

SESSION 1: TRIBAL FEDERATION (JOSHUA TO JUDGES)

PREPARATION FOR THE SESSION

Read: Joshua 1-5, 13:1-7, 23, 24:14-28; Judges 1-2, 10-11. Skim Judges for a couple of minutes, reading a verse or two per chapter and any section descriptions in your Bible. Be sure to read 17:6; 18:1; and 21:25.

Summary of the Video: Module 2, Episode 1

Andrew Wilson begins with a summary of the module (and the section of Scripture from Joshua through Song of Songs). In short, while God's people enter the land they still face massive problems. Some problems come from their enemies and some come from themselves. They have entered the land God promised to Abraham and it's now their right and responsibility to take the land as their own.

Three themes must be central in our minds as we read:

- 1) Land – It was promised to Abraham and is a dominant focus of much of the OT. In our section, the people of Israel finally enter this Promised Land.
- 2) Leadership – With Moses dead, a new experience with leaders develops (basically from prophets to judges to kings). This is more significant in this section than in other portions of Scripture.
- 3) Life – If you want practical advice on how to live, you typically look in this section with books like Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. (But this doesn't mean you should follow the examples of most of the people in these stories!)

The first two books (Joshua to Judges) of this section of Scripture describe God's people as a Tribal Federation. The first half of Joshua is a narrative while the second half mostly describes the division of the land (with minute detail about the geography of the land). Andrew Wilson encourages us to take the typology of these stories and see a foretaste of our own experiences in Christ and those coming in the new creation.

From here we turn to a much more difficult issue. It surrounds the task that God sets before Joshua (and his armies). On a practical level, did Joshua and his armies actually conquer the land? On an apologetic level, what do we do with God's command to destroy the people of the land?

First, we dive into the question of whether the conquest of Canaan was total or partial. Did Joshua do the job that God had instructed him to do? Did he succeed or not? Some of the texts of Joshua appear to say "yes!" while others seem to say "no!" What do we do with what appears to be a conflicting assessment? (Rather than pausing while watching the video on your own, dive into this question during your group discussion.)

Second, Andrew Wilson takes us into the thorniest issue in Joshua to Kings: *herem*. The word means “devoted to the Lord” and could refer to a sacrifice or gift but it also refers to destruction. Throughout these books God commands his people to “devote” to destruction the peoples of the land. This may sound like holy war or ethnic cleansing. In most of our contexts, this issue must be resolved.

The issue has been approached in various ways. Andrew Wilson offers his approach, which is that the language is hyperbolic (a culturally recognized form of exaggeration that seeks to make a point) rather than literal.

He gives the following reasons for his viewpoint:

1. The text tells us that people survived after many of the battles in which the text implies Joshua obeyed God’s command to wipe them out.
2. The archaeological evidence depicts the takeover of the land more modestly and slowly than a non-hyperbolic reading of Joshua would suggest.
3. Ancient near eastern records depict similar hyperbolic speaking in surrounding cultures.

Andrew Wilson concludes with three points to consider:

1. We need to put ourselves into the mindset of the original audience and determine how they would have understood the language of “total destruction”.
2. We also need to recognize that “cities” in that era (the Bronze Age) were quite different than today. They were primarily places for soldiers (and prostitutes). Thus, to destroy a city was often similar to taking out a military fortress.
3. *Herem* isn’t based on ethnicity but on sin. God didn’t devote people to destruction because of their skin color or race but because of their rebellion against him.

In the second half of the video, we get into Judges.

Questions naturally arise and these questions can point us toward the main purpose of the books. How does Judges address the fact that Israel doesn’t take over the whole land? Why did Israel so seamlessly fall into a lifestyle of living amongst pagan peoples alongside their gods? Andrew Wilson suggests that there were many reasons for this failure (theological, political, military, sin, economic, sociological) that do not conflict but instead collect into a fuller explanation. The failure of humanity, resilient love of God, and unrealized vision of a Messiah guide us toward expecting something greater in God’s plan of redemption.

Since in this era there are several tribes of Israel and they tend to be at odds with one another, God raises up judges. Judges are tribal heroes more than national rulers. The book chronicles the demise of the people in this era. They consistently rebel against God and his appointed leaders (and the leaders themselves stumble in many ways).

