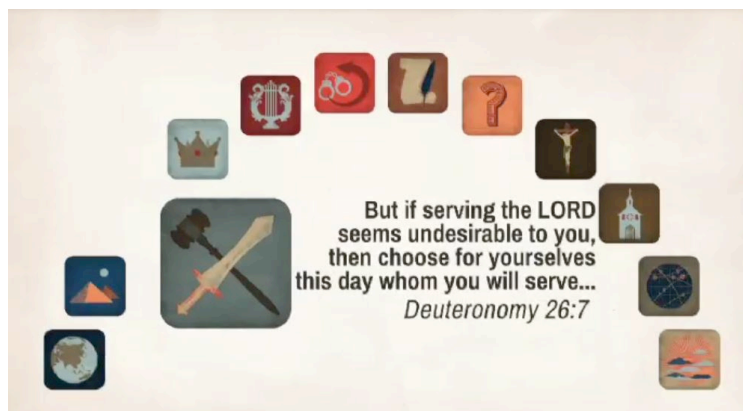




Conquest & Judges

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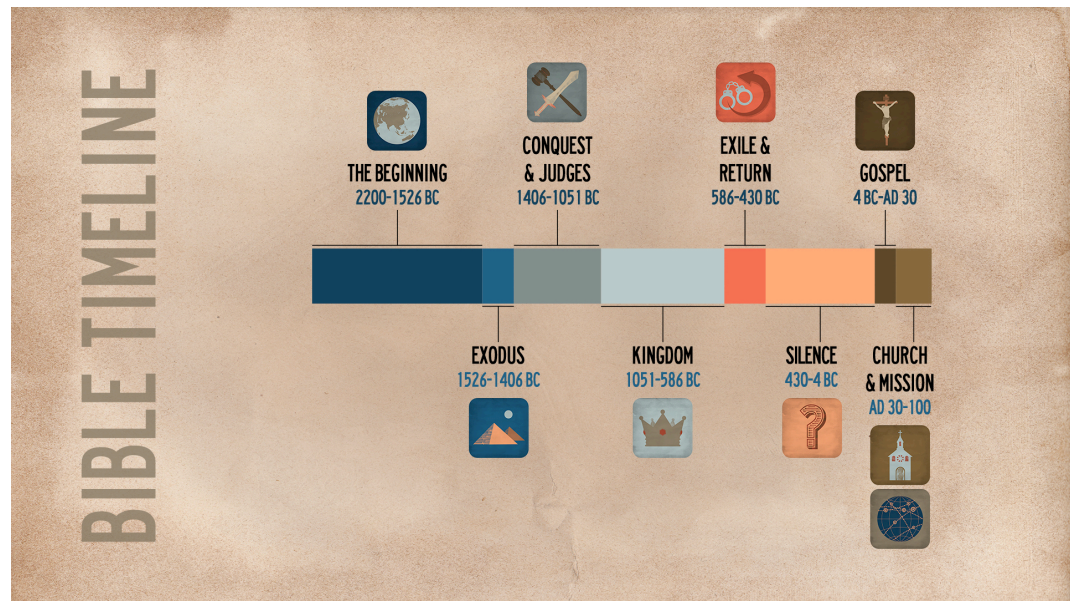


Good morning. We have covered a lot of ground in a couple of weeks, haven't we? Five books of the 66, and it is – I mean we're just running through them.



We've covered Genesis through Deuteronomy, and there's been a couple of storylines we've been following. I want to make sure that we're all clear on as we think about The Big Picture and as we enter into Conquest and Judges, this next era in the story of the Bible. That we kind of see it maybe from a different perspective.

I'd like to show it to you in the form of a timeline. Upfront we talked about the Beginning. In 2200 BC would really represent Abraham, and that time when Abraham entered the scene. Probably around 4,000 BC is when Adam and Eve and Noah and the Flood and the Tower of Babel – that begins to take place. And then you have Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And then last week Tim brought us through



Moses and the Exodus in the book of Exodus, and the rest of law through the Deuteronomy. So by the time we finish today in the Conquest and the Judges, we pick up that extra 400 years, we're going to have covered roughly around 3,000 years of human history in the first eight books of the Bible. That's a lot of time, isn't it? I mean when you think about all that has taken place, not just the creation and not just Adam and Eve, and not just Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, but when you think about it in terms of world history. The inventions of

things like the wheel, the plow, the sail, the building of the Great Pyramids of Giza happened during this timeframe, King Tut, the famous King Tut will take his throne, the Shanghai Dynasty, the Code of Hammurabi. Some great things in world history, and as we go through this story, the story of God, The Big Picture, the Bible, we see it laid out right there in world history and we have covered a lot of ground.

