

Well, hello and welcome to Ponder. We are having a conversation about the word of the Lord, as it was preached to us on Sunday, and as we encounter it in our everyday lives.

My name is Jack, and I am joined by Ben and Tristan, just the three of us today. How are we going on this Crisp Monday morning?

Yeah, very good. Welcome back, Jack. Welcome back to the pod.

Thank you.

It's very cold this morning.

Yes, definitely. We're all huddled. You've both got your puffer jackets on.

So today we are reflecting on Christ in Joshua and the sermon you preached last night, Ben. You want to give us a quick recap of that sermon?

Yeah, Joshua is a really tough book. The Bible reading that we had was Joshua 10 verse 40 to 43, which basically says, Joshua destroyed everything that breathed in the promised land.

This is one of the hardest and darkest parts of the Bible, in my opinion. So at the start of the sermon, I sort of quote to Timothy 3.16 that says, all scripture is God-breathed and raised this question of how that could be God-breathed.

Like where is God in the Book of Joshua? How are we supposed to read that? And really the sermon was how to read Joshua and keep your faith.

So I had five tips that I've picked up over years of reading the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and that is to remember genre, justice, scale, agency, and delay.

And I think if we remember those five things, it doesn't answer the questions and make them go away, but it helps us to hold on to our faith at the same time as reading the tough parts of the Bible. So I hope that that was helpful.

I found it didn't answer my questions entirely, but it was helpful to hold on to faith.

Tristan, what were your sort of initial impressions coming out of that sermon?

I'll give you my initial impression of Joshua before I went into the sermon. And that it's exactly what Ben said at the beginning. It's one of those passages or those books that you generally avoid.

But yeah, I was encouraged by the message to see the breakdown and the structure of it and how it's ultimately about God fulfilling his promises, which is something encouraging to hold on to out of Joshua. So that was good.

So we talk about Joshua as quite a hard book.

And I think, yeah, it has this reputation. But I just want to ask a question. I guess there are a lot of dark parts in the Bible.

What makes Joshua so particularly problematic, do you guys think?

I think for me, the main thing is that God commanded them to do what they did. I think we know that human history is full of violence and wickedness. And even not just history today, in many parts of the world, violence is a part of life.

And we really quite insulated from that in the West. The tricky part about Joshua is that it says, I mean, it says here in Chapter 10 verse, what is that?

Chapter 10 verse 40, He totally destroyed all who breathed just as the Lord, the God of Israel had commanded.

I mean, I spoke to a few people after the sermon yesterday who were struggling with me to reconcile Jesus, the mercy and the grace of Jesus with God, as He's presented in Joshua, commanding the annihilation of an entire people group.

How do you reconcile those two things together? For me, that's probably the hardest question.

I think one of the main themes that I always struggled with is, why is there a reason for the exile? And why is this, this, this? All these different questions.

And I think Joshua is hard hitting because one, it's, we can acknowledge that the Bible is offensive to people who haven't heard it before. It's hard hitting and hard hitting.

And I think it's difficult for people to recognize that it's a call to repentance in all the themes and all the message of Joshua. And it's not actually God's fault that they go into exile.

It's just this repeated defenses of the people, like their repeated unfaithfulness or apostasy.

And I suppose that kind of relates to the destruction of Canaanites, in that there's a parallel where it talks about the land vomiting you out.

So it, in the same way that it vomits out and drives out the Canaanites because of their sin, later in history, Israel gets vomited out because of their sin.

Yeah, it shows how much God hates sin. And not just sin in the abstract, but concrete practices of sin, like child sacrifice. He appalls that.

I mean, it says all throughout Jeremiah, that these people, he's talking about Israel. So later on in the story, Israel become the child sacrifices. And he says, I hate it.

It never, it says in Jeremiah, this, it never even came into my mind. God appalls child sacrifice. And so it is right for him to bring justice on people who are committing that kind of atrocity, which is hard to kind of hear.

But I think it's one of the helpful pieces to help us read Joshua.

Yeah. And that, and those sort of practices, there is some archeological basis for it, if I recall. Not necessarily from Canaan, from my knowledge, but from Carthage, which is a colony of Tyre and Sidon, which are essentially Canaanite cities.

And in this, we have found the bones of children, essentially in their temples. That would seem to back up that this was cultural practice that originated in Canaan, then got exported outwards.