Andrew Wilson walks through some of the major judges to draw some points out and make some applications for Christians. Probably the central theme of this period of the judges is the debilitating cycle of idolatry. Judges points to the limitations of Israel’s government without a king.

Terms You'll Need to Know:

Canaan—ancient name for the land of modern Israel.

Herem—a Hebrew word that means “ban, devote to destruction, or devote to God”.

Monarchy—rule by a king or queen; in Scripture this begins with Saul, David and Solomon.

Eschatology—the study of God’s ideal future for his people which will culminate in the new heavens and new earth (but, from an OT perspective, also includes the first coming of the Messiah and the establishment of his kingdom).

Idealized future Davidic king—OT prophecy saw in David a picture of the future Messiah, a God-oriented king.

Rhetorical—using various styles of speaking in order to persuade or to make a point (these might include word pictures, alternating volume, or hyperbole).

Hyperbole—exaggerating to make a point (without expecting anyone to take you literally).

Watch Video

Watch Module 2, Episode 1 (1hr 19 minutes).

Conquest to Monarchy

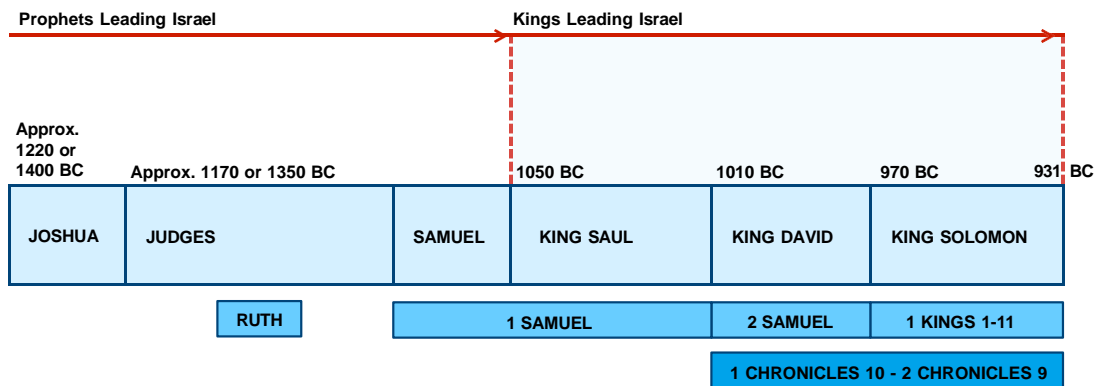
- I. **The Story So Far**
- II. Tribal Federation: Joshua to Judges
- III. United Monarchy: Saul to Solomon
- IV. God
- V. Gospel
- VI. People
- VII. Mission

Big Motifs – Land, Leadership and Life

- Land
 - Promised to Abraham
 - The journey back
 - The commission to fully possess the Land
 - From invasion to occupation to domination
 - The promise of the Land is tied to obedience to the covenant (Deut 28-29). Obedience → blessing, but disobedience → curse
- Leadership
 - “Moses is dead”
 - The absence of leadership causes chaos in Judges
 - The people ask for a king, and Samuel institutes the monarchy
 - Saul, David Solomon
 - The developing expectation for an ideal, future king
- Life
 - Suffering (e.g. Job)
 - Worship (e.g. Psalms)
 - Daily Life (e.g. Proverbs)
 - Meaning (e.g. Ecclesiastes)
 - Sex and Marriage (e.g. Song of Songs)

