul recognised that obeying his commands would not be easy for Timothy: conflict never is easy but, like Joshua, Paul recognised that failure to hold on to God would be disastrous.

1. *Do you take care to guard the Gospel both in your own life and in the life of the church? How?*
2. *What might "fleeing" from evil involve? Do you constantly do this? How actively do you pursue the things that Paul mentions (Ch.6 v.11)?*

Week 12 (6th to 10th July)

Joshua 24:1-33: Whom will you serve?

Monday: 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Joshua was seriously concerned about the corrupting effect of the Israelites mixing with the Canaanites and he prohibited this (Jos 23:12-16). By reason of a similar concern, some Christians have concluded that they should withdraw from the world. However, as noted in week 1, this is impossible and it is not what the New Testament requires (e.g. 1 Cor 5:9-10, which we looked at in Week 6). To use the apostle Peter's phrase, as Christians, we are scattered in the world (1 Pet 1:2).

We have to live *in the world* but we need to make sure that we are not *of the world*. We must not live like those who do not follow Jesus. In particular, as today's passage indicates, we need to be careful that we are not "*yoked together with unbelievers*" (v.14). In other words, we must make sure that we are not, like two oxen ploughing a field, so linked to unbelievers that we have to go in the same direction as them.

This has implications for marriage but we must remember that marriage is a permanent union involving loving commitment (1 Cor 7:10-11 and Eph 5:22-28). It also has implications for many other areas of life. In a world marred by sin, there will be many difficult decisions to make and simple red lines are not possible. We need to think through each association with non-Christians and ask, "Is this a 'yoking' that threatens my commitment or obedience to Christ?" and if it is ask "How can I deal with that threat?".

We also need to remember that living in a non-Christian society in and of itself carries a grave risk of corruption. Some risks are obvious and are easy to avoid but others are insidious. As pointed out earlier in this reading plan (page 7), without realising it, we pick up attitudes and assumptions from the world that are contrary to God's revelation and commands. We need to struggle against this and seek to purify ourselves (Ch.7 v.1).

1. *In what ways, if any, are you "yoked" to unbelievers? Address the two questions set out above in relation to any such yoking.*
2. *How do you guard against the corrupting influences around you?*

Tuesday: Joshua 24:1-15

The relationship between Joshua's address in chapter 23 and his address in today's passage is unclear. It may be that, having met the Israelite leaders, he then arranged a bigger gathering at Shiloh so that the people could present themselves before God and formally renew the covenant with the LORD (v.1; cf. Jos 18:1). In any event, that was the gathering's purpose.

Joshua began by reminding the Israelites of God's acts in their history, starting with his calling of Abraham and ending with their settlement in Canaan (vv.2-13). We may be impatient with the repeated stressing of these acts but the Israelites needed to have knowledge of God's acts firmly in their minds and so do we; they needed constantly to be reminded that their salvation and life depended entirely on the faithfulness and power of God and so do we. It has been suggested that we don't need to remember things because, these days, information is almost instantly available on the internet but, in order to influence our attitudes and our behaviour, things need to be embedded in our minds. If we don't remember what God has done then our response to him will inevitably be deficient.

Joshua then called on the people to respond to God's faithfulness and power with their own faithful allegiance (v.14). The reference to throwing away the gods that their ancestors had served in the past (v.14b) suggests that, despite everything, at least some Israelites were tempted to return to the old gods. This may seem incredible but old habits die hard. Furthermore, they lived in a polytheistic world and they may well have been tempted to believe that they could give their allegiance to both the LORD and the gods that their ancestors had trusted in. In any event, Joshua disabused them of this notion (v.15). The LORD demands exclusive allegiance and so they had a choice: either they could serve the LORD or they could serve other gods, in which case, they had better decide which of the array of pagan gods to choose! Furthermore, the need for a decision was urgent: the Israelites needed to make their choice "*this day*" (v.15a).

- 1. Ask yourself, do I seek to remember the major acts of God recorded in the Bible and his acts in your life? Why or why not? How can you do this? We considered this earlier in this plan but it is important enough to revisit it.*
- 2. Have you made a clear unequivocal commitment to serve the LORD? If not, why not? To use Joshua's words, why does this seem undesirable (v.15)?*

Wednesday: John 6:25-59

When people around the world use the word “God” they do not all mean the same thing. They have different notions of the nature and character of God. Some don’t even think that God is personal and so regard talk of his character as meaningless. Consequently, when someone says that they believe in or have faith in “God”, we need to make sure that we understand what they mean. It may turn out that they are putting their faith in something far removed from the God of whom we have been reading.