We started with Adam; we saw that he was created, he sinned, he destroyed God's original plan. We then moved on to Abraham who was called to father a people, and in so doing, as he was going to follow that people they were going to represent God to the world, and then became enslaved in Egypt. Moses came along and he was going to be their deliverer from slavery and give them the Law, and now we find ourselves at the Conquest and the Judges.



We find ourselves this land that's been promised, this land that they've been told about that's supposed to be theirs that they had a chance to get into 40 years ago as they now are wandering in the wilderness. Forty years ago they could have got in, but they were scared of the people there. They said they're too big, and now Moses is fixing to die. It now has to be turned over to another leader, a new hero must arise, and that new guy, his name is Joshua.

If you've got your Bible turn with me to Deuteronomy Chapter 31. Let's see how the reins are handed over as we continue in this story of God, this big picture of the Bible. Joshua, or excuse me, Deuteronomy 31, we'll start reading in verse 1.

"Then Moses went out and spoke these words to all Israel:" He says, "I am now a hundred and twenty years old and I am no longer able to lead you. The Lord has said to me, 'You shall not cross the Jordan.'"

Remember he sinned and so now he doesn't get to go in. Verse 3:

"The Lord your God himself will crossover ahead of you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you will take possession of their land. Joshua also will crossover ahead of you, as the Lord said. And the Lord will do to them what he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, who he destroyed along with their land. The Lord will deliver them to you, and you must do to them all that I have commanded to you. Be strong and courageous."

Don't wimp out again, don't get scared, don't look at them and say they're too big, don't do any of that.

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Verse 7, this is where it is, are you ready?

"And then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their forefathers to give them.'"

Joshua, you're the guy. If they're going to be strong and courageous you're going to have to be strong and courageous, and you're going to go get that land. That land was promised to Abraham and Isaac, and to Jacob. It's now time. You're the one to lead them. And not only that, he says:

"And you must divide it among them as their inheritance."

Divvy it up to the right tribes. Verse 8:

"And the Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

What a great speech, what a great succession plan. Here it is, I'm bringing you up in front of everybody. Y'all be courageous, this guy's going to be courageous, it's now time to go get the land, you've been waiting for it.

Joshua Chapter 1, the Lord speaks to Joshua. He tells him the exact same words except he adds one thing, he says this: "I'm going to be with you the way I was with Moses. I'm never going to leave you, I'm never going to forsake you. I'm going to be with you the same way that I was with Moses." If I was Joshua my next question would be what? Like "Red Sea" with me? Right? (congregation laughs) Like ten plagues with me, like throw a stick on the ground and it turns into a snake, I can pick it back up it's a staff again? That kind of with me? Like manna from heaven, water from a rock, that kind of with me? If you're going to do that then let's go. Sure enough, Joshua looks at Israel and says "It's time to do it. Get ready, we are crossing the Jordan River. We have a river that separates us from the Promised Land and we're going to go over it." Before we go over it he sends some spies across. He said, "I just want you to scope it out. Check out Jericho, make sure everything's okay." Sure enough the spies come back. They say, "They're scared to death of us. They're scared to death. It's ours for the taking." Joshua says, "Great, grab the Ark of the Covenant." We learned about the Ark of the Covenant in the Law. It was the details of how it was to be made, what its contents were. It was the representation of God's presence among Israel. He says, "I want you to grab it, pick it up, and I want you to start walking across the Jordan." The text tells us in Joshua Chapter 3 that it's overflowing its banks, but soon as the priests go in and they're carrying the ark, as soon as their feet hit the water it stops flowing and it begins to dam up on each side. And it says that they're standing in the middle on dry ground. And all of Israel gets to go through on dry ground. Does that sound familiar? Just like what God did with Moses he's now doing with Joshua. I'm thinking God, that's a great start. That's exactly how we need this thing to start. We left off with splitting of the Red Sea, now we're going to split the Jordan, let's go full fledged.

