

Week 15

Joshua – יהושע

Ye ho shua – Yahweh Is Salvation¹

Joshua reads like a history², but it also a faith story³, that dwells on a very challenging generation of change in the life of the people of God. In Exodus⁴, we see the Hebrews move painfully, from slave to free. In Joshua, we see the Hebrews move painfully, from nomadic to settled⁵ from landless to landed. We are reading the continuing birth story of the people of God. In Joshua we are confronted, at times with a brutally violent birth, so violent that is unsettling for those of us who are a couple hundred years distant from our own land's conquering⁶. Nor do we have the experience necessary to have any significant emotional empathy with this people; we simply have not experienced the vulnerability that the children of Jacob have. Look at this little scrap of land on a map: 200 miles North and South, 50 East and West – think New Jersey, or 1/5th of Ohio. Israel was, except in very infrequent time spans, a people who lived on the edge of existence. They lived on this knife's edge of existence for about 3500 years – I wonder how that multi-millennial experience of vulnerability shapes a people. Throughout history, they are alone, surrounded by so many great and petty powers.

¹ Numbers 13:16 lets us know that Joshua (which means Yahweh is salvation) was born Hoshea (which means salvation). Moses is the one who gave him the new name. If you prefer his original name, good news it was retained by the prophet Hosea.

² In the Hebrew Bible there are three divisions or categories: the law, the prophets, and the writings. Joshua was the first book of the prophets – surprised? The prophets were further divided into former and latter prophets. Joshua was the first of the former prophets which include Joshua, Judges Samuel and Kings. Note to self: I am curious if the Hebrew scholars had interpretive principles for each type/genre of writing.

³ The really smart folk call Joshua an *etiological saga* – a story that explains origins – I am comfortable with history or faith history. When someone tells you an almost assuredly richly embellished good-old-day-story – you can say, I don't go in for etiological sagas. Man... do we give you good stuff with the a/p

⁴ Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy also.

⁵ Consider how easy that change has been and continues to be for the Native American People – of course the Native Americans had that change imposed from another power. But that's a bit of our violent past, so let's return our focus to Joshua.

⁶ The most unsettling of the violence is the commanded *haram or herem*, which is 'to dedicate something or someone totally to God, with the implication that it must be completely destroyed to avoid human use' (*Logos - Exegetical Guide*). We see *herem* throughout the OT (also in the stories of the surrounding cultures), but it is particularly noted in Joshua, mostly in chapters 10 and 11. Samuel broke with Saul over a *herem* violation saying, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears." (1 Samuel 15:14). Saul wasn't squeamish about killing the people, but he hated letting go of the plunder – which was dedicated to God. My personal opinion, just thinking about it now, is the possibility that *herem* was a war practice/law that actually was instituted by God because it discouraged war, as the winner couldn't profit materially from the war – it works a little for me. We, humans learned rather quickly that there is money to be made in war. If anything about war is demonic it is that. Ultimately, if God is God, God is free. Maybe that freedom is the most fundamental aspect of divinity. God doesn't need my/our approval, God is not accountable to me/us, and I/we sooo need his mercy. I always think of **Isaiah 29:16** when I come to passages that make me uncomfortable in this way.

Going around the compass you have Nineveh, Babylon, Persia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. An eye-popping threat at every compass point. It's miraculous that Israel still exists as a nation. The book of Joshua has taught me much about God and life: God's good will for his children goes far beyond our ability to imagine. Neither our imaginations, nor our maps are big enough. // When calling roll we can start and end with is God. Is God among us? With his presence comes possibility // There is always a river to cross, a harbor to sail out of. We are often called to trust God in these river crossings and in these uncharted waters // Leaders matter a lot // The beneficial effects of obedience and the consequences of disobedience go far beyond the individual. // Some things and people are holy // There is always temptation to not finish the job and there are costs to ceding to this temptation // Remembering is a critical spiritual practice.