This is why it was so important that the Israelites affirmed their allegiance to “the LORD” (YHWH, see section 5 of the Appendix). They were affirming their allegiance to the living God who had made himself known to Abraham and had acted in their history. When the Bible talks about “God” that is who it is referring to and that is who the Israelites agreed to serve.

We are also called to affirm our allegiance to that same God but we know something that the Israelites did not. Since the time of Joshua, God has made himself known in the person of Jesus, the ultimate revelation of the LORD (John 10:30, John 14:7/11, Heb 1:3). In our reading today, we hear the implications of this. Jesus calls on us to believe in him and follow him (v.29. cf. Lk 9:57-62). He indicates that our eternal destiny depends upon whether or not we do this. On the one hand, he says that those who believe will receive eternal life, participating in the resurrection to new life (vv.35/40/47/54); on the other hand, he indicates that those who do not believe in him will not do so. He is the only way to God (v.53; cf. Jn 14:6).

These claims were offensive to many in Jesus’s day. At the time of him saying the things recorded in our passage, they merely grumbled (v.41) but, in the end, they crucified him. Jesus was not killed because he was a good person or on account of his moral teaching or miracles or even because he contradicted the Jewish leaders: he was killed for claiming to be the one true God and for seeking people’s allegiance accordingly (Mk 14:60-65).

1. *Slightly changing one of yesterday’s question, have you made a clear an unequivocal commitment to serve Jesus? If not, why not? See John 6:29.*
2. *What did Jesus mean by his references to eating his flesh and drinking his blood (e.g. John 6:35/48-57)? In what way is he himself real food and drink? How do we feed on him?*

Thursday: Joshua 24:16-28

Joshua's challenge (vv.14-15) was met with what sounded like a resounding declaration of faith from the people (vv.16-18). His response was, nonetheless, negative (vv.19-20). In essence, he said, "You will rebel against God and he will destroy you as he destroyed Achan (Ch.7) and the Canaanites". The people denied this and declared that they themselves were witness to their declaration of allegiance to God (vv.21-22). It was a strong statement: it was as if they were saying, "If we are not loyal to God, we ourselves will appear as witnesses for the prosecution in God's court".

This led Joshua to identify the core problem: the people had made bold declarations of allegiance to the LORD but their practice was inconsistent with their profession: some of them still had "*foreign gods*" (v.23). He thus demanded that they throw these away (v.23).

In the ancient world, as today, pagans often had small household idols or similar objects which they either relied on as charms or treated as representations of a god and thus objects of worship. Many years earlier, the patriarch Jacob had to deal with this issue in his own household (Gen 35:2-4). The possession, let alone use, of such objects was (and is) utterly inconsistent with the worship of the LORD. They had to be disposed of.

The people's response (v.24) implied acceptance of Joshua's command and so Joshua "*made a covenant for the people*" (i.e. a declaration of their commitments; v.25). He recorded it in "*the Book of the Law of God*" (v.26; cf. Josh 8:34). That book would have set out God's requirements in respect of exclusive allegiance and holiness. By swearing allegiance to God, the people had confirmed their acceptance of these things.

Joshua then set up the last of the many memorials mentioned in the book (v.27). This memorial was, however, different from the others that we have heard of: it was a reminder of the people's commitment. On the basis of that commitment, the people could enjoy their "*inheritance*" (v.28).

1. *What might compromise your exclusive allegiance to God? Consider 2 Tim 3:2-5 and Matt 6:24. What should you do to prevent this occurring?*
2. *In what other ways might your practices be inconsistent with your declared faith in Jesus? What are you going to do about these things?*

Friday: Joshua 24:29-33

It would be easy to skate over today's reading on the basis that it is a tail piece that simply ties up a few loose ends. However, that would be a mistake: it reinforces some key messages of the book.

We are told of the deaths of the two main leaders of the Israelites during the conquest of Canaan: Joshua, the political and military leader, and Eleazar, the high priest (vv.29-30/33). We are reminded that Joshua was *"the servant of the LORD"* (a title also given to Moses; v.29) but the focus is on the burials of the two men: Joshua was buried *"in the land of his inheritance"* (v.30) and Eleazar in the place *"which had been allotted to his son Phinehas"* (v.33). We are being reminded one last time that God had fulfilled his promise to give the land of Canaan to the Israelites and that this gift was not only a gift to the people as a whole but to clans and, in two cases, individuals (cf. *"his inheritance"* and *"allotted to his son"*).