They get across the Jordan River. Joshua looks at everybody and says, "We better make sure we're serious about this covenant." So we're going to get serious about it. They reestablish that with everyone there, and then an army of the - the captain of the Lord's Army shows up and speaks to Joshua. Can you imagine what that would be like? Captain of the Lord's Army speaks to Joshua. He says this: "You're going to go take Jericho, but you're not going to take it the way you think you're going to take it. You're going to take it a different way. You're going to take it my way. What you're going to do is you're going to march around the city six times." I'm sure Joshua is like "Whoa. We're going to march around it six times?" Not only are you going to march around it six times, but on the seventh day you're going to march around it seven times, and you're going to blow the trumpets. And as the trumpet blast gets loud everybody's going to screen. Y'all are going to yell and Jericho is going to fall to the ground, and you're going to go in and you're going to wipe it out. You're going to destroy everything."

Sure enough, seventh day the trumpets begin to blow, they scream, the walls come down. The next stop is not only Jericho, but then they get to Ai, the city of Ai. They have a little bit of a hiccup because they had some sin in the camp, but they're able to destroy it as well.

Then can you imagine what all the other kings are starting to think of in the land? They're thinking "We're next." The people from Gibeon, they decided to come up with a plan. They say, "Hey, we'll get to Joshua before Joshua gets to us. Let's tell Joshua we live really far away and we're no threat." Joshua buys it, signs a treaty with them. Gibeon was a huge place. The other kings in the area didn't like it. Five of them got together and said, "You know what, we're going to wage war on Gibeon." Joshua, because he's the commander of Israel, he's now an ally with Gibeon, he sends his army to march in. They march all night long. They get to Gibeon and they're going to defeat these kings. Turn with me to Joshua Chapter 10. I just don't want to tell you this one. I want you to see it for yourself. Joshua Chapter 10. They've destroyed Ai and now we are marching after the kings who are wanting to destroy Gibeon. Verse 9:

"After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise. The Lord threw them into confusion before Israel, who defeated them in a great victory at Gibeon."

They began to run, it says. And in verse 11:

"As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the Lord hurled large hailstones down on them from the sky, and more of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the swords of the Israelites."

And check this out, verse 12:

"On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel: 'O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.'"

Verse 13:

"So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies."

That's pretty cool, isn't it? I mean it's starting to get dark, they've been chasing them, they're following after them, these people are running but no, we're going

to have full victory, but we need the sun to stay out a little bit longer so that we can have complete victory. He just holds up his hand. I'm not real sure, but what he says, it stops. They have complete and total victory over those five kings that were there to attack Gibeon. We knocked out Jericho, we knocked out Ai, we defeated these five kings.

Just flip over a page to Chapter 12. Look at Chapter 12 verse 7:

"These are the kings of the land that Joshua and the Israelites conquered on the west side of the Jordan,"

And they begin to list them one after the other after the other. You see it there? That is a long list isn't it? Jericho, Ai, Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth - I mean the list goes on. This is complete and total defeat, nation after nation, completely wiping them out so that Israel can have the land that it's been promised.

If you're like me you're probably at this point thinking, this is where it gets a little tricky, doesn't it? This is where it gets a little tricky. Because here we are trying to figure out how a God who gave the storyline to Abraham that I want you to father a people to bless all the folks of the world through me, that they're supposed to be representatives of the world. That somehow this God is trying to reconcile all of creation to himself, that he loves everybody. Now how in the world do we justify the fact that God has just commanded the nation of Israel to destroy and wipe out these cities? This is tricky, isn't it? Boy this is tricky.

