



**Key Passage: Joshua 11:23; Judges 2:16-17**

**Key Thought: God uses Yeshua (Joshua/Jesus) to lead his people into the place of rest, and, when His people forget, God raises up judges to rescue His people from the consequences of their actions**

**The stories:**

Joshua: God promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan (Gen 17:1-8). 400 years later, the promise is fulfilled. God raises up Joshua and, because of His faithfulness, gives him the command and privilege to lead the people into the Promised Land. The children of Israel cross over the Jordan river and enter into the land (Joshua 1-4). This crossing over is meant to “re-tell” the story of His people crossing over the Red Sea, but it ends in the land. There were still fierce battles to wage against the enemies (Joshua 5-12), and it would require reminders from God and faith in God to be reassured that these battles would end in victory. Finally, they win the battles and divide up the land (Joshua 13-21), and the people were able to settle (Joshua 22-24). There will still be work to do; for example, they will not capture Jerusalem until the time of King David. But the boundaries are mapped out. As the book ends, Joshua reminds the people to make the firm decision to let this story be the story of their lives, of their families, and of their nation. Recounting the history of God keeping his promise even when His people did not keep their end of the promise, Joshua challenges the

people to choose whom they will serve; “but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:1-18).

Judges: The children of Israel have come to rest in the Promised Land. But have they come to rest in God’s promises? You know the story! Over the next two centuries, they forget. As a result of forgetting the story of their God (and their place in the story), the people fall for false gods and false ways. God—in keeping with his own promises and warnings—allows His people to suffer consequences in hopes that they might learn from their ways. When the people realize their wickedness, it is often the case that they turn from it and cry out to God for deliverance. Because God is a God of grace and mercy, He continues to seek and to find ways to connect with, forgive, heal, and guide His people. He raises up “judges” (leaders with military, judicial, and spiritual guidance) to lead his people out of dry seasons, though he will need to raise up more and more as His people remain fickle—serving God than falling away from Him—over and over again. This is a time when “everyone did what was right in their own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:5). But God did not give up on His people. The Judges—like the people—are far from perfect. In fact, it’s the glaring imperfections in the Judges that underscores three important take-aways. First, God is incredibly merciful. Second, God works through flawed people (praise God!). But third, there will need to be a final judge, a final leader, a final victory to grant His people rest forever, because no human judge can do the job fully. The constant rebellion on the part of God’s people is a warning that we, too, may suffer consequences for failing to obey. But obedience is for our own good; and God promises to never leave us nor forsake us. He proves that to be His very nature!

## **1. What Do We Learn About God & His Spirit (that tells the gospel)?**

God is faithful, even when we are not. He refuses to give up on His people, waiting patiently, always ready to save his people when they call upon Him, and always guiding how much and how far His people suffer consequences for their actions.

God supplies what we need. Whether it be leaders, victories, or encouragement. Note that “the book of Joshua is clearly not a typical portrayal of some epic conquest in which one side is glorified and the other is demonized. The hero is not Israel, nor even Joshua, but God himself.”<sup>1</sup>

God is relevant. The people in Joshua’s day see His victory. The people in the time of the Judges see more relevance in Baal (the god of rain, fertility, business, etc). But we

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Wright, p. 81.

learn that the God of all is who we need to keep us out of trouble and to provide deliverance.

God's Spirit is at work. "The spirit of God clothed Gideon" (Judges 6:34—literal translation). The Spirit comes upon Othniel, giving him power to defeat the King of Aram (Judges 3:10). The Spirit comes upon Jephthah to advance against the Ammonites (Judges 11:29). The Spirit gives Samson power (Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14-15).

The key question is not "whose side is God on?" The question is "are you on the Lord's side" (Joshua 5:13-14).

## **2. What Do We Learn About Christ (that tells the gospel)?**

Joshua is the Hebrew form of the Greek name Jesus. We are led into God's rest by the True Joshua—Jesus Christ. The law (represented by Moses) cannot do it. Note John 16:33.

Our leader is both our Joshua and our Judge. He secures the ultimate victory for us, and helps us up when we fail. He judges sin (in his own flesh) and grants us the blessings of covenant faithfulness because of His own covenant faithfulness (1 Cor 15:56-57; Philippians 3:8-10).

God tells Joshua "take courage," & "don't be afraid", and He told Moses "I AM." Notice that Jesus says all three things to his fearful people (Mark 6:42ff).

## **3. What Do We Learn About Faith, Forgiveness & Hope (that tells the gospel)?**

Our redemption has been secured for us! The battle is won! (1 Pet 1:3-5)

This means that no matter what battles we face, we can know that God's protection and love rest upon us as we rest in Him (Romans 8:31-39)

God has compassion on outsiders. The Israelites, we are led to believe, are to route all Canaanites. But the first one we meet in the book is Rahab, who ends up being a heroic figure in both testaments (Joshua 2:8-14; 6:22-25; Heb 11:31; James 2:25-26).

At the same time, God is willing to judge insiders. Achan sins, hurting the whole group, and is effectively treated like a Canaanite (Joshua 7). Is there an echo of Romans 2, that says one is not a child of God simply because of their genealogy or outward appearance; that God will be eschewing some who seem to be insiders, while welcoming in some who seem to be outsiders?

#### 4. What Do We Learn About Being the People of God (that tells the gospel)?

God uses imperfect leaders. Both Jephthah (Judges 11) and Samson (Judges 15) have serious character flaws. But God works with what He has to work with! And He works to find the best in us, and to use what we have to His glory. Notice he raises up leaders; they are not self-appointed or democratically elected. And these imperfect leaders become examples of faith (Heb 11:32)! Working through imperfection is a way to remind us that it is God who does the delivering.

It is easy for God's people to forget (Judges 3:7). And the consequences for forgetfulness can be devastating. Let us heed the warning of Hebrews and Romans (see Romans 6:11-14). Christ came to give us the abundant life. We fail to enjoy the abundant life when we fail to let God be our King.

The people in the time of the judges show terrible disunity, mainly because they have no capital city, no national army, no human king, and they are in constantly-embattled territories. But they also seem to still retain in their minds and hearts an ideal truth that leads to some unity: We are "Israel," and thus we are under our one true King, Yahweh. This common identity is seen especially in the stories of Deborah and Gideon (Judges 4-6). We see that it is important to tell our story to ourselves and our children. It's the story that might lead to repentance and return.

We learn to avoid the danger of syncretism—God AND Baal.

#### 5. Hook Questions:<sup>2</sup>

1. What battles are you fighting today? Are you surprised that you should have them? Did Jesus have battles to fight?
2. Where do you look for strength? What other things might you be relying on instead of God? How do you keep your focus on the only one who can bring about victory for you?
3. What counts as victory? Is the rest you seek the same as that of those who don't know God? How do you know when you have the rest that God intends for you?

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens* (Zondervan, 2012), p.36 & 40

4. Are you overcoming the world, or do you feel it has overcome you?

5. In what areas are you most in need of divine rescue? To what temptations are you particularly drawn? How can you realize God's deliverance over these? What safeguards can you put in place to avoid these things that war against the soul?