

Job 42:1–6 (CEB)

Job answered the LORD:

- ² I know you can do anything;
no plan of yours can be opposed successfully.
³ You said, “Who is this darkening counsel without knowledge?”
I have indeed spoken about things I didn’t understand,
wonders beyond my comprehension.
⁴ You said, “Listen and I will speak;
I will question you and you will inform me.”
⁵ My ears had heard about you,
but now my eyes have seen you.
⁶ Therefore, I relent and find comfort on dust and ashes.

Joshua 6:15–20 (CEB)

¹⁵ On the seventh day, they got up at dawn. They circled the city in this way seven times. It was only on that day that they circled the city seven times. ¹⁶ The seventh time, the priests blew the trumpets. Then Joshua said to the people, “Shout, because the LORD has given you the city!” ¹⁷ The city and everything in it is to be utterly wiped out as something reserved for the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute is to stay alive, along with everyone with her in her house. This is because she hid the messengers we sent. ¹⁸ But you, keep away from the things set aside for God so that you don’t desire and take some of the things reserved. That would turn the camp of Israel into a thing doomed to be utterly wiped out and bring calamity on it. ¹⁹ All silver and gold, along with bronze and iron equipment, are holy to the LORD. They must go into the LORD’s treasury.” ²⁰ Then the people shouted. They blew the trumpets. As soon as the people heard the trumpet blast, they shouted a loud war cry. Then the wall collapsed. The people went up against the city, attacking straight ahead. They captured the city.

Again we come to the fundamental question: Will we trust God?

Trust is the bond that enables the deepest and most meaningful relationships in our lives. If we have even a few people over the course of our lives that we utterly and completely trust, then we should count ourselves blessed. But there’s something else about trust. Trust has to be built over a long time, and it can be shattered in an instant, by one rash act, by a single instance of betrayal. That’s why even one act of unfaithfulness in a marriage never completely goes away. It can be overcome, but the memory is still there like a distant shadow.

There are countless questions we have about God, Jesus, the Bible, the church, and the rest. Indeed, many of the questions that we have aren’t really answerable. So what do we do with the questions we can’t answer or the answers that discomfort us? We could just walk away from the whole thing, muttering that we won’t trust God until we get satisfactory questions to all our questions. But that seems pretty foolish. Why would we think we could ever comprehend the fullness of God and his work in this world?

No, in the end, the question is really pretty simple: *Will we trust God even with all our doubts and questions?* That’s the question for everyone who claims to have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. We can acknowledge our doubts, we all have some, but we can still choose to trust God with what we cannot understand or what we question.

The biblical story, begun with Abraham and culminating in the death of Jesus on the cross, shows that God not only makes promises but keeps those promises. God is the able promise-keeper. The Bible’s way to show us that God is trustworthy is to tell us the stories of his people, such as today’s story of Joshua and the walls of Jericho. But let’s set the stage by turning to a very different Old Testament figure, Job, who learns some lessons about his, and our own, limitations.

“Do you have the answers?”

The basic story of Job is simple. He is a “blameless and upright” man, wealthy and devoted to God. Coming before God in the heavens, the Accuser¹ claims that Job is devoted to God only because he has been very blessed in his life and that if Job loses everything, then he will turn against God.

God allows the Accuser to take everything from Job – his family, his home, his wealth, even his health. Job has no idea why such suffering has fallen on him. Job’s friends come to comfort him and for seven days, they simply sit with him. But they can’t resist trying to answer the questions posed by Job’s suffering. Surely, Job has done something wrong. Or perhaps his family did. Somebody must have, they say . . . for bad things don’t happen to good people. But, of course, you and I know that they do. Bad things happen to good people all the time. Often, it is at the hands of other people, but sometimes it is the indiscriminate suffering caused by a tsunami or an illness.

In the end, after Job’s friends have demonstrated their foolishness and pride through all their futile explanations, God arrives, putting human wisdom in perspective. This is God’s world and Job’s friends are foolish to think they can answer all the questions. They do not have the answers and they won’t ever get them. Humility is a necessary virtue when we come to these questions ourselves. As hard as it may be to accept, there are some questions, some of the most important questions, to which we will never get satisfying answers. Job certainly did not. And what is left for him . . . to simply trust God.

And the walls came down

So it was with the Israelites after their flight from Egypt. Would they trust God, who led them straight to Mt. Sinai? There, God had given them the Law and the instructions for building a home for God, the tabernacle. Then, they had left Mt. Sinai and headed straight for Canaan, the Promised Land, which Jacob and his family had left generations before. Tragically, however, when they arrived, they had grown fearful and turned away, despite God’s promise to lead them to victory in this new land. And, treating them as adults, God had allowed them to refuse. He also had told them that none of them would enter the promised land, save for Joshua and Caleb, who had urged the people to trust God. So the entire generation had wandered in the wilderness until they died off. Their children would enter Canaan.

And so they did, crossing the Jordan as the waters parted for the priests and the ark. God held the flood waters back, just as God had parted the waters during the Exodus. God led the Israelites to Jericho, a city located on the west side of the Jordan river, northeast of Jerusalem. Conquering a walled city in the ancient world was a matter of laying siege and waiting out the inhabitants. But God had a different plan in mind. He told Joshua that soldiers and priests, carrying the ark of the covenant, were to walk around the city once a day for six days, as seven priests blew on rams’ horns. On the seventh day, they were to march around the city seven times with the horns blowing. After they completed the seventh circuit, there was to be one long sound on the horns followed by a huge shout from the army. And, God said, the walls would then fall, allowing the Israelites to march into the city and take it.