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Timeline



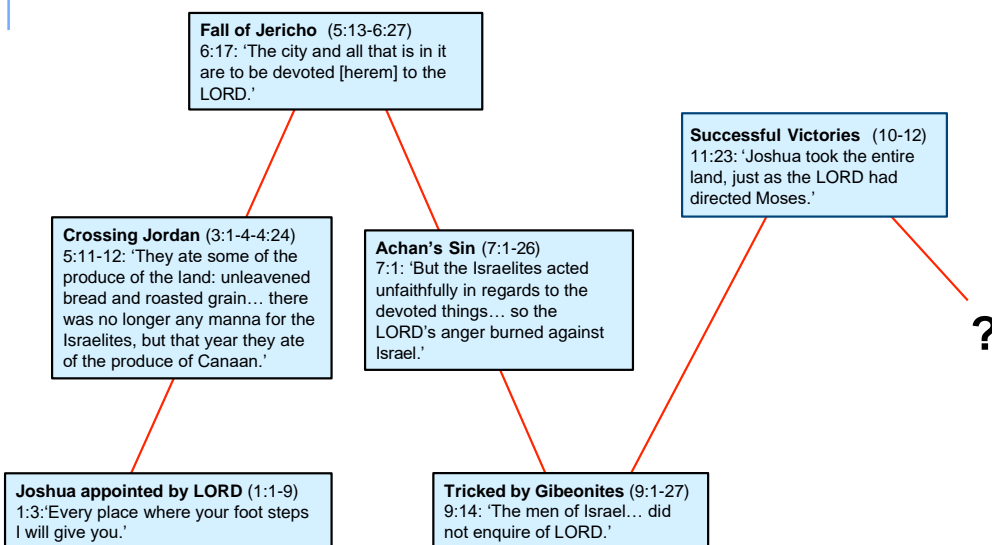
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Conquest to Monarchy

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The Conquest of Canaan: Progress and Setbacks in Joshua



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Was the Conquest of Canaan Total or Partial?

Indications of Total Victory

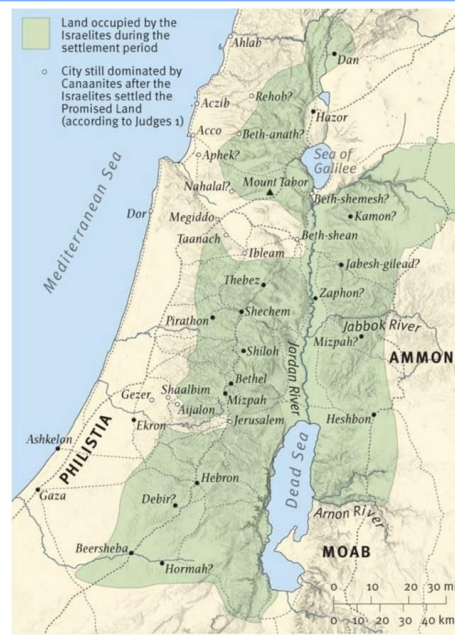
- "So Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions." (11:23)
- Northern Victory: "So Joshua took this entire land: the hill country, all the Negev, the whole region of Goshen, the western foothills, the Arabah and the mountains of Israel with their foothills, from Mount Halak, which rises towards Seir, to Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon." (11:16; cf. 10:40)
- "So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled." (21:43-45; cf. 23:14)

Indications of Partial Victory

- "When Joshua was old and well advanced in years, the LORD said to him, 'You are very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over.'" (13:1; see 2-7 for details)
- Many tribes fail to take their allotted land (13:13; 15:63; etc) or drive out other peoples, putting them to work instead. "They did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer; to this day the Canaanites live among the people of Ephraim but are required to do forced labour." (16:10)
- Chapters 13-19 are allocating land, rather than describing land being taken (cf. 18:3)
- Joshua ends with clear indications of other nations in the land. "The LORD your God himself will drive them out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you." (23:5; cf. v7)
- Judges begins in this sort of context (Jdg 2:21)

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The Land Allocated ... But Not Fully Possessed



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Holy War? Ethnic Cleansing?

