Alright, welcome to the “Bible in Five.” This week you are going to be reading the book of Joshua. The book of Joshua action packed. For most modern readers it poses some enormous, really difficult questions. So we will talk about those and the book of Joshua all at once here.

The book itself falls into a number of main chunks. The theme of the book is pretty clear. So the people came from the wilderness and they are entering into the Promised Land. Not under the leadership of Moses anymore, he died at the end of Deuteronomy, but under the leadership of Joshua. In these early chapters, Joshua is portrayed as the new leader of the people, as a new Moses. So most of things that Joshua is doing here are Moses-like things.

So in chapter 1 Joshua is called to help the people obey, especially to obey the Torah, the teachings, God’s instruction, to be obedient to the covenant and so on. He helps the people cross the River Jordan. The story is shaped and the language is very similar to people crossing through the Red Sea in the Exodus. Joshua is like a new Moses.

So they cross into the Promised Land, and they send out spies to find out what is going on in the land of Canaan. God commissions Joshua and the people essentially to go into the land, and to run out a number of Canaanite peoples that are in the land. That’s what happens in the next book of the story here. Chapters 5 through 12 is the Israelites battling the Canaanites. The front story here is given the most attention, this is the well-known story of the battle of Jericho. Most of everything that comes after it abbreviated short stories lists and summaries. There are years and years and years of events compacted into a very short amount of space here in chapters 5 through 12. What’s most likely happened is decades worth of events are being compressed here in these short chapters.
The basic idea is this, is that even you heard a little note back in the book of Genesis chapter 15 that the people who are inhabiting this land, the Canaanites, they are a deeply corrupt and morally compromised people. They are well-known child sacrifice or sexual fertility rituals and so on. Essentially God uses the people of Israel to bring judgment on their corruption and on their sin and rebellion. So they are called to run the people out of the land or to destroy them in battle.

So these chapters raise a big questions for most of us readers like: “I thought Jesus said love your enemies.” These stories pose problems for us as Christian readers of the Old Testament and that’s okay. They are always have and I think they are always will.

But the core message of these chapters however has never been to readers of the book “hey, go kill people of the name of God” or something like that. That’s not these stories are for. The Israelites are called to carry out this policy of destroying just a handful of Canaanite people groups who were corrupt sinful rebels that I talked about earlier. This was a form of God’s judgment on them. Israel was not allowed to act like this towards any other nations, read Deuteronomy chapter 20. They would seek peace with the nations around them but this was God’s justice coming on the Canaanites. So they battle numerous amounts of the Canaanites here and the Israelites move into the cities and the land.

The main chunk of the book chapters 13 to 22 is once the Israelites were established in the land, then they are given the boundaries, all the different tribes of Israel are given their inheritance in the land of Canaan. If you are doing the “Eat This Book” plan you would notice that these chapters I said it is okay to skim because literally it is like reading a map. It’s like geographical land boundary markers all the way through these chapters. So to us it seems boring but to them it is super important because this is about part of God fulfilling his promises to the down to the detail. He told Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that he would bring their descendants into the land. All of those promises are fulfilled. God was faithful to his promises to protect his people and to bring them into the Promised Land.

The book ends with two chapters where Joshua has two long speeches to the
people and they are about the covenant. These chapters are very similar to the final chapters of the book of Deuteronomy. In these chapters he calls them to remember the covenant God made with Abraham, to remember the covenant God made with the people of Israel on Mount Sinai, to remember the laws of the book of Deuteronomy. He says “You guys are in the land, God has been faithful to you, he has shown you grace; now you need to step up and obey and live as God’s holy people in the land, not like the Canaanites.” He says, “if you do, it is going to be great, you will have blessing. But if you don’t, you are going to call down the same kind of judgment that the Canaanites experienced. God will kick you guys out of the land just like you kicked the Canaanites out of the land, if you become corrupt just like they did.”

So the book again leaves the Israelites with a choice. What are they going to do? Are they in the land now are they going to obey or disobey? What’s going to happen? You remember the largest storyline of the Bible is God’s mission to the nation is at stake here in how the Israelites respond.

So that’s the book of Joshua in the big picture. I hope it is helpful for you. Use the weekly Bible guides to help you read through the book of Joshua. I hope you sort out some of those questions. So thanks and see you next time

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