This message is reinforced by what we are told about the patriarch Joseph's bones (v.32). Joseph, a son of Jacob and great grandson of Abraham, had spent most of his adult life in Egypt. He left Canaan as a young man and never returned. Just before his death, he said to his brothers *"I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob"*. He then made the Israelites swear an oath that they would take his bones to Canaan when God gave it to them (Gen 50:22-26). He had thus died in faith and the burial of his bones showed that he had not believed in vain. The message is hammered home: God is faithful!

Finally, we are told that *"Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel"* (v.31). God's faithfulness had been met by faithfulness among the Israelites. There had been bumps along the road (e.g. at Ai, Ch.7, and within the tribe of Joseph, Ch.17 vv.12-18) but they had been *"strong and courageous"* (Ch.1 v.6) and obeyed God.

1. *Think about your study of the book of Joshua over the past few months. What are the main messages that you are taking away from it?*
2. *How can you ensure that at your death, you will be called the "servant of the LORD"?*

Appendix

Additional information

1. The book of Joshua

1.1 Who wrote the book, when and why? The Bible contains no hint as to the identity of the author of the book and it is unclear when it was written. In a number of places, the phrase *“to this day”* is used (e.g. Jos 4:9b) and there is a reference to a source document (Jos 10:13), which suggests that the book was not written immediately after the events it records. There are various indicators that it may have been written in the following decades and perhaps edited at the time of King David but this remains speculative.

The book is not like a modern history book. The author was clearly not trying to give a comprehensive account of the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites (e.g. nothing is said about the conquest of the central highlands where important places like Shechem were located) and does not appear to have been concerned about precise chronology (see section 1.4(i) below).

This is not to say that the work is unreliable as history. On the contrary, the author clearly wanted to emphasise that he was recording things that actually happened. However, he was not concerned with detail that was only of antiquarian interest. The book’s contents strongly suggest that his main aim was to ensure that the events that it records were not forgotten and that readers were inspired and, if necessary, convicted and encouraged to be faithful to the LORD.

1.2 The book’s main themes: The book has various major themes that are hammered home as the book progresses. In summary:

- The land of Canaan was a gift from God to the Israelites. God had promised that gift and would (and did) faithfully fulfil his promise.
- God is all powerful and so nothing could prevent his plans being carried into effect. He did not need the Israelites to assist him to fulfil his plans but they had to act to take hold of what God had promised.
- God was not “on the side of the Israelites”, rather he called on them to be on his side and required obedience from them, blessing those who followed him but judging those who did not.

- God's people thus needed to give exclusive allegiance to him, reflect on his words, follow his commandments and be strong and courageous in his service.

1.3 The structure: The structure of the book of Joshua is simple: chapters 1 to 5 tell us about God's intentions, the crossing of the Jordan by the Israelites and its immediate aftermath; chapters 6 to 12 (and Ch.13 vv.1-7) relate some important events in the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites and summarise the end result of this; chapters 13 to 21 record the allotment of the land of Canaan among the Israelite tribes; and chapters 22 to 24 report events following the conquest including, in particular, Joshua's calls for commitment to God.

1.4 Stylistic features: The book has some stylistic features that are worth noting since they impact how we read it. In particular:

(i) *Chronology:* As the preceding section indicates, the overall structure of the book is chronological but, within this basic framework, a number of parts of the book seem to have been ordered thematically rather than chronologically. For example, the allocation of land to the tribe of Judah (see Ch.15) may well have occurred after the victories in the south of Canaan (Ch.10) and thus before the campaign in the north (Ch.11). Conversely, Verses 1-7 of chapter 13 appear to relate to the situation at the end of Joshua's life, well after the allocation of the land (Chs.14-19).

(ii) *Lack of evaluation of events:* In some parts of the book the author merely records events without evaluating them and the reader has to wait until later in the book (or even later in the Bible) to find an evaluation. For example, in chapter 2 we are told about the agreement that the Israelite spies made with Rahab but we are not told whether this was a breach of God's prohibition on making treaties with the Canaanites or his command that they be destroyed (see section 3 below). We have to wait until chapters 6 (vv.22-25) and 8 (v.35) to hear that what was done was acceptable.

(iii) *Looping back and forth:* The book sometimes gives headlines about an event and then loops back to give us more detail or explanation. For example, the account of the crossing of the Jordan in Chapters 3 and 4 loops back and forth several times and, after we are told of the return to Gilgal

following the victory over the southern coalition (Ch.10 v.15), we are given more detail of the immediate aftermath of the victory (Ch.10 vv.16-27).

