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The Conquest of Canaan and The Period of Judges : Joshua, Judges

Joshua leads the Israelites across the Jordan River to take possession of the land promised by God through the Abrahamic covenant. This conquest was to be complete, totally eliminating the Canaanite culture in the land (see *herem* below). Instead, Israel disobeyed, leaving Canaanite remnants in the land, ultimately leading to Israel's seduction into idolatry and the resulting oppression, division of the kingdom, and exile from the land. In the meantime, the tribes learned to live together in the land, in the midst of remaining Canaanite cities and surrounded by hostile nations. Thus begins the following pattern, repeated several times: the people serve other gods, God sends a nation to oppress them, the people cry out to God, God raises up a judge (or deliverer), the oppressor is defeated, the people have rest.

Sections

- Joshua 1-5 – Entry into the Land
- Joshua 5-12 – Conquest of the Land
- Joshua 13-22 – Division of the Land
- Joshua 23-24 – Joshua's Last Days
- Judges 1-2 – Summary of the Conquest of Canaan
- Judges 2-8 – Israel in the Period of Judges (to the Death of Gideon)
- Judges 8-9 – Reign of Abimelech
- Judges 10-12 – Israel in the Period of Judges (to the Close of the Period)
- Judges 13-16 – Philistine Oppression and the Exploits of Samson
- Judges 17-19 – Other Events of the Period
- Judges 20-21 – War between Benjamin and Israel, and Reconciliation

Literary Styles of Note

- Narrative – Joshua 1-12, 23-24; Judges 1-4, 6-21
- Poetry / Song – Judges 5
- Records of Subdivision – Joshua 13-22
- Prophecy – Overall, these books are considered books of the Former Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. They are more than historical narratives, as they contain a prophetic message whose lessons were meant to give hope and instruction to a people threatened by conquerors.

Concepts

- Promised Land – the land of Canaan, occupied by Canaanites (obviously), that was promised to Israel in the Abrahamic covenant with blessings highlighted in the Mosaic covenant.
- Devotion / Herem – complete destruction and killing in the name of God.
- Rest – peace and living rightly with God, as contrasted by the period of slavery, wandering hardship, and war that preceded this time. Serves as a picture of prophetic hope.
- Judge – a charismatic leader, not selected by the people but raised up by God, filled with God's Spirit to empower him/her to deal with a particular situation: driving out an oppressor and giving rest to the land and the people.

Purpose

- Details the conquest of Canaan and the delivery of the Promised Land to the people of Israel.
- Explains how foreign and idolatrous enclaves remained amongst Israel, the seeds through which oppression, captivity, and exile would arise as consequences.
- Establishes a cadence of idolatry, oppression, repentance, delivery, and rest which plays out continually in the relationship between humanity and God.
- Shows what life is like in a world described in Judges 21:25: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.” Even the judges acted terribly, though in ways they thought right.

Notes

- Joshua is shown as a second Moses leading his people to victory as well as a prototype of kingship.
- The Land serves as a central character signifying God’s covenant with Israel. Here, we see the initial conquest of the land. Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, blessings in the land follow obedience to God, idolatry was punished with driving them out of the land, and, during the Exile, God’s promise through the prophets to return a remnant to the land served to give the people hope.
- The complete destruction of the Canaanite culture and religious practices was commanded by God. While struggling with this truth, understand:
 - Canaanite religious practices were wicked — including prostitution and child sacrifice
 - They continually sought to entice Israel into joining this idolatrous worship
 - The necessity of the purity of Israel’s worship of God is obvious in light of God’s holiness (see the definition of “holiness” in the *Exodus and the Law* lesson)
 - Israel’s existence, and thus the salvation of the whole world, depending on God’s blessing
 - The outcome of their *not* fully destroying the Canaanites resulting in idolatry pervading Israelite worship, resulting in oppression, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the Exile
- Following a consequence through the biblical narrative: the story of the Gibeonites in Joshua 9. Joshua accidentally makes a treaty with Gibeonites, who were supposed to be devoted to God. He therefore leaves the Gibeonites as a Canaanite enclave within Israel. This enclave later becomes a factor in preventing the unification of the tribes of Israel, causing it to split into the northern and southern kingdoms (1 Kings 12).
- The *herem* was not a permanent policy, but was intended only for a specific situation: to punish the wickedness of the Canaanites, to keep Israel’s worship of God holy, and to preserve God’s blessing of Israel and thus the salvation of the world.
 - “The *herem* must be viewed within the context of Israel’s prophetic outlook. Yahweh acted for Israel and against Israel’s enemies because of his covenant promise with the fathers. In fact, this makes the idea of total destruction an understandable item in biblical religion, for the covenant’s ultimate purpose is to provide for all the nations of the earth the knowledge of Yahweh and the covenant blessings. Anything or any person that would prevent the working out of this redemptive purpose for all peoples must be removed as an enemy of Yahweh.” [LaSor, Hubbard, Bush. *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*. (Eerdmans, 2nd Edition: 1996). Pg 152.]
- The typical pattern in stories of the judges: the people serve other gods, God sends a nation to oppress them, the people cry out to God, God raises up a judge (or deliverer), the oppressor is defeated, the people have rest.

- Judges didn't primarily hear complaints or make legal decisions, they were leaders and military deliverers. They differed from kings in that they did not establish a dynasty or ruling family.
- Notable judges and respective oppressors:
 - Othniel delivers from Cushan-rishathaim
 - Ehud delivers from Eglon
 - Deborah/Barak delivers from Jabin
 - Gideon delivers from Midian
 - Jephthah delivers from Ammonites
 - Samson delivers from Philistines
- Even though empowered by God and filled with the Spirit to carry out a task of deliverance, the judges still acted with deception (Ehud killing Eglon through sneak attack) and treachery (Jael killing Sisera after taking him in as a refugee from Deborah/Barak). They still performed abominable acts (Jephthah sacrificing his daughter). They still had a lot to be taught.
- It's quite possible the book of Judges serves primarily as an apology for the Davidic monarchy.

Bible Study

- Judges 2:1-3, 2:10-3:11