Well, I'm interested in cultural perceptions of Joshua, because obviously we have a particular, it has a particular reputation for us.

Tristan, do you think that in back in South Africa, did they have a similar attitude towards Joshua as a particularly, did it have a reputation as a dark book back there?

I don't think it was perceived as a dark book, but just a book of great challenge that we just feared. Like, so it was just, we were too scared to jump into it. But not all the churches were like that.

There were some churches that were geared up and ready to go into Joshua, into detail, and do series, like deep series on Joshua. So I don't think it's a general, this is a bad, bad book, let's cut it out of our Bible.

But more of a, we're not ready to go into that type of conversation yet.

Yeah, I guess that tracks with how most Australian churches would look at it as well. There's probably maybe a little bit more reticence. But yeah, I just thought that would be an interesting to compare, but it looks like it's fairly similar.

So Ben, you talked about these principles of interpretation, genre, justice, scale, agency, and delay.

And the first one you talked about is genre, and you talked about Joshua as a battle account, as sort of a sub-genre of narrative, a battle or a conquest narrative. And you talked about one of the characteristics being heavy exaggeration, right?

This idea that we destroyed them all, and then you look later and like, oh, they're still there. I imagine some listeners might struggle with this idea of exaggeration because does that undermine the truth of the text?

What would you, how would you respond to that?

Yeah, I think that's a fair point to say. The idea about genre is that we have to understand the nature of the genre in order to interpret the text itself.

Just because a feature of battle account narrative is over exaggeration to make a point, doesn't mean that there's not truth in there.

It doesn't say that nothing that happened inside this text is true, but it's speaking in a particular way to make a particular point.

And so, it's really helpful for us Bible readers to understand the way that genres work in the Bible's literature, but also in other ancient Near Eastern literature, such as there's Egyptian literature that has the same over exaggeration feature,

And I wonder if the word exaggeration, maybe is not exactly what we might prefer, but perhaps it's better to say there's particular type of jargon that gets used in this type of genre.

Because exaggeration makes it seem like we're just looking at the events and intentionally inflating them.

But what we have in Joshua is a particular set of vocabulary and way of describing things that is consistent throughout Joshua, throughout Hebrew literature, and throughout conquest narratives in other places.

I mean, the Assyrians are very good at it. The Assyrians have a very formulaic way of describing their conquests, where they say, you know, we left no one alive, there was no happiness left, we salted all the fields.

Like they say, they describe it the same way all over and over and over again.

And so it's not necessarily if they're taking each individual event and lying about it or exaggerating about it, but they have a specific vocabulary and language for describing this type of conquest. Would you agree with that?

Yeah, that's helpful. I probably didn't put a lot of thought into the choice of the word exaggerate.

Yeah, sorry. That may be me being pedantic.

I'm not sure what a better word would be, but that is quite helpful, I think, to make that distinction.

Would you say it's emphasis? That it's putting emphasis on it?

Yeah, choosing what to place the priority on. And as I said, the point of the battle account is to highlight the nature of the gods that are behind the nations fighting. And in the case of Joshua, it's to say that God is faithful to his promise.

And in fact, when you look at the battles in Joshua, when they win, it's because God won for them. When they lose, it's because they weren't fighting in faithfulness to God.

And so the whole point of that first half of Joshua is to bring our eyes back to God and back to faithfulness to him as the one who fights for us and the one who achieves his purpose.

Yeah, I feel like we get lost in the murky waters of all the battles and get too drawn to the negative side of it, whereas in my view, the main theme of Joshua is how God fulfilled that promise to give the land that he promised in Genesis 12.

And the whole of Joshua is an account of how Israel received that land. So, I think, I don't want to say a general statement, but I've seen it most often that we focus too much on the negative sides of Joshua as what we perceive as negative.

All the fights and all the battles and all those, oh, our God is a very bad God.

But if you look at it in the full story, which is what you did at the beginning of the sermon, you laid out the story of the Bible, placing it in context, then those jargons and everything fits into place, and then you can see the bigger picture.

Because you can never isolate the book by itself and try and understand it.

Yeah, that's good. The other kind of danger is that we read it the other way, and we think it's all about me and the battles that I'm fighting.