(iv) *Hyperbole*: It is clear that not every statement in the book is intended to be taken literally: it makes use of hyperbole. Sometimes it is not certain whether or not a statement is hyperbolic (see section 3.2 below) but some statements clearly are. For example, Joshua 11:23 states that “*Joshua took the entire land*” yet just over a chapter later there is a list of the “*very large areas of land*” that had not been taken (Jos 13:1-7). Clearly, the first statement is intended to convey the magnitude of Joshua’s achievement without being taken literally. Likewise, it is clear that the references to “*all Israel*” (e.g. in Ch.10 v.43) cannot mean every single Israelite.

1.5 “Thousands”: The Hebrew word ‘elep can mean “thousand” or it can refer to a military unit or a clan or group of people. In Joshua 4:13 and a number of places in chapters 7 and 8 it is usually translated “thousand” in English bibles. However, a good case can be made for the other possible meanings. Thus, in Joshua 8:3b, we may be being told that 30 military units (comprising perhaps differing numbers of men) were sent out. This makes a material difference to the detail of what occurred but no difference at all to the key points that we should be taking away from the relevant passages.

2. The historical background

2.1 The promises to Abraham: The book of Genesis tells us that God called Abraham to leave his homeland and Abraham obeyed this call (Gen 12:1-4). He travelled to Canaan and there the LORD appeared to him and said “*To your offspring I will give this land*” (Gen 12:7). Abraham was also promised that his descendants would be very numerous (Gen 12:2-3).

2.2 Flight to Egypt and slavery: Despite God’s promises, Abraham and three generations of his descendants merely lived in part of the land of Canaan and his grandson (Jacob) together with his children and their families had to emigrate to Egypt in order to escape famine (Gen 42-46). They never returned to Canaan and their descendants remained in Egypt for several hundred years. While in Egypt, these descendants increased greatly in number but they were reduced to slavery (Ex 1:8-14). Since Jacob was also called Israel (Gen 32:28), they were known as “Israelites”.

2.3 The Exodus and the decades in the desert: The Israelites may have thought that they had been forgotten by God but they had not. God revealed himself to Moses at a burning bush, saying that he was going to rescue them and bring them to the land promised to Abraham, with Moses as their leader (Ex 3:1-17). The rescue was dramatic (Ex 7:10-14:31) and the people were led into the desert in the Sinai Peninsula.

While they were in the desert, God made his presence known by means of a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire during the night (Ex 13:21-22, 40:34-38). He provided manna and quail for the people to eat (Ex 16) and water for them to drink (Ex 17). He also gave them the ten commandments and other detailed laws by which to live (Ex 19ff).

Despite this, the Israelites repeatedly grumbled (Ex 14:11, 16:2, and 17:3) and on one occasion made an idol in the form of a golden calf, which nearly resulted in their destruction (Ex 32). Furthermore, when the time came for them to enter Canaan, they were scared and rebelled (Nu 13:26-14:10). Consequently, God swore that he would not allow any of the adults who had rebelled to enter the land that he had promised to give them (Nu 14:20-23, 26-30). The Israelites were thus condemned to wander in the wilderness of Sinai for a generation, albeit under the protection of God (Deut 2:7).

2.4 The conquest of the Transjordan: Once all the people aged over 20 at the time of the rebellion had died, God told the Israelites to head north with a view to taking possession of Canaan (Deut 2:2-3). This time, the Israelites obeyed. They took a route to the east of the Dead Sea, passing through the kingdom of Moab with a view to entering Canaan further north. Sihon (the king of Heshbon) and Og (the king of Bashan) tried to prevent them passing through their kingdoms but the Israelites defeated the armies of both kings and took control of their lands (Nu 21:21-35, Deut 2:24-3:11).

At this time, as set out in Numbers 32, two of the twelve Israelite tribes, the tribes of Reuben and Gad, asked that they be allowed to settle in the lands to the east of the River Jordan (the "Transjordan"). Moses was initially angry and opposed to this since he thought that they were trying to avoid having to fight in Canaan and that they would undermine the spirit of the remaining tribes (Nu 32:6-15). The Reubenites and Gadites responded that, having settled their families in the Transjordan, their fighting men would cross into Canaan with the rest of the Israelites and not return until the land

was conquered (Nu 32:16-19). Moses reached an agreement with them on this basis (Nu 32:20-32) and then allocated land in the Transjordan to them (Nu 32:33). He also allowed one part of the tribe of Manasseh (the Makirites) to settle in the part of the Transjordan that they had conquered.