I'll never forget, I met a man in Kyle, a guy my age, the same season of life with young kids. Just put his faith and trust in Jesus. He said, "Russell, I would love to learn about the Bible. I don't know it that well, I've never read through it, would you read through it with me?" I said, "Man I would love to." I began to drive once a week downtown to South Congress and we were reading large chunks of scripture together. We're going through it, he's taking notes, we're conversing back and forth. He's got questions, I've got observations it's a great time of just learning together the word. We get to Deuteronomy and Joshua, no kidding, I'll never forget that day on South Congress, where over lunch he just, I mean, he's got a different look on his face. He's got that look of "Russell, I don't get this." Matter of fact, he was, he was visibly distraught. "How does this -- one plus one doesn't equal two here. I would just as soon never have read this. Just as soon never have read this." Just as soon never have read it. I mean I'm assuming he's not the only one who has to deal with this because there's a lot of people who like - "Well the God of the Old Testament, he's weird, but the God of the New Testament, he's a good guy, right?" And we can't do

that because then that means that God changes or he wasn't the same yesterday, today, and forever, and so we have to like - where's his grace and justice and mercy in this? Where's his righteousness in this? I mean we love Jesus. We love his death, burial and resurrection for us, but how do we deal with this? I think some of us maybe even feel like Richard Dawkins who has the much quoted description of God this way, he says:

"God is just a particular deity who's jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."

A moral monster; how do we deal with this? I just don't think it would be fair to read these stories, celebrate them as victories, and not address the tension in the room. Let me see if I can do it for you.

Number one - We address the conquest and the taking of the land. The first thing we need to understand is this. The land was Israel's. It was promised to them in Genesis Chapter 12. God made it clear to Abraham "It's your land." And he made it clear to Isaac, "It's going to be your land." He made it clear to Jacob, "It's your land." It's theirs, and so because of that they are taking possession of a land that God gave them. That's the first thing we need to know.

The second thing is this - It's judgment upon the sin of these Canaanite nations. It's judgment on the sin of these Canaanite nations. These nations and people practiced some horrific, perverted practices. They were - I'm going to read you a few details here in a minute. I want to be clear that this isn't one of those times where we just can kind of coexist. Like we don't slap one of those "Coexist" bumper stickers on the back of a camel here and just traipse in and say "It's all good. You do your thing, we're going to do ours. You don't tell us we're wrong, we won't tell you you're wrong, you know, we'll just all tolerate this." Let me just tell you about some of the practices of the Canaanites: number one was temple prostitution. Through this they hoped to please the fertility gods associated with Baal worship. It was believed that human pairs by imitating the actions of Baal and his partner could bring the divine pair together in fertilizing union. In other words, they believed that their prostitution could actually initiate sexual union between Baal and the mother goddess producing fertility. Temple prostitution.

The next one was child sacrifice. Many historians believe that child sacrifice happened as they were practicing temple prostitution. This is a fact confirmed through archeology. Under the ancient city of Giza urns were found containing

the burnt bones of children dating from 2000 to 1500 BC, roughly the time of Joshua and the conquest, or at minimum during the heyday of the Canaanites. Nearly all the urns contained the remains of not one, but two children, usually siblings. One was usually a newborn and the next child 2 to 4 years old. You don't tolerate this, right? This is serious. As we listen to the screams of children sacrificing them to a god hoping that you'll get crops next year.

Or Anaf, the god of both sex and war. One archeologist describes it this way: The blood was so deep that she waded in it up to her neck. Under her feet were human heads above her human hands, flew like locusts in her sensuous delight she decorated herself with suspended heads while she attached hands to her girdle. Afterwards Anaf was satisfied and washed her hands in human gore before proceeding with other occupations.

We would be saddened and mad if a holy, just God did not show his righteous anger towards sin, wouldn't we? We would be mad. And so this is not just a possession of a land that's theirs and promised to them, this is also the judgment of sin.

The third thing this is is protection. It's protection for Israel. When I say protection, I don't mean protection physically, because it has been demonstrated they don't need swords, they don't need weapons, horses, cannons or anything else. They have all the protection they need physically from God. If he can split a Red Sea, stop the sun, God will take care of them, right? If marching around a city makes walls fall, this is not physical protection that we're talking about. This is moral protection. This is the protection that says, "As you enter the land we need to drive these people out. We need to drive them from the land so that you don't intermarry, intermingle, ally with them so that you start worshiping their gods and doing this stuff. Remember, you're supposed to be a representative to the nations of my holiness, my justice, my grace, my patience, my mercy, and you can't do that worshiping some god that wants you to sacrifice its child." We can't even be allied with that because it goes so counter to God's character. So this is a protection morally for Israel.

