



Class 5 - Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges

Old Testament Seminar - Immanuel Church

Deuteronomy

Today, as we conclude our overview of the Five Books of Moses, we'll encounter one of the greatest transitions in the Bible, as the people of Israel prepare to enter the Promised Land. While they wait on the plains of Moab for that long-expected day, Moses delivers three final exhortations to the people on God's behalf. These sermons are what make up most of our book today: Deuteronomy. The name comes from the Greek for "second law," because much of the book is a second giving of the law that we've seen already in the Pentateuch. But this book is far more than a repetition of the law. It's the Bible's summary of God's covenant with Israel. So you'll see in the rest of the Old Testament overview, the authors continue to come back to one book more than any other in the Pentateuch. They come back to Deuteronomy. It's the key to understanding Joshua. And Judges. We'll use it to structure our study of 1 and 2 Samuel. And 1 and 2 Kings. You get the picture. This book is central to the rest of Scripture.

Now, one way that it's central is that it helps us understand the role of the law and of grace in our salvation. So let's start there. *Some people have said that in the Old Testament, people are saved by works and in the New, by grace. **But we know that's not true.*** Romans 3 makes it clear that salvation has only and ever been by grace. So, based on your knowledge of the Old Testament, where are some of the places where it talks about our need for God's grace?

Context

Let's talk a bit about the context of the book, and then we'll dive into our study. We left off last week at the end of Numbers, with Israel on the plains of Moab, just across the Jordan River from the Promised Land. It's around 1400BC. The first generation that came out of Egypt has died. The second generation is ready to enter and occupy Canaan. And as Numbers leaves off, we begin Deuteronomy. And we see in the opening verses that this is going to be a book of Moses' sermons.

But why? If they're so close to this land they've been dreaming of for 40 years, why stop here on

the border... to listen to sermons? Why? Because there's much more at stake than just a place to live. Israel is a nation founded on the promises of God that's been sustained by the power of God. They've been redeemed from slavery, constituted as a nation, brought into covenant with Yahweh, given good laws and a tabernacle where God's glory dwelt. And so possession of the land of Canaan is the last of the puzzle pieces to come together for God to make good on all of his promises to Abraham. Now, they could easily get confused and think that all they need is a place to live. So to work against that, God uses Deuteronomy to renew his covenant with them - the complete and finished puzzle of his relationship with them. Deuteronomy is the book that future generations will turn to again and again. To understand who they are and what it means for them to be in covenant with Yahweh.

Structure

So, some important context. With that in place, let's take a look at how this covenant shapes the structure of this book.

You'll remember that we've defined a "covenant" as a bond in blood, sovereignly administered.¹ A binding agreement between two parties with terms and conditions. In the ancient Near East, it was common for rulers to use a covenant to guarantee their alliances. Typically, the terms of the covenant were laid down in a document and ratified in a solemn ceremony, with oaths, witnesses and a symbolic seal or sign.

Well, if you've been with us in the OT class so far, you know that this covenant model is one of the major ways that God chose to deal with his people. We've seen how God covenanted with Abraham to make his descendants a great nation, with Yahweh reigning and ruling over them in Canaan. Then, in Exodus, we saw the obligations Abraham's descendants were bound to in a new covenant: the Ten Commandments and laws in Exodus 20-24. This covenant, called the Mosaic Covenant, was a gracious step forward in God's redemptive plan - it made the people into a nation, revealed God's holy character through his law, and established the sacrificial system that prepared the way for Christ's atonement on the cross.² But it also formally placed an obligation on the nation of Israel: to be holy as God is holy, with the curse of death if they fell short.

It's this Mosaic Covenant that's being expounded and ratified here in Deuteronomy. In fact, if you look at the outline of Deuteronomy in your handout and you'll see that the whole book of

¹This definition comes from O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, p. 4.

²Cf. Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, p. 215.

Deuteronomy follows the format of a covenant document commonly used in the ancient Near-East. We begin with a historical prologue in chapters 1-4, where Moses in his first speech recounts God's past faithfulness to the people. Then, the heart of the book is Moses' second speech. That's where he details the covenant stipulations that bind the people. First, general commands in chapters 5-11 about their exclusive relationship to God. Then, specific commands in chapters 12-26 about how to operate as God's people in the land. In Moses' third speech, he explains the blessings and curses that will result if the people are faithful or unfaithful to the covenant. The conclusion of the book gives a window into Israel's future as the covenant people of God. For the rest of our time in Deuteronomy, we'll walk through this covenant document section by section.