By this time, Moses was very old and he had been told that, owing to his having previously broken faith with God, he would die before the people entered Canaan (Deut 32:48-52). He thus gave a departing address and died on a mountain overlooking the promised land (Deut 34:1-7).

2.5 Joshua: Upon Moses's death, Joshua took over the leadership of the Israelites. His birth name was "Hoshea" and he was a member of the tribe of Ephraim. He was a young man at the time of the Exodus, shortly after which he was appointed Moses's assistant (Ex 24:13) and given the name "Joshua", meaning "the LORD is salvation", by Moses (Nu 13:16). Later, he was the representative of the tribe of Ephraim in the expedition sent by Moses to explore Canaan (Nu 13:8) and, upon the expedition's return, backed Caleb (an older man) in his attempt to persuade the Israelites not to rebel against God (Nu 14:6-9). Consequently, he (along with Caleb) was excluded from God's decision that none of the adult Israelites of the time would enter the promised land (Nu 14:30) and after the Transjordan had been conquered, he was commissioned as Moses's successor (Nu 27:18-23). He thus led the Israelites into Canaan.

2.6 The conquest of Canaan: Shortly after the death of Moses, the Israelites crossed the River Jordan and entered Canaan (Jos 3-4). They established a camp at Gilgal and then took the town of Jericho followed by Ai (Jos 5-8).

The sequence of events thereafter is unclear. The book of Joshua does not give a comprehensive account of what happened or any guidance as to the time periods involved. It may be that the Israelites remained encamped at Gilgal whilst raids were carried out around Canaan and the various Canaanite kings were subdued (cf. Jos 10:43). These raids may then have been followed up by various settlement operations, which resulted in the various Israelite tribes taking possession of large tracts of land (Jos 14-19).

The whole operation clearly took a number of years. Some places had to be attacked on more than one occasion (e.g. Hebron, the defeat of which is described in Joshua 10:36-37 but which Judges 1:9-10 indicates had to be

attacked again before it could be occupied). Others were not taken at all (e.g. Jerusalem and the places listed in Joshua 13:2-5).

2.7 The aftermath: At some point, the land was sufficiently subdued for the fighting to cease (Jos 11:23b) but, as indicated in the books of Judges and Samuel, the Israelites were still not totally secure. Furthermore, although during the lifetime of Joshua and his immediate successors, the Israelites were loyal to the LORD (Jos 24:31), this was soon to change (Jdg 2:6-10; cf. Ps 106:34-39). Consequently, the rest given to the people by means of the conquest was never as complete or as happy as might have been hoped.

2.8 The implications of archaeological findings: It is sometimes claimed that archaeology has proved that the book of Joshua is not a reliable source of history. There is not space here to address this claim properly but it should be noted that some highly reputable archaeologists do not accept the claim (e.g. the late Kenneth Kitchen). They argue that the archaeological findings do not support it. For example, it is sometimes suggested that work at the site of Jericho demonstrates that there was no walled town there at the time when the book of Joshua indicates that it was attacked by the Israelites. However, the excavator of Jericho (Kathleen Kenyon) did not draw this conclusion. The Bible does not claim that Jericho was a large town in Joshua's time and, since the centre of the site is now very heavily eroded, the archaeology does not disprove what the Bible tells us.

2.9 The date of the conquest: The absolute date of the arrival of the Israelites in Canaan is not known. Some people, on the basis of 1 Kings 6:1, argue for the last decade of the fifteenth century BC whilst others, on the basis that the Pharaoh of the Exodus may have been Rameses II, argue for the second half of the twelfth century. The archaeological evidence, such as it is, appears to point to the later date but it is not conclusive.

3. The destruction of the Canaanites

3.1 The issue: The books of Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua clearly state that God gave the land of Canaan to the Israelites (e.g. Jos 1:2) and instructed them to invade it and drive out or destroy the pre-existing population (e.g. Deut 7:1-2). The New Testament also indicates this: both Stephen and the apostle Paul asserted that God drove out or overthrew the Canaanites (Acts 7:45 and 13:19) and the faith of the Israelite army

attacking Jericho is commended in Hebrews 11:30; in addition, Jesus treated the Old Testament as authoritative and, although he did not quote the parts of it relating to the invasion, he quoted the book of Deuteronomy many times including chapters 6 and 8, which straddle the instructions about the invasion in chapter 7 (e.g. see Matt 4:1-11). Atheists (such as Richard Dawkins) have asserted that the Bible thus portrays God as a monster who sponsors genocide and some Christians find what the Bible says uncomfortable.

