

**Core Seminar**

**Old Testament**

**Class 9: Joshua & Judges**

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Good morning. Today we’re on through the Old Testament into the narratives of Joshua and Judges. The books of Moses, the first five books, have been completed. And so we now journey out of the “Torah”, or the “Pentateuch”, and into the “the Historical Books.”

**[PRAY]**

Before we look at the detail of Joshua and Judges, let’s start by looking at some context. The book of Joshua was probably written by Joshua himself within the first 15 years of the 14th century BC. At the start of the book, as you might remember, the nation of Israel is outside the land of Canaan, eastward over the Jordan River. But by the end of the book they will have taken and occupied the land (as you can see from the map). We can summarize Joshua by saying: Joshua is all about conquest. The Israelites enter the land, take the land, possess the land, and come to rest.

The book of Judges picks up right were Joshua leaves off. Israel has taken the land, but now the question is whether or not they’ll be able to keep it. As the second map shows, God’s people come under pressure from a number of surrounding nations. The events told in Judges take place over a period of roughly 350 years, from the time Joshua died until the time of Israel’s first king. We don’t know who wrote Judges, but we do believe it was written shortly after the last events were recorded, somewhere in the mid to late 11th century BC.

Let’s start by previewing some major themes in these two books.

* Now, as you might expect **land** is a big idea in both books: Joshua is all about taking it, and Judges is all about keeping it.
* Very closely related to that is the idea of **rest**. Rest is the goal for God’s people. Joshua ends positively in this manner with God’s enemies at bay and God’s people enjoying fellowship with him. Judges, however, is almost the reverse; God’s people start with rest and quickl lose it.
* The two books are also about **trust**. In Joshua, God’s people must trust in Joshua, their saving leader, if they are to take the land and enjoy rest in it. Similarly in Judges, it will become clear that God’s people need to trust a savior if they’re to keep what God’s given them.

Consequently our two themes sentences are as follows:

For Joshua we have…

**TRUSTING a FAITHFUL savior to LEAD God’s people to land and rest**

While in Judges we have…

**REQUIRING a PERFECT savior to MAINTAIN this land and rest**

***Let’s stop here for a moment. What are some of the parallels between what the people of Israel were facing during these early years in the Promised Land—and what we face in our lives as Christians?***

Well, with these themes in mind let’s start into Joshua with an overview of the whole book. The book of Joshua divides neatly into four chronological sections, or four periods of trust for the Israelites. As we quickly run through these sections, you can flip through your Bible to watch the chapter headings and follow along.

In chapters 1-5 we discover that the Israelites must trust God as they **ENTER the Promised Land**. The Israelites start off (chapter 1) confidently trusting God in the plains of Moab, but they must depend on God as they spy out the land (chapter 2), and then finally as they cross the Jordan (in Exodus-like fashion in chapters 3 and 4).

Next, in chapters 6-13 we discover that this trust must then extend to war as they begin to **TAKE the Promised Land.** In chapter 6, the walls of Jericho famously fall at a trumpet blast. After that, the Israelites march South through the land, conquering nation after nation. Then in chapter 11, the people move North, and defeat all Northern Canaanite tribes. Chapter 12 ends this section by reviewing the land taken.

Then, with the land taken it’s time to **DIVIDE the Promised Land** in chapters 13 to 21. The land to be shared by the 12 tribes is reviewed in chapters 13 and 14. And then dividing it up goes all the way from chapter 15 to chapter 21.

Finally, as the book of Joshua comes to its conclusion in chapters 22-24 we see the need for Israel to remain faithful as they **ACCOMPLISH promised rest**. And so in these last three chapters God’s people reflect on how they are to enjoy this rest. That is, rest from war, from wanderings, and from their enemies.

**[TAKE QUESTIONS]**

Ok well with that overview in mind, let’s return to our theme sentence for Joshua – “**trusting a faithful savior to lead God’s people to land and rest.”** There are four ideas, which flow out of that key sentence that I want us to focus in on this morning.

The first, as you’ll see from the handout, is **Trusting as God’s people.** Turn with me to chapter 1 and verse 5…

“Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.”

So here they are – God’s people on the edge of the Promised Land and the call is to be strong and courageous. Is that *self*-confidence? No: it’s confidence that the same God who was with Moses will be with his promised people again.

This idea of trusting in the fact that they are *God’s* people is further emphasized when are circumcised in chapter 5, marking them out from the other nations. And it’s reiterated in chapter 8 when the people renew their covenant with God.

