Small group discussion questions

December 2014/January 2015

Chapter & verse – Neil Thorogood (p22)
Read Joshua 4, followed by Neil Thorogood’s article.

1. At the start of “Chapter & verse”, Neil says: “Sometimes we stand where history was made”. What historic places have you visited? How did they make you feel?

2. In the same paragraph, Neil says: “And for people of faith, history unfolds within the purposes and presence of God.” How do you understand that statement? Do you agree?

3. In later chapters of the book of Joshua, Joshua and his men slaughter the inhabitants of the land they conquer at God’s decree (for example, Joshua 10:40). Neil, in the second paragraph of “Chapter & verse”, says: “It is a story rich in meaning but dripping in blood”. Is it possible to appreciate the rich meaning of such a bloody story? If so, what meaning do you find in it?

4. Read verses eight to nine of the Bible passage. Here, Neil says, in paragraph three: “Place, people and God are being bound together”. What does it mean for place, people and God to be bound together? Are there places where this is true today?

5. Neil says of the stones: “They want to talk; they are to elicit, from future generations, questions about why they are there.” How good are we today at listening to what the past has to say to us and asking questions of it?

6. In paragraph four of “Chapter & verse”, Neil lists five “narratives stressing different points” that can be found in this passage. Which of those comes across most strongly for you?

7. Read Joshua 4: 10-11, 15-18. What is the significance of the ark of the covenant in this story?

8. In paragraph four of “Chapter & verse”, Neil compares our Christmas and New Year traditions with what happens in this story. What is the connection between them?
9. The last question is Neil’s own conclusion: Today, what stone can we set in place that points others towards God? And tomorrow?

For further reflection:

“Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honour and an everlasting name.” 1 Maccabees 2:5

Prayer: God of our fathers and mothers, and all who have gone before us, we give thanks for their memory, and for all that we owe them which has been lost from memory. Help us to remember, and in our own way to set up stones for those who will come after us. Amen.