And so they did. The army shouted and the walls fell, just like God said they would. It must have seemed like a crazy idea to many of the Israelites, but, this time, they decided to set aside their questions and simply rely on God to keep his promises.

Can God be trusted?

So it is with us. If we are not going to get all the answers we seek, then where are we left? In his book, *Can God Be Trusted?: Faith and the Challenge of Evil*, John Stackhouse concludes that the key question posed to us is whether we will trust God even in the face of our own unanswerable questions. Will we trust God’s promises that, in the end, we will enjoy a renewed and transformed world free from tragedy, illness, suffering, and even death? Will we trust that God is all-powerful and all-loving even though, at times, it doesn’t seem

¹ This is *ha-satan*, whose job seems to be to roam the earth and assess wrong-doing.

possible to us? This is not complicated. We are asked to trust God with all our doubts and hurts, our questions and our pain.

The Book of Joshua's Place in the Bible and the Church's Theology

(adapted slightly from Jerome F. D. Creach's commentary in the *Interpretation* series)

Rahab's story is one of many in the book of Joshua which tell the story of the Israelites' conquest of Canaan under God's leadership. It is the bloodiest book of the Bible and recounts many instances of what seems a lot like genocide to present-day readers. Jerome Creach offers us some reflections on this challenging and controversial book.

The book of Joshua is one of the Bible's greatest testimonies to the mighty acts of God on behalf of Israel. It reports how the Lord gave Israel the land of Canaan (Josh. 1–12) and allotted it as an inheritance (Josh. 13–19), to fulfill the promises made to Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 15:12–16). This story, along with the book's concluding call to faithfulness (Josh. 23–24), is pivotal to the theology and literature of the Old Testament. Joshua promotes obedience to the Law, Genesis–Deuteronomy, which it follows. Indeed, Joshua's opening emphasis on torah obedience (Josh. 1:7–8) establishes the Pentateuch as the primary authority for Israel's life in Canaan and as the basis for the writing prophets' (Isaiah through Malachi) evaluation of Israelite society.

In light of Joshua's central place in the Old Testament story and in the biblical canon, it is not surprising that the book has been a rich theological resource for the church. Traditionally, the Christian community has seen Joshua as foundational for basic doctrines such as election, predestination, and divine grace.

The church has also found in Joshua a deep well from which to draw its typological expression of the faith. Early Christians saw as significant that Joshua's Hebrew name, *Yeshua* (meaning "The Lord Saves") is written as *Iêsous* (Jesus) in Greek. Joshua's attempt to give the Israelites rest from their enemies (Josh. 1:13, 15; cf. 21:44) came to be seen as a model of Jesus' provision of rest from the power of sin (Heb. 4:1–11). In this scheme, Canaan, the land promised to Israel's patriarchs and possessed through Joshua, symbolizes the heavenly reward of those who follow Jesus. The Jordan, which Israel crossed en route to conquering the land, became a code name for the passage into the next life.

But despite the obvious importance of Joshua in the Old Testament and the traditional place it has held in the Christian community, the book has fallen out of favor with some believers, particularly in the modern period. The problem with Joshua is that it advocates, and says that God dictates, the destruction of all the Canaanites as part of the conquest of the land. This feature of the book seems an approval of what modern people would call "war crimes." In his famous work *The Age of Reason*, Thomas Paine sums up the issue this way:

"There are matters in that book, said to be done by the *express command* of God, that are as shocking to humanity and to every idea we have of moral justice as anything done by Robespierre, by Carrier, by Joseph le Bon, in France, by the English Government in the East Indies, or by any other assassin in modern times." (p. 104)

To those who share this view, Joshua represents the worst impulses of humankind, dressed up as an expression of the divine will. As a result of such opinions, some Christians reject Joshua because they think it primitive and brutal, promoting a violent god who is surely different from the Father of Jesus Christ. But perhaps a majority of those who are uncomfortable with Joshua simply ignore it, thus letting the book languish in a kind of scriptural ghetto from which its voice is seldom heard. The revised lectionary gives evidence that this may be the most popular solution to the problem of the book's contents. It includes only a paucity of selections from Joshua, with no story of battle represented. But the avoidance of Joshua fails to recognize how indispensable the book is to the larger biblical account. Indeed, the story contained in the book is referred to or quoted directly in fourteen other biblical texts. The contemporary community of faith is impoverished theologically when it fails to attend to Joshua. This book, with all its objectionable contents, presents a portrait of God and God's demands on God's people that the modern church particularly needs to hear.

Daily Bible Readings

More on the story of Joshua

Monday, Joshua 1 God makes Joshua leader of the Israelite tribes.

Tuesday, Joshua 2 The Canaanite prostitute, Rahab, protects Israelite spies sent into Jericho.

Wednesday, Joshua 3 The Israelites cross the Jordan River in a demonstration of God's power.

Thursday, Joshua 4:1-5:1 The Israelites begin to establish themselves in Canaan.

Friday, Joshua 5:2-12 All the males in the tribes are circumcised. The fact that this sign of the covenant had been abandoned show how far the people had drifted from God.

Saturday, Joshua 5:13-6:27 The conquest of Jericho

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying key portions of Isaiah.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the parables of Jesus.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Video of each week's class is posted here: vimeo.com/groups/scottsbiblestudy

Current series: *Amazing Stories*

Beginning August 11: *From Pagan to Christian: how the west was won*