

Joshua,

I remember beginning my first reading with you. I had spent the last 40 years in the desert with your chosen people as you prepared them to finally- *finally*- be free, God honoring, landholding men and women. This was the moment we'd been waiting for; we were at the entrance of the Promised Land. But, Joshua, I was not aware that there were already people living in the Promised Land. Perhaps this was something I had naively neglected to acknowledge during the journey to this moment. As I realized that it was not just the land itself that needed to be conquered but also the *people living in it...* I felt betrayed. I had become so accustomed to being in the same space as God's chosen people that I forgot not all people were chosen. I am uncomfortable with this.

I hid from you, Joshua, for a long time. I told myself lies about the book being meaningless in the greater context of the Bible. I decided you, admittedly along with many other Old Testament books, were not important. I refused to accept that my faith was associated in any way with something so horrifying. How could you? How could you enter this land and in good conscience kill these people? I thought you were all about love and forgiveness and creating safe places for one another. This completely contradicts what I understood about following you. Honestly, I did not want to ever have to defend you or my faith against these books. So they did not exist for me. I began telling people that they did not count-that only the New Testament and new covenant in Jesus Christ mattered. Who cares about the history? Pretty cringe worthy statements, huh?

Thankfully, the Lord called me back to you and urged me to open my heart to something that goes beyond my human understanding of God's love for His world. For, Joshua, you are not a story of people reclaiming a land that belonged to other people. You are a story of God reclaiming a land that always has and always will belong to *Him*. Of course you matter,

Joshua. And I hear you when you say to “be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” Who am I to find fault with this?

Joshua, you make me ask the hard questions. As you have said “just as every good promise of the Lord your God has come true, so the Lord will bring on you all the evil he has threatened, until he has destroyed you.” How is this fair? Is this not God doubting His people already, when they have only just arrived? So, what, God knew he was eventually going to leave them but decided not to prevent it? And what’s going to happen when God comes to reclaim his land again- will I even be among the chosen people? Or will I be among the conquered? Will God commission me to fight His fight? Am I in any way worthy of this? I continue to fear that the answer is no.

Despite my fears and questions, I now find myself yearning for the God of Joshua. I think of our own broken and sinful land and am in awe of the beauty that is God reclaiming it. I continue to *love* grappling and debating with you. I look forward to our next conversation.

Love,

Maddie