Maybe some of us who are still saying, "You know what, that's good Russell, I mean I get that. I see what you're saying, but you know what? This is still the wiping out of nations. I still don't know if I fully understand it. I'm just going to share with you the thing that I rest in and the thing that makes this completely make sense for me. I understand the possession, I understand the judgment, I understand the protection, but look at Deuteronomy Chapter 20. If you don't have your Bible you just want to listen. Deuteronomy Chapter 20. This is so good for me as I think about this. Deuteronomy 20 is the passage

where we have a clear command to go to holy war against these nations. Chapter 20 verse 10 of Deuteronomy, look at what it says:

"When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace."

You see that? That's really good right there, isn't it? "I mean this is the opportunity for you to understand that what you're doing is not right. That we worship the one true God, and now you have an opportunity to embrace our peace offering, turn from what you're doing, repent, stop that, acknowledge God, Yahweh is the one true God and come up under us. Follow us, serve us to serve him. That's the offer. We make an offering of peace and it's clear if they deny that, we destroy." As I sit back and think through that that makes perfect sense. There is plenty of fair warning; there's plenty of fair warning. Not only that, but I think about Jericho and as they marched around the city they were scared to death. They had already heard what God had done 40 years later. Matter of fact, one family is rescued, Rahab's family is rescued because she sent back and said, 'No, no, no. You guys serve the one true God; save me and my family,'" and God did. This wasn't just about wiping them out to wipe them out. It was an opportunity for everyone to know who was the one God. You now have a chance to make peace. There was fair warning. Not only that, but a lot of the wars that we see in Joshua, a lot of the battles were in retaliation of other people attacking them.

Fair warning, retaliation, and then the fact that there was a peace offering. I know it's difficult, but as I read the Old and New Testament God doesn't change, God's not different in the Old than he is in the New. He's still a righteous God who is at war with sin. He's at war with sin. And if you think it's unfair to the other nations, listen, he's going to go to war with Israel because of their sin, and we're going to learn that along the way. They're going to be thrown into exile because of their sin. They're going to be forsaken because they go out and worship those gods, but you know what. God didn't only go to war with sin and flesh and blood, he went at war with sin at the spiritual realm when he sent his Son Jesus Christ to die, be buried, and he rose again and now we no longer fight against flesh and blood, but what? Powers of the air because God has gotten victory over sin and death. But that's not all; God is going to come back and he's going to give sin and evil its final blow when Jesus returns. And all of it comes to consummation, right? It's good. We need to think through this as we watch this and just think, "Oh no, no, no how could God do that?" He's righteous, he's just, he's merciful, and he is going to win, and he will defeat sin.

And I hope that encourages us. As hard as these passages are they encourage us that God is just and right, and he's gracious and loving, and he wants us to