And so we think, oh, God is fighting for me, which means I'll get the promotion, and I'll win the argument, and I'll conquer this situation. I'll buy the house, and everything is going to work out for me.

So rather than reading it through the hard questions, we read it as all about me and my spiritual struggles, which equally is not what Joshua was written to do.

You think about the later generation of Israelites, who are living in the land, experiencing the different things that happen as the story of the Bible unfolds.

Joshua was really helpful in telling their history of how they got to be where they are, and the fact that it was God who provided this land and who fought for them. And that's the first half. The second half of Joshua is the allocation of the land.

That's like almost a constitution of the land. It's like a deed almost, for the tribes to know where their boundaries are. So this text of Joshua is really important in the life of Israel for their future life in the land, in their worship.

But we can read it the wrong way, and that can be unhelpful, I think.

And I think the cultural barrier is particularly pronounced here. I mean, I think collective killing has a very particular place in our imagination because of what has happened in the 20th century.

And the genocides that occurred there have become a key part of our culture, in our concepts of evil. But we're also people that haven't really experienced genuine war in our lifetime.

Whereas from the perspective of an ancient Israelite reader, this is us versus our enemies, and we defeated them here, and we defeated them here, and it's like a Ukrainian describing victories against a Russian.

Now, the language makes us think of the... The language it uses of total destruction makes us think of those genocidal situations, which again, are particularly sensitive to us as 21st century readers.

But I think I remember reading something about this, that the point is not to make ancient Israelites into 21st century readers, but it's also not to make 21st century people into ancient Israelites. It's a tricky...

It's a tricky type of road to walk, I think. Ben, you talked about the idea of delay as another aspect of this, that God delayed in bringing his justice on the Canaanites.

You know, there's that passage in Genesis that says, the sin of the Amalekites have not reached its full measure. And of course, there's an ultimate delay for judgment for all of us, right? And at the end of time, all sin will be destroyed.

But I just want to sort of... The devil being in the details, did God call the Canaanites to repent?

I mean, that is kind of the implication of this, but as far as I'm aware, is there any sort of sense to which the Canaanites are being given an opportunity other than the time?

Yeah, there's no explicit text in that part of the Bible that says that God preached to them for them to repent. In the same way that I quoted the Book of Jonah, Jonah does give the wicked city a chance to repent, and they do repent.

So we don't have explicitly that happening.

But what we have, which is such an important story, is the story of Rahab, that as God's justice is coming to the city of Jericho, a prostitute woman of a Gentile nation, meaning in all three senses, opposite to the Jewish majority, who are

attacking, she sees the justice of God coming and chooses to be faithful to God, and she is saved. In contrast, the story immediately after that, is a male Israelite soldier, so the opposite in all three senses, who aligns himself against Yahweh and

is destroyed. And so, even though we don't kind of see specifically the language of repentance go before the justice, it's very clear from the Rahab story and the Achan story, that alignment with God is the key thing.

And if you see God and even, oh, it says also in the Rahab story that Rahab heard what God did in Egypt. Isn't that cool?

Like the mind blowing plagues and the parting of the Red Sea, all of the people heard about that, and they knew something about Yahweh, the God of Israel. And so, Rahab sees that God coming for her city, and her response is repentance.

And she and her whole family are saved for that reason. And so, I think there is a place for repentance in turning to God, even if the message of repentance is not being preached as clearly as it is later on in the Bible.

And there is that other story of the men of Isaac Abia, who deceived the Israelites into making a treaty with them. The false treaty. And essentially get incorporated into the Israelite project.

So zooming out from the text's content and looking at these texts themselves and how they have been used, I think we have to grapple with the fact that Joshua has been...

Is one of those biblical texts that has been misused historically, whether it's settlers in North America believing they've come to the promised land and they need to claim it from the Native Americans, or whether it's people in modern Israel who use

it as justification to expel Palestinians, Benjamin and Yahu calling Palestinians Amalekites or whatever. What is our message for people or people who are descendants of people who have been sort of victims of this text and how it's been misused?

I mean, yeah, sorry doesn't cut it for the injustices that are present in this world based on what has been interpreted from this text. I think it's helpful. I mean, I don't have anything more to say but sorry to those people.

This is why it's important to do biblical theology to hold in tension the entire Bible, not just to take Joshua and say, oh, that's for me right now. I'm going to run with that.