Now, it’s not that the people earned this right. In fact, both of these events happen before a single battle is fought. They are reminded of their status as God’s people, and that gives them confidence that they can take the land.

And, of course, we’re in the same position, aren’t we? As Christians, we are God’s people. Not because we earned it but because of his grace alone. And *because* we are God’s people. We can have every confidence that we will enter the land he’s promised to us: heaven.

The second theme I want to draw out in this section is the fact while the Israelites are to trust in God, they do that by **Trusting in God’s faithful savior.**

Did you notice in that first verse we looked at how closely the nation’s success is tied up with Joshua’s faithfulness and leadership? The people are God’s but it is Joshua who will lead them into the land. He must mediate on God’s Word day and night and be careful do everything in it (verse 8). And because of this that God’s people must trust him. And wonderfully, they do! Look down with me to verses 16-17. Still in chapter 1…

“And they answered Joshua, ‘All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you, as he was with Moses!’”

And so, because Joshua and the Israelites do trust and obey, Joshua is able to lead them into the land. Indeed, in contrast to Moses and all the disobedience that went on in the desert, this new generation of God’s people obey Joshua. They trust him as a savior who will obey the Lord.

Again, the New Testament parallels for us shouldn’t be that difficult to make. Joshua (just like Moses) prefigures the coming of God’s ultimately faithful savior. Jesus Christ perfectly obeys God’s law. So he’s the one who brings us into the New Heavens and New Earth, if we obey him.

The main theme in the book of Joshua, and the third theme, which flows out of our theme sentence, is the need to **trust God for land**. This is huge, as you might imagine. Now just to clarify, the significance of the land is a major concept to grasp. Because Canaan is more than just a physical piece of property. It is a picture of what the Garden of Eden was, and what the New Heavens and the New Earth are going to be.

To see this land parallelism fleshed out, turn with me to one fascinating text in chapter 5:13-15. As you turn there let me quickly set the context for you. God’s people have just crossed the Jordan, and God’s people are about to enter God’s place first time.

However, this is no easy task - you’ll remember how Eden ended up in Genesis 3 - with an angel with a flashing sword barring the entrance forever. And so what does Joshua see as he nears God’s promised place? Verse 13:

**13**When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” **14**And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?”**15**And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

So the land of Canaan is holy ground—it reminds us that God is there—and because of sin there is no right for sinful people to be in it. That’s why an angel’s sword met them at Canaan. But now, just as promised in Exodus 23, there is an angel of the Lord. But this time the angel doesn’t bar the way to God’s place. Instead, he actively helps God’s people to take the land.

Now, the people trust God for the land. God sends his angel ahead of them. And . . . well, no surprise: they win! So Joshua 21:43-45 gives us the peak of redemption history so far:

**43**Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. **44**And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. **45**Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

Not a single word has failed. The people are in possession of God’s place, safely with him. Just like we will be able to say when we stand before him in heaven.

But we can’t help but be disturbed at the bloody and brutal chapters in between the angel’s arrival in chapter 5 and this wonderfully fulfilled promise in chapter 21. Indeed that is really much what so much of Joshua is about.

And so we read 6:21 of Jericho - “Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword.”

And of the Northern cities of Canaan in 11:20 - “For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the Lord commanded Moses.”

What are we to make of such violence? And of the God who seems behind it? What’s going on here?

Now, we can’t spend too much time here, but let me make a few comments that I hope will help.

First, it’s important to say that God is not condoning holy war here or telling Christians that they should engage in Middle Eastern crusades. Rather, Joshua’s military campaign is to be understood as a unique event that was commanded by God at one time in redemptive-history. At the time of Joshua the physical land then was deemed holy. It was therefore for God’s holy people - a people who were to be righteous - who were to be just - who were to be loving and kind. It wasn’t for the Canaanites, who according to Deuteronomy 9 and Genesis 15, were a wicked people, with whom God had been extremely patient.

Beyond that, as we talked about earlier, this physical land loses its significance once Jesus arrives. God’s people today are not an ethnic, national people. They are from all corners of the earth with one citizenship: a heavenly one.

So how should we think about these horrific events? Well, Deuteronomy 9:4 tells us that the Canaanites were being judged for their wickedness. For their idolatry, and cruelty, and child sacrifice, among other things. Which should be quite sobering for us. Because it means that this one-time military campaign of complete destruction in Joshua is simply foreshadowing something else. The one-time certain and terrible judgment that all will face when Jesus returns.

We shouldn’t somehow think that we’re any better than the Canaanites were. And we ought to remember that the conquest of Canaan pales in comparison to that great and awful day of reckoning coming for everyone. So we should be all the more thankful for salvation in Jesus—salvation from certain judgment.