[Questions]

Historical Prologue - Chs. 1-4

First, the covenant's Historical Prologue. Chapters 1 through 4 are a review of the Israel's relationship with Yahweh to date. The theme? Yahweh has shown himself to be both just and merciful. The history here is the same as we saw last week in the book of Numbers. The people's lack of trust in God's power (Dt. 1:32), God's refusing to let the first generation enter the land (Dt. 1:35), the people's wanderings in the desert (Dt. 2:14), and God's gracious provision (Dt. 2:7) and military victory (Dt. 2:24-3:11). The summary of all this is 4:35: "*To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him.*" Moses continues in verse 40: "*Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for all time.*" A perfectly faithful God requires perfect faithfulness to himself.

That's the history: God has been gracious. And that's the charge: therefore, follow God alone. What will it look like for the people to obey that charge once they're in the land? God tells them, by giving them his covenant stipulations in Moses' next speech.

General Stipulations: Love and Faithfulness – Chs. 5-11

And these begin with some general laws in chapter 5. If you turn there, you'll see a reiteration of the Ten Commandments. But God makes it clear that his relationship with Israel is not about

merely following rules and regulations. At the heart of these commandments is a story of love. Look at 6:4-6:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.”

This is the famous “Shema,” which is the Hebrew word for “hear.” The most important thing for the Israelites to hear is that Yahweh is one God. He is the only God, and the proper response to the one true God is total, all-consuming love. What does this love look like? Obeying God’s commands. Because his commandments are to be “upon your hearts,” which the ancient Hebrews understood to be the mind, will, emotions, thought life - everything that makes up the “inside” character of a person.

But if total, exclusive love is at the core of how Israel was to engage with its covenant God, this was simply because God had loved them first. Listen to these amazing words, just a chapter later, in Deut. 7:7-8:

“It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

Here we have a majestic window into the mystery of God’s electing love. He chose this people simply because he loved them. *Not because of anything about them; he just loved them.* Their relationship with God is based entirely in God’s grace.

We can apply this to our lives too. Though we are in a different chapter of redemptive history, love should still be at the center of how we engage with God. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he quoted Deuteronomy 6:4. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself. (Luke 10:27).” *But, like Israel, we must recognize that we can only love God because he first chose and loved us. We love God by first tasting his gracious, electing love for us.*

And as we look over this section of general covenant stipulations, we see that a crucial part of loving God is obeying the first commandment: having no other gods but him. That’s why Moses instructs the people to completely destroy foreign idols in chapter 7 (7:5-6), to never forget God’s

faithfulness in chapter 8 (8:10-14), and to remember that idolatry is deadly in chapter 9 (9:27-29).

With this guiding principle of loving faithfulness in place, Moses proceeds to explain the specific stipulations of the covenant for the nation's life in the Promised Land. That's chapters 12-26.

Specific Stipulations: Justice and Holiness – Chs. 12-26

Moses starts in 12:1 by saying, “These are the statutes and rules that you shall be careful to do in the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth.” The point of these 15 chapters is that as God's people in God's land, they were to worship God alone, reflect God's holiness, and represent God's justice. But... in spite of that straightforward purpose, this section of Deuteronomy may be the toughest to work through as we meditate on this book in our personal devotions. Why? Well, the general principle in 12:1 is followed by command after command that don't really seem to apply to us. Like, how to destroy idols (Chs. 12-13), clean and unclean food (Ch. 14), tithes, animal property, and national feasts (Chs. 14:22-16:17). How are we to make sense of *all* these laws?

For one, it's helpful to see that there's a basic structure in place. If you look at the third page of your handout, you'll see a guide to this underlying format: broadly speaking, the laws follow the order of the Ten Commandments.

Now, knowing that structure may be useful, but it doesn't tell us everything we need to know about how to apply these laws today. To understand that, we need to take a step back and review the chapter of *redemptive history* that Deuteronomy is in.

As we've discussed already, this period in the Bible sees God fulfilling his promises to Abraham by establishing Israel as his special people. In order to set the stage for Christ, the promised seed of Eve, God is graciously setting Israel apart. They are the holy nation from whom the Messiah would descend. And the fact that Israel is God's *covenant* nation means that they are obligated to obey his law. When you read these laws, remember the context: they were given to Israel at a specific point in history.