A few brief comments relating to the issue are, therefore, set out below. It is, however, impossible in this Reading Plan to examine this issue properly and so, on 31 May our evening service will comprise an *Open to Questions* service about the destruction of the Canaanites. During this, there will be an opportunity to hear more about the issues and to ask questions.

3.2 What did God command and what happened? Some commentators who fully accept the authority of the Bible suggest that the passages requiring that that Israelites “*totally destroy*” the Canaanite people (the so-called “ban”) and the statements about the Israelites killing everyone (e.g. in Jos 10:28-43) are hyperbolic. As an example, they point to out that we are told about Caleb driving out the inhabitants of Hebron (Jos 15:13-14 and Jdg 1:9-11) despite the inhabitants having been “*totally destroyed*” previously (Jos 10:37), which suggests that the reference to destruction is hyperbolic. They also note that accounts of battles in the ancient near east routinely used hyperbole and suggest that the author of the book of Joshua would have expected readers to understand that he was doing so.

Whether or not this is correct (and there are arguments both ways), the assertion that God commanded genocide is wrong. God said not that he would kill all the Canaanites but that he would drive them out of the land and the Israelites were his instrument in executing this (e.g. Ex 23:27-31; Nu 33:50-56; cf. Deut 7:1). They were to kill people who remained but, in the light of the evident fear that the Israelites induced in the Canaanites, it is likely that many people fled.

That said, however, the Israelite invasion was terrible for the Canaanites, many of whom were killed and most of whom lost their homes and land. Hence, the question why God would command this remains.

3.3 The allocation of the land: In order to address this question, we need to remember that God “owns” the whole earth (Ps 24:1) and allocates land to whoever he chooses, not only to the Israelites but also to other peoples (e.g. the Moabites, see Deut 2:9; cf. John 19:10-11). Furthermore, his allocation of Canaan to the Israelites was not on account of them being righteous (Gen 9:4-6) or favouritism: it was part of his plan of salvation, through which all nations would ultimately be blessed (Gen 12:3).

3.4 God’s judgment of the Canaanites: The implication of this was that the Canaanites would be driven from Canaan, not least because their presence would present a snare for the Israelites (Deut 20:17-18). Some assert that this was unfair but God said that the driving out or killing of the Canaanites was justified as judgment on account of their evil practices (Deut 9:4-5).

There is evidence that Canaanite religious practices were particularly depraved. For example, Deuteronomy 12:31 mentions child sacrifice and archaeologists have found clear evidence that this was practiced on a large scale. Some other ancient peoples were also dreadful and the Bible does not assert that the Canaanites were worse than others, but it does say that their practices deserved the judgment that was to be executed.

3.5 The basis of God’s judgment: The book of Joshua and other parts of the Old Testament make clear that God’s judgment was not based on race or ethnicity. It was his just condemnation from which the only escape was by his mercy on those who put their faith in him.

Non-Israelites who turned to the LORD were saved. Examples in the book of Joshua include Caleb (a Kenizzite; Ch.14), Rahab (a Canaanite; Ch.2) and the Gibeonites (also Canaanites; Ch.9) and there were also other foreigners within the Israelite community (Jos 8:33/35). Conversely, the Israelites were warned that, if they rebelled against God, they would be condemned just as the Canaanites had been (Ch.6 v.18/Ch.7 v.12). They were reminded of this by the defeat at Ai caused by the rebellion of Achan, for which he was put to death (Ch.7), and also by the recitation of the covenant curses at Shechem (Ch.8 vv.30-35; cf. Deut 13:1-18).

Centuries later, the Israelites were subject to terrible judgment on account of their ignoring these warnings (see 2 Kings 17/24-25 and the books of Jeremiah, Lamentations and Ezekiel). God used them to execute judgment

on the Canaanites but he then used the Assyrians and Babylonians to execute similar judgment on them.

We may ask why God chose to execute judgment on the Canaanites and the Israelites at the time that he did, bearing in mind that he did not execute similar judgment on other people who were probably equally deserving of it. The answer to this question probably lies in the exemplary nature of what God did. In any event, God says that he will judge all who do evil (see below) and those who are rightly condemned cannot complain if, for his own reasons, God chooses to defer executing judgment on others.