But to see how that the hard parts of Joshua are part of the biggest story that leads to Christ and to his salvation. And so certainly Joshua is meant to confront us and to our tendencies to abuse our power over vulnerable people.

The fundamental premise of Christianity is that all human beings are sinful. And that includes people within the church. And we can only try and be better.

And as you say, biblical theology is key. And the Bible is not something... I guess I'm speaking to my fellow Christians here.

The Bible is not something to be taken lightly because it can have disastrous consequences if it's misused. And I have no doubt also that God's judgment will fall upon those who misuse it.

And that at the end of time, I mean, I cannot speak, He's the judge at the end of the day. But those who hold the Lord's name in vain, who lift it up in vain, Exodus says there will be no forgiveness for them.

So, we can only hope that, and I trust actually, in faith, that there will be justice for even those who wear the name of Christian, but misuse the name of God.

I think it's important to emphasize what you just said, is that we are not the judge in that situation. And I can guarantee you, there's a lot more times where Joshua has been misinterpreted than it has been faithfully told.

And that's just, it's the same theme in Joshua happening today. It's repeated on faithfulness of humanity. And that's important to understand, that we're still living in a sinful world.

And there's going to be attacks from the enemy from all different sides, especially when it comes to understanding scripture.

And I think it's important to hold on to the truth, that He is still sovereign through all the bad times, and through all the confusing times as well, especially when it comes to reading His word, and understanding His word.

It's holding on to the truth that, this may be confusing, but I remember what He did for me on the cross, and therefore I will hold on to Him. Yeah.

That's good. We are not the judge, and we are also not the innocent. We can't stand in the place of pointing fingers at a world that is deserving of the justice of God.

When we are deserving of the justice of God, Romans says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

And that's what makes the Gospel so good, and that's why the entire Bible finds its culmination in Christ crucified, that He took on Himself our sin and the justice of God, in order that the faithfulness of God would be magnified to us.

And so, far be it from us to point fingers and to throw stones when we are the ones who are deserving of death itself. So, praise God for the Gospel in Joshua even.

I think that we can pretty definitively say, and I think it's worth stating, that a lot of Christian states have tried to portray themselves as Israel.

I think we can say pretty clearly from what Scripture says that no national group or ethnicity has a monopoly on the claims of Israel or on being the people of God. That being the people of God is now a matter of faith.

And that Christians should be wary of anyone that tries to use that faith to justify national or ethnic claims. I just wanted to say that straight up, because that is not the application of Joshua.

You are not the Israelites and your enemies are not the Amalekites and you don't get to go around destroying them because of this text.

But that then leads me into the next question, which is, you talked about, okay, all scripture is useful and God breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, training and righteousness.

And you said that Joshua, it's key about justice, the justice of God will come upon sinners, which we've just touched on, and faithfulness. God is faithful to his promises.

And we can see that in the context of Joshua, that God is faithful to his promises to Israel, to deliver them into victory and give them this land, and he brings justice on wrongdoers. But how does that translate into our lives on Monday morning?

Because most of us are not fighting wars, and none of us have really been promised land, and hopefully none of us are sacrificing children. Yeah, how is this useful for training us in righteousness?

As we've just probably read Joshua through our reading plan, how can we use it in our workplace, in our devotions? What do you guys think?

I mean, so many thoughts could be said. The first one that comes to mind is the idea that God fights for us, that the battle belongs to the Lord, and what I'm taking from that is that God is active more so than we are.

I mean, you've never walked into a room that God was not already in that room at work in some way.

And so, the Book of Joshua, one of the things it does is it reminds us not to fight in our own strength, but to serve the Lord and let Him fight the battle for us, or even to change the metaphor from an explicitly violent metaphor.

God is doing the work for His glory and we get to be a part of that. And so, there's conversations you can have with colleagues or family members or friends that God is going ahead of you and He is preparing the way.

And so, these two kind of phrases that I've come across recently, which have been really helpful, is the contrast between straining in the flesh versus serving in the spirit.

So often I and maybe we can try and squeeze something out of life and we're just straining in the flesh to make something good happen for God and for His glory and our good.

But that the life of Jesus was a life not of any sense of straining in the flesh, but of serving humbly in the spirit and trusting that God is the one who was at work and who goes before us and who upholds all of our efforts.