- In Deuteronomy, God commands Israel to “destroy...totally” (7:2) the nations already in the promised land. They are to “not leave alive anything that breathes” (20:16) and “completely destroy them” (20:17). This is the Hebrew verb *haram*
 - This raises the uncomfortable concept of *herem* warfare – a Judeo-Christian version of Islamic Jihad – in which no one associated with the enemy is spared, not even non-combatants or PoWs
 - Joshua is recorded as carrying out this *herem* warfare as commanded. “They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men & women, young & old, cattle, sheep & donkeys” (6:21; cf. 10:40)
- However, a strong case can be made for understanding statements about *herem* warfare as hyperbolic and rhetorical. Firstly, there is internal evidence – clues within Joshua and Judges that these statements are not to be taken ‘literally’
 - Joshua notes several specific places where Joshua exterminated everyone and left no survivors: Hebron (10:36-37), Debir (10:38), the hill country and the Negev and the western foothills (10:40)
 - Yet in Judges 1, we find that there are Canaanites in the Negev, in the hill country (1:9), in Debir (1:11), in Hebron (1:10) and in the western foothills (1:9), in such numbers that they had to be driven out by force
 - Consequently, “leaving no survivors” would apparently have been taken as hyperbole, like a rugby team saying “we massacred them”. Elsewhere, the language of “driving out” or “dispossessing” is used (e.g. Deut 33:27; Josh 3:10)
- There is also external evidence concerning the conquest of Canaan, all of which indicates a gradualist entry into the Land rather than the complete destruction of the existing tribes
 - Comparisons with other Ancient Near Eastern texts indicate that the rhetorical hyperbole of Joshua is paralleled in contemporary literature – that was simply how battles were described
 - So, since Joshua is said to have done “just as the LORD had commanded” (10:40), we should also understand God’s *herem* command in the same way, rather than as a command to execute every human being Israel found
 - “The best one can conclude from the accounts of “killing everyone that breathed” is that Israel scored a decisive victory, and once you recognize the presence of hyperbole it is not even clear how decisive the victories were” (Copan et al)
- Finally, it is worth noting that the logic of *herem* is not based on ethnicity but on sin (e.g. Rahab is preserved; Achan is killed). The conquest is more like the cleansing of sacred space, like a temple, than it ethnic cleansing

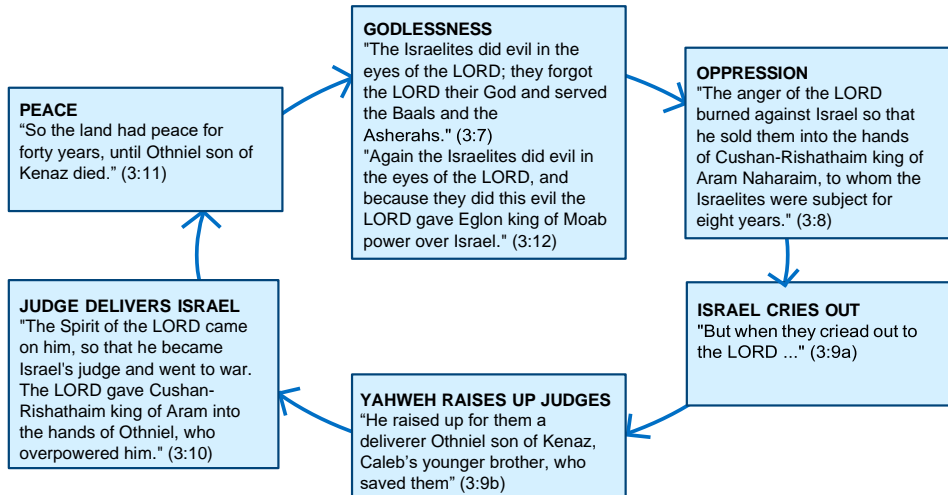
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The Setting of Judges

- Despite ongoing attempts, Israel fails to consolidate all the initial victories of Joshua and eventually settles for living together with other peoples and their gods. Why?
 - A lack of leadership, after the death of Joshua
 - Military difficulty: “The LORD was with the men of Judah. They took possession of the hill country, but they were unable to drive the people from the plains, because they had chariots fitted with iron” (Jdg 1:19)
 - Faithlessness: “You have disobeyed me ... Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you: they will be thorns in your side & their gods will be a snare to you” (2:1-3)
 - A test of obedience: “Because this nation has violated the covenant I ordained for their ancestors and has not listened to me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their ancestors did” (2:20-22)
- As such, we do not have a united Israelite nation living in an entirely Israelite land
 - Israel is in the Promised Land, but not in exclusive occupancy. The Canaanites, in particular, continue to live there
 - Furthermore, Israel is a loose federation of tribes, rather than a unified nation. There is no central government or leadership at all. The tribes are sometimes virtually independent, sometimes fighting each other and sometimes cooperating against common enemies
 - Jerusalem is still in enemy hands (in 1:8 it is attacked and burnt, but not occupied). By David’s time it belongs to the Jebusites, and the corridor separating north from south becomes a fault line in Israel that breaks open later
- So judges are raised up by God, to provide leadership at specific times. These judges are more tribal heroes than national rulers, and they rescue Israel from outside threats
 - The period of Judges begins after the death of Joshua (1:1), and covers several generations after Joshua, either c.120 or c.300 years (depending on the date of the exodus, and whether the judges are consecutive or sometimes simultaneous in different parts of the country)