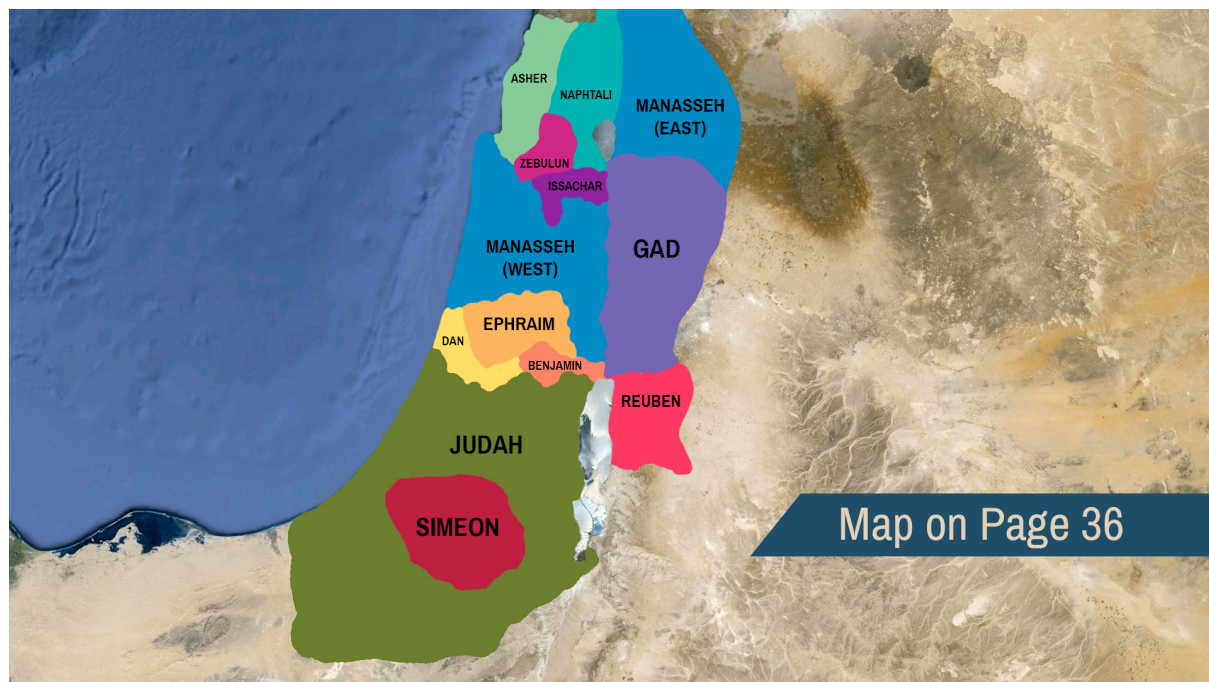
live in a world free from sin, its curse, and its consequence. And he will bring that one day. He will bring it.

So what happens next? As we continue on in Joshua, you want to flip over to Joshua 23. In Joshua 23, actually 21 through 23, we see now that Joshua's next part of his leadership was not only to conquer the land, to drive them out of the land, but his next responsibility was to divide up the land. Let me show it



to you on this map here so we can see exactly what we're talking about when we talk about the land being divided up. It's a big wide shot here. We've got Africa down here, we've got Europe, Italy, let me pan in here right down here. Sea of Galilee,

Dead Sea, this is where all of the fuss and commotion is about, right here, right? We're still fighting over this land. Israel says "This is our land." You want to know why? Because Joshua said here it is. "All the tribes, that's your land, you get it. You have it, you take possession of it, and from here on out this will not be a unified effort to push out the Canaanites. You will take care



of this by tribe, by tribe, by tribe.” And so that’s what we have. We have the land divvied up, Joshua does that, and on his way out he gives this final call in Joshua 23 verses 9-16.

Listen to what he challenges the nation with.

“The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you.”

Verse 10:

“One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised. So be very careful to love the Lord your God. But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the Lord your God has given you.”

He goes, “Here, I’ve done my part. I’ve done what I said I was going to do. Now it’s your opportunity to obey, to follow. You’ve been given the Law, you’ve been taught how to live morally, civically, and ceremonially. You know how to worship me, you know how to treat each other, you know what will please me, now get in the land and do it and don’t mess with anybody else.” Don’t mess with anybody else.

Verse 14, Joshua says:

“Now I am about to go the way of all the earth..”

I’m fixing to die guys.

“You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.”

And you know what they all do? They all rise up, they all say “Yes, this is going to be great.” And you know what the rest of the story is? They live happily ever after. (congregation laughs) What are you laughing at? They’re just supposed to do what they’re asked to do. How hard can that be, right? I mean once you teach them, once you show them, once you’ve walked through it with them, now all you have to do is be obedient. I tell that to my kids all the time,

right? (congregation laughs) I've taught you how to eat at the table, eat at the table. I've taught you how to brush your teeth, brush your teeth. We know how to act at school, at that way at school. It's amazing how difficult it is. And it's apparently incredibly difficult here, right? You know what you're supposed to do. Now watch what didn't happen in this address. He didn't hand the keys of leadership over to anyone else. There's no successor right now. It's pretty simple. You've got the land, you've got the Law, do what you're supposed to do.

And look at what happens in Judges Chapter 2, verse 10. Hit the next book.

"After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the Lord to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths."