Well as we close Joshua, I want us to look at one more aspect of it- that final word in your sentence overview – rest. **Trusting God for rest.**

Turn back again to Joshua 21:43-44 and let me read it again:

**43**Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. **44**And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands.

Notice here in these climatic verses how much is made of this idea of “rest.” In verse 43 it says that God gave them the land. And in verse 44 it says He gave them rest. The two, the land and rest, are nearly synonymous.

But, of course, that rest was tenuous, wasn’t it? It was guaranteed only so long as the people kept their end of the Covenant—which they knew they would not do. So Hebrews 4 picks up this idea of the Promised Land as rest and explains that this tenuous rest pointed ahead to a perfect rest of unshakable fellowship with God. Verse 8:

“For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.”

As you read through Joshua, then, take all that longing for rest and apply it to your own life. Long with these people for rest from your own works, as you trust the perfect work of Jesus Christ in your place. As Jesus said in Matthew 11:28,

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”.

**[TAKE QUESTIONS]**

So that’s Joshua. On to Judges. How tenuous is this rest? Quite tenuous indeed, we’ll see. Let’s do a brief overview of the entire book and then we’ll get into some specific themes.

In chapter 1 the picture starts off rather bleak – five words in and Joshua has already died. Not only that, but in the rest of the chapter we discover that Israel has failed in their mission to wipe out certain tribes.

The upshot of this is that Israel descends into a repeated cycle of rebellion, followed by suffering, followed by a crying out to God, followed by God raising up a savior - a judge who rescues them from their enemies. Followed by rebellion

This cycle repeats 9 times through 14 chapters. But it’s important to note that this cycle isn’t the same each time. It’s a downward spiral. In fact the victory of each judge is increasingly elusive as the book continues. Othniel, in chapter 3, has complete victory… but Ehud, who follows him, has victory only through deception. In chapter 4, Deborah has victory, but some of the tribes are cursed. Gideon has victory, in chapters 6-8, but eventually we have civil war. Jepthah, in chapters 10-12, has victory but it is marred by the tragedy of his daughter, and again things eventually devolve into civil war. And even though he does great damage, Samson, the last and most famous judge of all, never actually defeats the Philistines, in chapters 13-16.

So by the time we reach chapter 17, we Israel is at the depth of their sin. Chapters 17-18 reveal their religious corruption while chapters 19-21 reveal their moral and social corruption. As the book concludes the author sadly reflects on the Israelites’ plight and their desperate need for a perfect savoir and true rest in the land.

OK. Let’s return to our theme sentence for Judges – “**requiring a perfect savior to maintain this land and rest.”** We’ll flesh out three key ideas and application points from it.

First of all, it is important to note that throughout the book of Judges the Israelites desperately **require separation as God’s people**. Well what do I mean by this? Look down with me to where the root of the problems in Judges begin. Chapter 1:27-29…

**27**Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages, for the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. **28**When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not drive them out completely.

And so it goes on...

You see the core of the problem for the Israelites is that they forgot that they were to live separately from the nations. They were to be holy – to be set apart from the world. They’ve been told to remove God’s enemies from the land and to live holy lives. But as chapter 2v10 sadly points out, this new generation “did not know the Lord or the work he had done for Israel.” They lived with the Canaanites and then they lived like the Canaanites. That’s one of the main points of the book. From the very first account, in chapter 1 verses 1-7, of how they treat a captive king just like the Canaanites would, instead of how God had told them to. To the revolting story of rape, mutilation, and murder at the end of the book. When an Israelite passed by a Canaanite town to take refuge in a Hebrew town—and acted, and was treated, far worse than the Canaanites would ever have done.

This major problem, often referred to in the commentaries, as ‘Canaanization’ should act as a stark warning us as God’s people in the world today today. No matter how secure we think we are as Christians, we must remember that apostasy can be right around the corner. The Israelites were in the midst of enjoying ‘Joshua’ rest when everything went downhill. And it went downhill so fast.

Beyond that, we should take careful note of what caused their falling away. God’s people forgot who they were—unlike the previous generation, who always remembered through the reading of God’s word, Passovers and circumcision. They acted as the nations around them. They mixed with them, married them, and were drawn quickly into sin. As Christians we rightly live in the world, but we must be careful how we live in it, for we are to be nothing like it.

The second point is that **God’s punishment that leads to repentance**, which is echoed through the nine cycles of Judges. To help us see this idea a little better let’s track through one cycle, the cycle of the first judge, Othniel, in chapter 3.