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The Downward Spiral



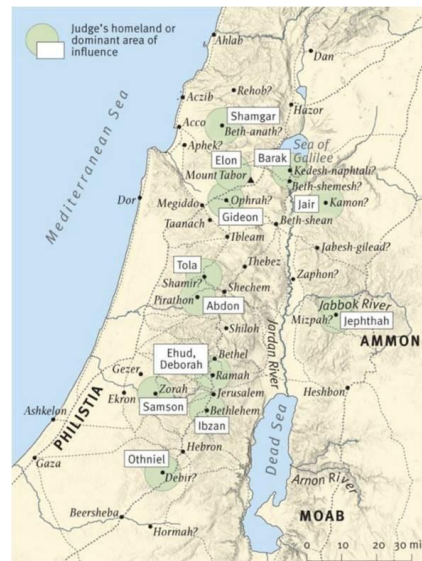
"But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshipping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways." (2:19)

"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (17:6)

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The Table of Judges

Judge	Bible Ref	Tribe	Enemy	Period of oppression	Period of rest
Othniel	3:7-11	Judah	Mesopotamians	8 years	40 years
Ehud	3:12-30	Benjamin	Moabites	18 years	80 years
Shamgar	3:31		Philistines		
Deborah	Chs. 4-5	Ephraim	Canaanites	20 years	40 years
Gideon	Chs. 6-8	Manasseh	Midianites	7 years	40 years
Tola	10:1-2	Issachar			23 years
Jair	10:3-5	Gilead-Manasseh			22 years
Jephthah	10:6 - 12:7	Gilead-Manasseh	Ammonites		24 years
Ibzan	12:8-10	Judah or Zebulun?			7 years
Elon	12:11-12	Zebulun			10 years
Abdon	12:13-15	Ephraim			8 years
Samson	Chs.13-16	Dan	Philistines	40 years	20 years



NB: Many of the episodes in Judges overlap each other, unfolding in different parts of the land

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GROUP MEETING:

Discussion Questions

Before getting into these specific questions, spend a few minutes discussing what struck you or stuck with you from the video. What were some of the main points? Did any of Andrew's comments or questions open up the Bible in a profound way to you? Also, ask if anything was confusing or needs clarification.

1. What would you say this portion of Scripture teaches us about the nature, character and purposes of God?

2. What connections can you draw between what is pictured in Joshua and Judges and what we receive in Christ?

3. This section talks a lot about leadership (good and bad and absent). Andrew Wilson was asked whether or not we are justified in focusing on leadership as we preach this section. How would you answer that question?

4. What do we do with what appears to be a conflicting assessment of Joshua's conquest? How do we deal with the fact that some verses seem to say he did wipe out the enemy (e.g. Joshua 21:43-45) and others that clearly indicate that he didn't (e.g. Joshua 11:22; 13:2; Judges 6:1-11)?

5. Spend a good amount of time talking about Andrew Wilson's approach to the question of *herem*. First, attempt to articulate in your own words what he said. Then, assess whether it convinces you and if it would help a friend of yours.

6. Israel quickly sunk into the surrounding culture after God's great salvation. What are the most powerful temptations for Christians to sink into in your community? How can we strengthen our churches to overcome this temptation?

Meditation on Scripture

Judges 21:25

Joshua 24:14-15

Putting This Session into Practice

Without God as king, society falls apart. Individualism (being the self-appointed authority who submits to no other leader) seems to be on the rise throughout the world. Chaos is sure to follow. Ask the Lord to reveal areas in your life in which you don't live consistently in submission to him.