Can you believe that? The first part of that is a sermon in and of itself, that there was a generation that rose up after Joshua and all of those guys died. They did not have a clue who God was. They hadn't heard about what he had done. I mean you talk about a foolish generation. How do you not tell people about the Red Sea and the Jordan and manna from heaven, and ten plagues, and Jericho, and the sun standing still -- like how do you not say that? Wow. We need to take warning if we do not pass on the truths to the next generation. Right? Wow what a thought. And they turned over, they started worshiping all of these false gods and then verse 16:

"Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders."

It wouldn't be just one, it would be multiple judges. They would kind of come up, God would raise them up and they would lead for a period, they would die, and then we would see what would happen next.

That leads us to our next storyline. If Joshua is going to lead the conquest of the Promised Land, the storyline of the judges is that **Samson and others were chosen as judges to govern the people for 400 rebellious years**. So verse 16 says:

"Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them,"

Verse 17:

“Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the Lord’s commands. Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord had compassion.”

“I’m going to save you, I’m going to give you a judge because I love you, I got compassion on you.” And as soon as that guy died, what does it say they did? Verse 19:

“But when judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt.”

Can you believe it? As a matter of fact, let me just read these to you. Are you ready? You want a synopsis of the book of Judges, that’s it. Apostasy, then they cry out and say “Oh, we’re so sorry,” because they are getting punished. Then they repent, God raises up a leader, then they get complacent and do it all over again. Chapter 3 verse 7:

“The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord; they forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals.”

Judges 3:12:

“Once again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and because they did this evil the Lord gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel.”

How about Judges 4:1:

“After Ehud died, the Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the Lord.”

This is a really easy book to write, isn’t it? (congregation laughs)

Judges 6:1:

“Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord,”

This time Gideon would be the guy that would rise up. How about 10:6, has anything changed?

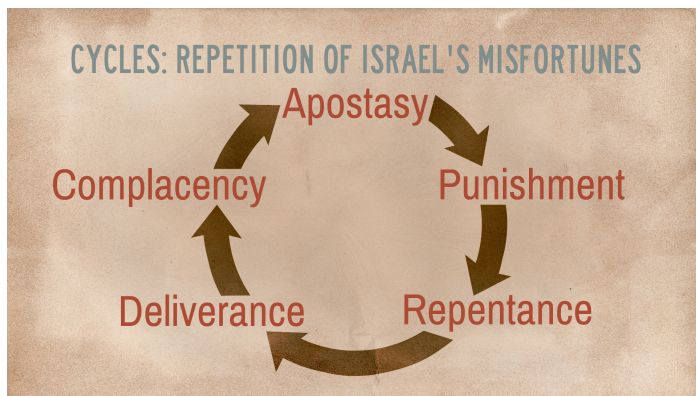
“Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. They served Baals and the Ashtoreths.”

Chapter 13, verse 1:

"Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, so the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years."

And then that's when we get Samson, lots of great judges. When you think about the judges you've got Gideon, he had this army of 30,000 and God says it's too big. They got it down to 10,000. God said it's still too big. Finally they had a group of 300 and all they had were these jars with torches in them and that's how they were going to defeat the enemy.

Then you had Samson, you talk about a hot head. He would just fly off and do some crazy stuff like he caught foxes one time, tied their tails together, put torches and then sent it into a Philistine wheat field. That was pretty cool, right? Killing people with jawbones and donkeys and all kinds of stuff. These judges were characters, but they weren't the primary emphasis. The primary



emphasis is this - look at this cycle. Over and over and over and over again. Apostasy, you get punished, the Philistines are over you, the Midianites are over you, repentance - "Oh we're so sorry, we're so sorry." You get delivered because Gideon, Samson, Jephthah -- one of the guys deliver you. There's 80 years of peace, 10 years of peace,

6 years of peace. You get complacent and think, "Aw it's not so bad, it's not so bad," and then you start doing the same thing over and over again. We don't ever do this, do we? (congregation laughs)

