

Series: God is the Hero of this Story: A Study Through Judges

Message: The Legacy of Joshua / Jeff Kennedy April 16, 2023

**Opening Scripture: Psalm 9:7–10** “But the Lord sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for judgment. <sup>8</sup> And he judges the world with righteousness; he executes judgment on the nations with fairness. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is a refuge for the persecuted, a refuge in times of trouble. <sup>10</sup> Those who know your name trust in you because you have not abandoned those who seek you, Lord.

**Introduction:** Everyone in this room either has faced or will face challenges or changes that fundamentally alter the course of our lives—and at that moment, we come to realize that there is no going back. Life will never be the same. **I think of the last day my kids jumped up into a comfy chair with me to tell me all about their day at school.** No one told me that would be the last time they would ever do that. Suck it up, buttercup because, from this day forward, everything is going to change. And, of course, you want it to (if my 18–21 yr old sons jumped up into my lap for a tickle fight, that’d just be weird). This experience of loss and change is particularly acute as it relates to mothers and fathers and leaders who have significantly impacted our lives. Sometimes, the hardest thing to do is to say goodbye to those who’ve left an indelible mark on us with their character, their faith, and their love.

**And we hope what follows will be equally as good, if not better. But what happens when it isn’t?**

The book of Judges is just that kind of experience. The first chapter or two actually looks back with fondness and nostalgia on Joshua—his faithfulness, his strength, and his triumph as Moses’ replacement. Joshua’s leadership was the benchmark against whom all successors would be measured. Never had there been a tougher act to follow or bigger shoes to fill. Joshua was quite literally an improvement on Moses. He had all of Moses’ great qualities and none of the baggage. The elders, officers and judges that followed Joshua were faithful also. But the next generation of Jews and their leaders could not have been a greater disappointment. The book ends on one of the most depressing notes of any book in the Bible, Judges 21:25 “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him.” Could there be a more relevant diagnosis of our culture than this verse right here? This is why the Gospel is not merely a message about Jesus who died on a cross for my sins so I could go to heaven when I die. It’s firstly the royal pronouncement that the world’s true and rightful King has come—and he calls us to renounce our sins (doing whatever is right in our own eyes) and to become subject to his reigning grace.

And so, what could possibly be the silver lining in a book like this? Since the book cannot commend the Judges of Israel to us as paragons of principled leadership, what lesson then are we to take away from it?

What is this book about?

Consider these Key Passages as they relate to the purpose and themes of this great (yes, I said it) book:

- (1) **Key Verse About the People:** Judges 2:19 “Whenever the judge died, the Israelites would act even more corruptly than their ancestors, following other gods to serve them and bow in worship to them. They did not turn from their evil practices or their obstinate ways.”
- (2) **Key Verse About God:** Judges 2:1 “I brought you out of Egypt and led you into the land I had promised to your ancestors. I also said: I will never break my covenant with you.”
- (3) **Key Verse About God’s Plan:** Judges is bookended by God’s Sovereign choice of Judah as Joshua’s successor and a son from the tribe of Judah being born—a new hope for Israel in David and his heir, the Messiah.
  - Judges 1:1–2 “After the death of Joshua, the Israelites inquired of the Lord, “Who will be the first to fight for us against the Canaanites?”<sup>2</sup> The Lord answered, “**Judah** is to go. I have handed the land over to him.”
  - Ruth 4:17 “The neighbor women said, ‘A son has been born to Naomi,’ and they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.” Now we learn from both Matthew and Luke’s genealogies that David, Jesse, Obed and Boaz are from the tribe of Judah.

**Transition:** Today, we’re just going to look at an overview of the message of Judges set against the backdrop of Joshua’s high bar of godly, spiritual leadership.

**Joshua's Legacy:** Joshua was the leader whose influence outlived him. Several things in 1:1–21 show the impact his life had made.

- 1. A unified nation:** There are few things more stressful than a lack of unity among God's people. Families being ripped apart by adultery, abandonment, divorce go through tremendous stress, most of which is channeled in the direction of children. Churches that are torn apart over doctrinal disputes, or worse, over mere preferences, go through tremendous strain causing anxiety and unrest. Leaders who experience a falling out can experience diminished effectiveness as the crisis of leadership becomes all-consuming. Joshua's legacy was that he left the nation arguably better than he found it. He learned from Moses' mistakes and was faithful to unify the nation in a way that had never been achieved. After his death we see a united response of the people Judges 1:1 "After the death of Joshua, the Israelites inquired of the Lord, 'Who will be the first to fight for us against the Canaanites?'" Agreement over our mission, our purpose, and our core beliefs and values inspires confidence in everyone and disunity does exactly the opposite. And Joshua modelled this approach to leadership.

Ephesians 4:1–6 "Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> ***making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*** <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

- 2. A model of teamwork:** Moses had to learn the hard way that good leadership requires delegation. Moses was killing himself by hearing every court case brought before and his father in law, Jethro, made a brilliant suggestion—recruit a team to help you. A good leader learns from their mistakes. A better leader learns from the mistakes of others and avoids those pitfalls. Everything that Joshua did, he accomplished along with the elders and leaders of Israel. Whether it was seeking God before the ark of the Covenant (Josh 7:6) or preparing for war and addressing the people (8:10); delegating authority to the elders to judge civil cases (20:4), and finally passing the baton of leadership to them at his death. ***Two passages sum up his focus on the next generation of leaders:*** Josh 24:31 "Israel worshiped the Lord throughout Joshua's lifetime and during the lifetimes of the **elders** who outlived Joshua and who had experienced all the works the Lord had done for Israel." And Judges 2:7 "The people worshiped the Lord throughout Joshua's lifetime and during the lifetimes of the elders who outlived Joshua." The best leader is always thinking beyond his/her term. And Joshua invested in the lives of the elders, officers, leaders, and judges of Israel to carry on his excellence.