Sunday, Jan 30

Joshua 1 – Trusting promises or threats

For Reflection: Two covenants in one chapter. From God to Joshua: a promise of land and presence and a threefold expectation of God's that Joshua be strong and courageous (6,7,9). Then at the end of the chapter the people promise to follow as long as Joshua is strong and courageous. (18) *What challenge are you facing that requires strength and courage?* Offer your concerns to God in prayer.

Lagniappe: Genesis 15:18-21

Monday, Jan 31

Joshua 2 – Family history

For Reflection: Besides Joshua (vs 1), Rahab, a prostitute and not a Hebrew, is the only named character in this chapter – she is the focus of chapter 2. *Knowing Rahab's occupation and her foreign (Canaanite) status how would she be welcomed in your house? at your church? Who would she hang out with?* Vs 11 ends with one of the great faith statements in the Bible. THIS IS NOT faith in a little god, a regional deity. THIS IS NOT... I believe in the God of Sunday morning, the God that always makes me feel better, the God that makes me look respectable, that stays out of money matters, and knows his/her place. *What is your 1 sentence faith statement?*

Lagniappe: Matthew 1:5⁷ (Guess who shows up in Jesus' family tree? One of only four women in that long, 17 verse, 42 generation genealogy. Each of these women seem to crash the party – unexpected guests: One who is a homeless foreigner (Ruth), one who is a foreigner and a prostitute (Rahab), one a widow who "brilliantly?" pretended to be a prostitute (Tamar), and then one who today we might say had an affair with a king (Bathsheba).

⁷ See also Heb 11:31 and James 2:25

This genealogy has many implications for how we see the kingdom of God - in terms of inclusion.⁸

Tuesday, Feb 1

Joshua 3/4 – Provision and Remembering

For Reflection: A very Moses-ish miracle – it had to help the numbers in Joshua’s approval polls. *What river is God calling you to cross? How do you remember the provision of God in your life and in your family?* Connie and I have experienced some truly head-shaking moments of provision. We also have a way of remembering those moments – our metaphoric pile of twelve stones. It helps.

Lagniappe: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Wednesday, Feb 2

Joshua 6/7 – First Victory First Rebellion

For Reflection: Here we see the end of the Jericho story. The first instance of *herem* in Joshua (17). Faithfulness toward Rahab. The first war profiteer, Achan and the consequences. *In what personal situation have you most clearly seen the consequences of sin, and the benefits of obedience?*

Lagniappe: Galatians 6:7

Thursday, Feb 3

Joshua 12:1-13:13 – Victories and Unfinished Business

For Reflection: Chapter 12 is a list of the victories of Joshua (his trophy room) impressive. Chapter 13 details the great amount of land not possessed. Unfinished business. The lands described to this day know little to no security. The Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and Lebanon. *What is your greatest accomplishment/victory? What is your most galling bit of unfinished business? How was God part of each? What can still be done?*

Lagniappe: Philippians 1:6

Friday, Feb 4

Joshua 23 – Last words to the leaders

For Reflection: *What will be your last words to those you love most?* Think about the full life of Joshua: he was born a slave in Africa and dies the leader of a nation in Asia. He saw miracles in Egypt and miracles in Israel. He was a spy, and sent spies. He was at war almost all his life, but dies peacefully at home. *How full has your life been?*

Lagniappe: *The book of 2 Timothy is Paul’s last charge to Timothy as his execution is drawing near 4:6-8*

⁸ Most public records hide what society considers shameful, the Bible, however, does not. This is one of the lesser reasons I believe the Bible is inspired. It is like no other book, it records the opposite of what we would expect.

Saturday, Feb 5

Joshua 24 – Last words to the people

For Reflection: *What were the circumstances of your most powerful times of renewing your commitment to the Lord? In what sense did God choose you, and in what sense have you chosen God (eg vs 19-28)* Another stone of remembering in this passage. These stones serve as prologues and epilogues to the book of Joshua.

Lagniappe: Luke 14:28