Let me show you how we do it, you ready? Let me show you how we do it. We don't talk about in the form of apostasy. We don't about it in the form of punishment. This is how we do it. We talk about it in the form of "highs and lows." We come over her and we're getting - we just got out of church. "I feel so good, man the music was great. Clayton and the team lead us, it was good. The sermon, man, wow, it's good. We're on top, we feel close, we're high." And then all of a sudden we recognize on Monday we're still dealing with that sin we've been dealing with for five years. And we feel far away, we fight and argue, consequences of sin are there, but then the men's retreat is coming up and that's going to be good. I'm going to get close again, I'm going to feel good again. Then I'm going to have a loss or a trial, maybe it's an issue at work,

maybe I lose a loved one, maybe it's a diagnosis. I get down here. But then Easter, "I love sunrise service - whew it's the best." (congregation laughs) You follow me here (motions in an up and down pattern with his hand). And you look back after 10 years and the way you mark your spiritual journey is by all the highs and the lows. "Oh that was when I felt so close to God." "That was when I felt far from God." What if we changed the paradigm. What if we changed it instead of it just an up and down that really doesn't go much higher or much lower, what if God was asking us to actually become more and more like Jesus Christ. And so our spiritual journey looked more like the edge of a mountain, always trending upward. So what would it look like as I grow, all of a sudden, "Man you know what. I do have a sin issue, and I've plateaued right here, but you know what? I'm not just going to let it bottom me out. Instead I'm going to go seek some wisdom, I'm going to find a mentor. I'm going to press into God's word." What does it say about putting this off and putting it on. And I go through a little bit, but I understand I can now rejoice because I have victory over that sin, because now I'm becoming more and more like Christ. And then all of a sudden, "Ah I did get a diagnosis, there was a loss of a loved one. Maybe I lost my job, but I'm not going to let that push me over because I know James 1 says what? Count it all joy when you encounter trials of various kinds because it's going to make me like Jesus. And so even though it's hard I'm going to press into him so that I can rejoice knowing that on the back end I'll be better for it." And we keep trending upward. And so after 10 years we look down at where we started and say, "I have come so far through the good, the bad, and the ugly." And you look up and say, "I've still got a long way to go." Instead of looking backwards and just, "Oh that was good, that was good, wow that treat was really good." All right? We want to always be trending upwards to Christ to become more and more like him. The book of Judges reminds us of just how devastating the cycle can become.

Let me show you one more thing in the book of Judges. Once we get past Samson we kind of take a little detour, and the book of Judges begins to talk about the Levites, the priests. These would be the guys that should be holding the plumb line, the religious plumb line for the nation. They're failing miserably, you can read it. Just some terrible things happen. But look at the words that are repeated over and over and over again.

Judges 17 verse 6 says this:

"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."

It's repeated again in Judges 18:1. Repeated again in Judges 19:1 It's also repeated again in the very last verse of the book - 21:25.

"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit."

If you're reading Judges you might be saying, "Well give them a king", right? "If it's going to be that bad, give them a king." Listen, you ready? They had a king. They failed to honor him as their king. They had a king. It was the one who delivered them from Egypt, the one who made all of those promises, the one who fault those battles for them, the one who said he would never leave you or forsake you, but they had forsaken him. This is a great reminder for us. There is no human leader to take the place of Jesus Christ. We know what we need to do. We need to follow our king because he is our king. And we need to honor him as that, right? So as you sit back and you think through this, the question for me is, will a king really help them? They're going to cry out for one in 1 Samuel and God's going to give them a king. He's going to give them a bunch of kings, and most of them aren't going to work out so well.

So here's the question for you. Who's your king? Do you honor him as such? Are you trying to be more like him? Or is it just how close you get and how far you get? And then on top of it all you need to know that the God we serve and the Christ that we follow is serious about sin, and he will bring an end to it one day because he's at war with it and we need to battle it everyday to become more and more like Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Father I love you, I thank you for your word. I thank you for this big picture, the story of the Bible that just shows us more of your righteousness, your justice, your grace, your patience. And I thank you for the book of Judges that reminds us how easy it is to get caught in the cycle, but God you don't want us to be in a cycle. You want us to be in an upward trajectory toward you, becoming more and more like your son, Jesus. Father I pray for us today as we have now covered eight books, that we continue to press on that this isn't just about head knowledge; it's about changing our hearts to know more and more and more of you. That's what we ask. It's in your son's name that we pray. Amen.