3.6 God's final judgment and salvation: The execution of judgment on the Canaanites and the Israelites is consistent with the Bible's warnings that God will judge wrongdoing and that his judgment is terrible. Jesus himself talked about God's final judgment on many occasions and frequently used the term "*weeping and gnashing of teeth*" in relation to it (e.g. Matt 13:36-43). He also indicated that God's judgment is far worse than being killed (Matt 10:28) and Hebrews 10:31 says that it is a "*dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*". Some Christians are uncomfortable with the concept of judgment but it is a fundamental part of God's justice.

In fact, God's judgment and grace go together (cf. Isa 60:1-3) and both are exemplified in the Israelites' entry into Canaan: God judged the Canaanites (and those Israelites who rebelled against him) and, as he did so, he showed grace to those (including Canaanites) who followed him. Knowing that God will hold people to account for their actions and that evil will be judged should be a great comfort to those who experience God's grace. What happened in Canaan is thus both a warning and a reassurance that God is serious about both judgement and salvation.

3.8 The uniqueness of the situation: There is absolutely no justification for using the conquest of Canaan as a model for actions by Christians or others today. It is presented in the Bible as being a unique event. Its uniqueness was made clear before the conquest began: in one of the key passages relating to the conquest, the things that the Israelites are told to do in the course of it are expressly distinguished from the things that they can do in the course of other wars (contrast Deut 20:1-15 with Deut 20:16-20); and even in relation to Canaan, in the light of the disobedience of the Israelites, God later stopped driving out the Canaanites (Jdg 2:20-23).

4. The geo-political setting

4.1 Places: Many places are mentioned in the book of Joshua and it is only possible to mention the more important ones here. Furthermore, the precise location of some places is uncertain.

The book opens with the Israelites camped a little to the north-east of the Dead Sea at **Shittim**, the full name of which was **Abel-Shittim** (Nu 33:49), which probably means something like “the brook by the acacia grove”. They were close to the River Jordan, which runs from the Sea of Galilee in the north to the Dead Sea in the south. They probably crossed the river a few kilometres north of the Dead Sea. **Gilgal**, where they then camped, was a few kilometres west of the river, between the river and Jericho.

Jericho was an ancient town located in the River Jordan valley about 16 km north-west of where the river flows into the Dead Sea and 27km east-north-east of Jerusalem. It had declined and was probably quite small at the time of the Joshua. The same is true of **Ai**, which was in the hills about 20km west of Jericho by a winding track. It is always referred to as “the Ai”, which appears to mean “the ruin” and it may have been an old, ruined settlement that had been reoccupied as a defensive measure by the people of **Bethel**, a significant town that lay about three kilometres to the north-west.

Shechem was a town in central Canaan, about 30 km north of Bethel. It was overshadowed by **Mount Ebal** (to the south) and Mount **Gerizim** (to the north), the mountains creating a natural amphitheatre, which was used by the Israelites for the covenant renewal ceremony described in Joshua 8:30-35. **Shiloh**, the location of the central sanctuary established by Joshua (Jos 18:1), lay between Bethel and Shechem.

Gibeon was a town about 9km north-west of Jerusalem, which explains why the king of Jerusalem was so concerned when it defected to the Israelites (Jos 10:1-2). The anti-Israelite coalition that he formed comprised various towns to the south and southwest of Jerusalem: **Hebron**, **Jarmuth**, **Lachish** and **Eglon**. The action in Joshua 10 mainly took place in that area.

Various places in Canaan were named **Hazor**. The one mentioned in Joshua 12:1 was a large and important town in the far north of Canaan and the action in Joshua 11 mainly took place in the surrounding area.

The term **Canaan** does not refer to a precisely defined area but generally to the land to the east of the Mediterranean Sea and west of the Dead Sea, River Jordan and Sea of Galilee (roughly bounded by the desert to the south and the hills of Lebanon to the north).

The book of Joshua refers to various places outside Canaan including: **Moab**, a kingdom to the east of the Dead Sea that, at the time of the events of the book, stretched north as far as the **Arnon Gorge** about half-way up the Dead Sea from the south. To the north of Moab lay the former kingdom of King Sihon of **Heshbon** and further north still lay **Bashan**, the former kingdom of King Og. The territory south of Bashan was referred to as **Gilead**, although this name could also be used to refer to the whole area occupied by the Israelites to the east of the Jordan (the **Transjordan**).