The cycle begins, chapter 3v7, with Israel forgetting God and serving other gods. Consequently, God is rightly angry, verse 8, and this leads to God’s punishment. In verse 8, you can see that this specific punishment is slavery. But in verse 9, the Israelites cry out to God. So God provides a savior, verse 9, who goes to war, verse 10, and, verse 11, restores peace. But in verse 12, the cycle starts over again.

As I said, you can look for that pattern of events in all the following stories about the Judges. The point is always to emphasize Israel’s constant stubbornness and sin, and Yahweh’s great justice and then great mercy. Sadly, God’s people continually require God’s judgment. Indeed, they are continually being oppressed by foreign enemies, sent by God to bring them to repentance.

Now, we need to be very careful how we apply this, this side of the New Testament. But in one sense I think we often see God’s Spirit acting in this way. Sometimes it’s only by seeing the consequences of life *without* God—in the utter decay of our world around us—that we realize our need *for* God. Which leads us to cry out in repentance.

However, following this idea, we must see that the biggest theme in the whole book of Judges is the **requirement of a perfect Savior who leads to true rest.**

You see, every cycle in Judges reminds us that God’s people need a perfect Savior. Previously God’s people had Joshua, but Joshua dies. After him come these judges, who are *types* of Christ. But they are neither lasting nor faithful. Yes, they save them briefly, but these judges are not the best ethical role models, nor do they ever bring a lasting rule. What is needed is a monarchy - a line of perfect savior kings, who lead God’s people to obey His word perfectly.

What’s interesting is that in Judges, right in the centre of the book, right in the centre of this dark book, God’s people get a king. No it’s not Saul or David, but Abimelech. Look with me to Judges 9v6: “all the leaders of Shechem came together, and all Beth-millo, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar at Shechem.”

But this is no faithful king. He does whatever he thinks is right: he has many wives, he ruthlessly kills his own brothers, and leads God’s people in total unfaithfulness.

So by the time we reach the end of the book it is no surprise to read the final summarising line of Judges 21v25: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

It’s as though the author is saying that, “This sort of stuff that we’ve seen in Judges, all the sin of the people and the invasions of the foreign armies and the loss of rest. That wouldn’t happen if we had a king who was faithful to God’s covenant!”

This is the momentum that pushes the narrative forward into the rest of the Old Testament. The people need more than the prophet Moses. They need more than the priest Aaron. They need more than the savior Joshua, and definitely more than these savior judges. They need a king! But what kind of king? As we get into 1 and 2 Samuel, we’ll see it’s definitely not a king like Saul. Or even David or his son Solomon. All these figures are getting closer to that perfect king, but they all fall short.

Who do all these leaders point us to? As you can guess, Jesus. Only He can perfectly deliver His people from all their pain. And as we saw earlier, in Matthew 11, only He brings a lasting “rest.” Only Christ solves problems that these judges could only temporarily address. For only Christ ever obeyed all the laws of God. And only Christ is the perfect King over His people. But, I get ahead of myself. We’ll talk more about Christ as our great king next week. For now, we leave off with the book of Judges calling and praying and hoping for a king.

**[TAKE QUESTIONS]**

**[PRAY]**

Deleted from the point on Rest in Joshua:

But what does it mean for Israel to have “rest,” and what does it mean in the scope of God’s plan for the ages?

Well in Joshua we get a few hints at what that might mean. In chapter 11:23 we read that “the land received rest from war” and in chapter 23:1 we hear that Israel is given “rest from all their enemies around them”. So rest will be gained through the removal of God’s enemies.

But to answer the question of who are God’s enemies and the scope of God’s rest throughout the ages, we need to go elsewhere. First of all let’s look back Genesis 3. Here, if you remember, Adam and Eve have rebelled against God and are receiving their just punishment. But in the midst of it listen to what God says to the serpent…

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

The ultimate enemy of mankind is the serpent – that is Satan – the one who tempts man to ruin God’s land – the one who will keep striking the woman’s offspring.

But, that Genesis passage also promises a time when there will be a final removal of this enemy from the land – a time when Satan’s head will be crushed by man.

And in Joshua we have a glorious little snapshot of that enemy-less land and victory for God’s people. Look at10:24-26…

When they had brought these kings to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders who had come with him, “Come here and put your HEEL on the NECKS of these kings.” So they came forward and placed their FEET on their HEADS. Joshua said to them, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is what the LORD will do to all the enemies you are going to fight.” Then Joshua struck and killed the kings and hung them on five trees, and they were left hanging on the trees until evening.