And so that's, I mean, it's the reminder that Paul gives in 2 Corinthians 12 verse 9, that his grace is sufficient because his power is made perfect in our weakness.

So as we go into our workplaces and our families, our marriages and friendships, God is going before us and he is at work in some way and he invites us to participate in his work, which is encouraging.

I think it's important to note that the whole of Joshua, he repeats the phrase, be strong and courageous a lot of times. And I think that's something we can hold on to is, be strong and courageous for you have a mighty God.

And that is so reverent and so encouraging that we can hold on to. And I don't think you can look further than the story of Rahab, because here's this lady who's in the line of Jesus, but the most unlikely figure to be in that line.

And that shows that it's not all for us, at least for the Monday morning. It's not about earning the titles and earning, like just earning things in general to look good on the outside, but rather it's just a call to faithfulness and obedience.

Like that's, it's not about doing all the good works and being all the good things. Yes, works are important, but not solely works. And for us, that looks like just trusting in God's plan through all the different seasons.

That's the way I try to bring Joshua.

And that's the way that he finishes his famous last words, is, choose this day who you will serve, those gods or those gods. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

And so Joshua speaks volumes to the faithfulness of God, but then it ends with the invitation for us to be faithful to him.

And that's covenant language, that God is committing himself to his people, and he invites them to commit themselves back to him again.

All right, so I think we're well-due for a palate cleanser question after a dark topic like this.

Not to skip over that. And there's obviously so much more we could say on this. There's so much ink that's already been spilled.

And there's some good books you can read on this. There's Show No Mercy, Five Views on the Canaanite Genocide is a book you can pick up if you want to read a variety of views.

John Walton's Lost World of the Canaanite Conquest is another good book you can pick up on it that will go into, both of those books will provide different perspectives and will go into a lot more detail on the specifics than we could in our podcast

or Ben could in his sermon. So if you're struggling with this and you want to get deeper into it, there are books you can read. We only have limitations for what we can do with this time, but that's a tangent.

Going back to our palette, Quinn's a question. What are you guys reading at the moment?

I'm reading my church history textbook. Hey, come on. When I did church history five years ago at Bible College, it was so boring.

I'm sorry if my lecturers happened to be listening. They're probably not listening, but if they were.

I'm going to send it to them.

I'm sorry. It was really boring at the time. But I find myself now fascinated by church history, and so I have voluntarily gone back, and I'm reading through the textbook on church history.

And that is Gonzales'-

Yeah, Justin Gonzales.

Justin Gonzales, The Story of Christianity, Volume One.

It's a two-volume work. Great. Tristan?

I'm reading two books at the moment.

One is Holy Spirit by John Owen. It's one of the Pirates in Paperback series. And the other one is Prodigal God by Tim Keller.

Ah.

Love that book.

Love a bit of Tim Keller.

Yeah.

One is The Short Read, which is the Tim Keller one. And the John Owen one I've had in my ownership for six years. I've read it twice.

Now, this third time, I'm trying to go through it like crazy detail. So yeah, those two books.

I love rereading books. I do it all the time. I finished a book and I'm like, I just want to start again.

Very impressive. There's a CS. Lewis quote that I read once where he says, I can't imagine reading a book and loving it and not wanting to immediately read it again.

And a couple of years ago, I thought that that's just insane. I would never want to read a book again, but now you find certain books and it just changes the way you think about something or God meets you in the middle of that book.

And I can't imagine not wanting to go back and read it again, which is interesting. Anyway, Jack, your book at the moment.

My book. So we seem to have a bit of a theme here. You're reading Church History.

Tristan, you're reading some Puritan works, which was also Church History.

I'm reading some Church History, which is Julian of Norwich's Revelations of Divine Love, which is Julian of Norwich is sort of an anchorite, sort of a, I guess not technically a nun, but a holy woman who's sort of intentionally locked herself in a

chamber, and she receives these visions from God. And she's just writing down what she saw. And it's quite an interesting, it's a bit of a hard read, because it's an older form of English, but yes, I'm working my way through that.

Very good.

All right. Well, thank you all for listening and for bearing with us as we try to struggle with quite a difficult area of Scripture. But I hope you have a very blessed week, and thank you guys for coming on the pod.