4.2 The peoples and politics: At the time of Joshua, the land of Canaan was occupied by various different peoples (seven are mentioned in Joshua 3:10 but there were also others). Strictly, the **Canaanites** were only one of these groups but the term **Canaanites** was sometimes used to refer to all of the groups collectively. The same is true of the term **Amorites** but on occasions, the term Canaanites is used of the peoples on the coastal plain and the term Amorite for those in the hills. **Canaan** was divided into innumerable small states. Their rulers were often referred to as “kings” but most seem to have ruled no more than a single town and its surrounding countryside. Thus, although the Israelites were seriously outnumbered, they were more unified than their enemies.

The **Hittites** were originally located in the middle of Anatolia in what is now Turkey, from where they built an empire. References to them in the book of Joshua are probably to people originally from Anatolia who had settled in Canaan and who may have owed allegiance to the Hittite kings. However, these kings did not intervene in the affairs of Canaan.

Another people, the **Philistines** had only just arrived on the scene (probably from Crete). They were based on the south-west coast, far from the conflict between the Israelites and the Canaanites, in which they did not intervene.

The **Israelites** were divided into 12 tribes (each descended from one of the sons of Jacob) and the tribes were divided into clans, but all accepted the leadership of Moses and, subsequently, Joshua. The tribe of Levi was

dedicated to the service of God and so was treated differently from the remaining tribes. Furthermore, the tribe of Joseph had divided into the sub-tribes of Ephraim (the tribe of Joshua) and Manasseh. In the case of the tribe of Manasseh, one of the clans (the Makirites) clearly had a distinct identity from the remainder of the tribe since it settled to the east of the River Jordan whilst the remainder settled to the west of it.

The **Egyptians** had long been interested in Canaan and Syria as far north as the River Euphrates but they allowed the Israelite invasion of Canaan to occur, possibly because they were distracted by events closer to Egypt.

4.3 Further information: A considerable amount of information about the time of Joshua is available on-line, although it needs to be read with caution since much of it is, at best, speculative. In particular, helpful (if to an extent, conjectural) maps can be found showing the places mentioned in the book of Joshua and the division of the land described in Joshua 14-19 (see, for example, <https://ibiblemaps.com/map-index/>, where you will find various maps relating to the events of the book of Joshua in the section headed "*The Conquest of Canaan*").

5. The name of God

5.1 The LORD: God is normally referred to in Joshua by his covenant name as given to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:13-15). This is spelt YHWH (using Latin script) and it is linked to the verb "to be", thus reminding us of God's statement, "*I am who I am*" (Exodus 3:14).

Ancient written Hebrew comprised only consonants and we are not sure how YHWH was pronounced. One suggestion is "*Jehovah*" but scholars now generally prefer "*Yahweh*". In any event, in ancient times, the name was considered too holy to utter and, when the Bible was read, it was replaced by "*the Lord*". This convention is followed in English Bibles but, in order to distinguish references to YHWH from other words that are also translated "*the Lord*", our Bibles use upper case letters (i.e. "*the LORD*") whenever translating "*YHWH*". This convention is followed in this reading plan.

5.2 God: God is sometimes referred to in Joshua by the Hebrew word "*EI*". This is a general term for God not carrying the overtones of God's covenant with his people that YHWH carries. Our Bibles translate it as "*God*".

“Have I not commanded you?

Be strong and courageous.

Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged,

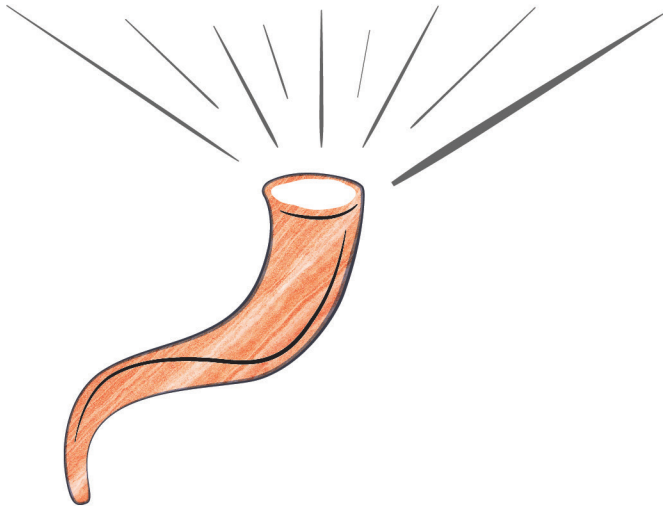
For the LORD your God will be with you

wherever you go.”

(Joshua 1:9, NIV)

“Have I not commanded you?
Be strong and courageous.
Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged,
for the LORD your God will be with you
wherever you go.”

Joshua 1:9



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