Look at what Jesus prayed for all believers globally, John 17:23 “I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me.” The key to our effectiveness is our unity in Christ. Jesus is here in these chapters preparing his team to carry on his work.

3. **A model of service:** Of the myriad of leaders Israel had over its history, *only four people in the OT get the title* “Servant of the LORD.” Moses, David, the Messiah (Isa 61) and Joshua. Look at Judges 2:8 “Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died age 110.” Later, Jesus will teach the disciples this principle of leadership—Mathew 23:11 “The **greatest** among you will be your **servant**.” Paul will later define his apostleship this way, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus” (Romans 1:1). Peter uses this lowly term also “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). Jesus’ brothers, Jude and James both refer to themselves as “a servant” of God and Christ (Jude 1:1; James 1:1). When John the apostle receives the Revelation of Christ he identifies himself as “John, His servant” (Rev 1:1). The best leaders do not fixate on creating a cult of personality, consolidating all the power and influence of the church or a ministry in themselves. They instead view themselves as servants of the gospel who eventually pass on the baton to faithful people.
  
4. **A model of faithfulness:** Good leaders know where the real credit for their accomplishments lies. It is because of God’s faithfulness—because the LORD lived up to his promises and accomplished his purposes in their time. Look at Joshua’s last words Joshua 23:3, 9–10, 14 “you have seen for yourselves everything *the Lord your God did* to all these nations on your account because *it was the Lord your God who was fighting for you*...<sup>9</sup> *The Lord has driven out* great and powerful nations before you, and no one is able to stand against you to this day. <sup>10</sup>One of you routed a thousand *because the Lord your God was fighting for you*, as he promised...none of the good promises the Lord your God made to you has failed. Everything was fulfilled for you; *not one promise has failed*.” Good and godly leaders never take credit for God alone has accomplished. Did he use our preaching, teaching, prayers and effort? He sure did. But it was God who brought the victory, not us. Godly leaders never take credit for what God alone is responsible for. Philippians 2:12–13 “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose.” We are faithful to work out what God has worked in. It is by his strength to works in us, by his will and according to his purpose that our inner being is strengthened and resolute to accomplish all that he intends.

**5. Spirit-filled leadership:** Exodus chapters 17, 24, and 33 make it clear that Joshua was no rookie. He was a seasoned, hardened warrior who fought side-by-side with Moses. But the defining characteristic of his leadership is in Numbers 27:18 “A man who has the Spirit [of the Lord] resting on him.” Deuteronomy 34:9 tells us that “Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him.” The Key to Joshua’s Spirit-filled life was his commitment to the Word of God, to obey it; his commitment to the covenant of God—to remain loyal to it; and his commitment to prayer before the Ark of the Covenant. Because of his faithfulness to the Word of God, then he received the promise that God would always be with him Joshua 1:5, 9, 17 “Just as I was with Moses so I will be with you, I will not leave you nor forsake you.” He is a spiritual leader who does not neglect nourishing his faith in prayer and the Word. Acts 6:4 Peter responded to the administrative crisis before the church of the distribution of resources, “But we will devote ourselves to **prayer** and to the **ministry of the word.**”

By contrast, the Judges of Israel will only be described as people of Faith—in fact, when the author of Hebrews summarizes their ministries and lives—he specifically mentions Judges who were deeply flawed, like Samson, Gideon, Barak, and Jephthah. These men no doubt had tremendous faith but at times, tested God’s patience. And God was faithful to the nation despite their failings.

Wherever these leaders succeed, they mirror Joshua’s competence and commitment. And whenever they fail, they will reject his model of unifying, serving, equipping, faithful and Spiritual leadership.

The book of Judges is one, continuous story of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God punctuated by a few short-lived spiritual awakenings, followed by a period of Kings and Prophets. Israel can’t save itself. Their Kings can’t save them, their prophets can’t save them. And ultimately, the prophets will foretell of a coming King to end all kings. A ruler who will die for their sins, taking the nations’ iniquities on himself, and will raise to life again being exalted to a throne which is above all the nations of the earth.

This King comes through the tribe of Judah—a very inconsistent and defective group within Israel who obey and also perpetrate moral horrors. They’re rewarded when they obey and are judged for their sins when they disobey. Ultimately it is through them that the line of the Messiah comes, and the book ends by highlighting David’s ancestral family. The author of Judges wants us to

see that a major part of solution is a new King of God's choosing who will establish God's Kingdom forever and whose son will reign in an eternal unshakable Kingdom.

Matthew 1:21 (from Aramaic/Syriac, Jesus' original language): "She [Mary] will beget a son, and you are to name him *Yeshua* (contraction of *Ye'hoshua*/Joshua: "Yahweh Saves"), because he will **save (*yoshia*) his people from their sins.**"

The nations will hear this good news and be glad—they will rejoice because the God who had divorced the nations in their idolatries in Genesis 11, has now made a way for them to cast off their idols, their false gods, and return to the one living and true eternal God through Christ his son. No earthly king, no nation, no people could accomplish this—only God through his servant Jesus.

And that is why folks, we must see this story as God's story. And God is the hero of this story.