Now, today, Christ has come. *We're* in a different stage of redemption history. That doesn't mean that this law is irrelevant, though. As we discussed a couple of weeks ago, the law still reveals God's flawless character, it still exposes our need for a Savior, and it still instructs Christians about how to live.³ Jesus said in Matthew 5:17 that he didn't come to abolish the law. Instead,

³This roughly translates to Calvin's three “uses” of the law: First, it restrains evil in society (the “civil” use); second, it exposes our need for a Savior (the “pedagogical” use, which is what Paul was referring to in Galatians

he came to fulfill it. Now, in one sense he fulfilled it by obeying it perfectly. So Deut. 27:26 says, “Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.” Because Jesus was the only one who “did” them, he is the only one not under a curse. So he was able to die in our place, bearing *our* curse, so that we might be set free from the curse of the law. (Cf. Rom. 6:14).

But that’s not all that Jesus meant when he said he “fulfilled” the law. In John 5:39 Jesus claims that the Old Testament “bear[s] witness about *me*.” It’s his portrait, so to speak. And that’s exactly what we see as we read through how the New Testament authors use the Old Testament. They see the Old Testament as pointing to Christ.

OK. Good background on the law. But we still don’t know how to apply it, do we? Let’s make this practical. In order to understand how to apply a section of the Old Testament law, we need to understand exactly how it points to Christ. How it is fulfilled in Christ. To do this, a helpful starting point is to divide the law into three different categories.

- The *moral* laws are largely permanent and apply directly to us, because they aren’t limited to the national, ethnic context of Israel. A prime example would be the Greatest Commandment (“love the Lord your God”...).
- On the other hand, the *civil* laws applied to the political nation of Israel’s governance and justice,
- and the *ceremonial* laws dealt with Israel’s temple sacrifices, religious offerings, and national feasts. These were pointing to Christ in the sense that a shadow points to the real thing. So once Christ came, their purpose was complete. And so they are no longer binding on Christians.

So, given that the law is fulfilled in Christ and that it divides broadly into those 3 categories, let me suggest three ways we can practically apply the law today:

- First, we should follow the New Testament’s instruction regarding these laws. For example, laws about clean and unclean food like we see in Deut. 14? In the NT, Mark 7 and Acts 10 teach that Christians do not need to follow those rules - they were part of the ceremonial law. But, in contrast, moral laws that are repeated or even amplified in the NT, like “do not murder,” *are* valid for Christians today.
- Second, we should understand what these laws teach us about God’s character. Deut. 22:11 forbids the Israelites from mixing wool and linen in the same article of clothing, to remind them about God’s holiness and the nation’s distinctness from the world. We don’t

3:24); and third, it teaches Christians how to live (the “didactic” use).

have to obey this law, but it tells us something important about God.

- Third, we should appreciate Jesus' perfection because he upheld all these laws. All of them.

I hope you can see that even though some interpretive work is required, these laws are very instructive for our lives as Christians. We should be like the Psalmist who declared, "I gain understanding from your precepts (laws); therefore I hate every wrong path" (Ps. 119:104). But most importantly, these laws should point us to our need for a Savior! As Luther said, "the principal purpose of the Law in theology is to make men not better but worse; that is, it shows them their sin, so that by the recognition of their sin they may be humbled, frightened, and worn down, and so may long for grace and for the Blessed Offspring."

[Questions]

Moses' Third Speech: Covenant Renewal – Chs. 27-30

As we move ahead to Moses' final sermon, let's again put ourselves in the shoes of the Israelites. You can see the Promised Land waiting in the distance. You've just heard God's standards, and they are utterly high.

Now, in chapters 27-30, we learn just how high the stakes are. If Israel devotes their hearts to Yahweh, the covenant promises great blessings. Deut. 28:10-11: "And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you. And the Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give you." In fact, there are 14 inspiring verses in chapter 28 outlining the blessings for covenant faithfulness.

But, if Israel will not stay faithful to Yahweh, the covenant includes terrible curses... 70 devastating verses of them, in chapters 27-28. The greatest curse of all? Exile from the Promised Land. Listen to 28:36-37: "The Lord will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone. And you shall become a horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the Lord will lead you away."

If we're the people of Israel listening to Moses, our hearts should be quaking right now! The curses are horrific! And the blessings only come... if we're perfect??

It seems that failure is inevitable. Deuteronomy leaves us with no false impressions that the people

will be able to maintain the demands of this covenant. In fact, in chapters 29-30, Moses directly tells the people that they will fall short. The reason, in 29:4, is that “But to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.” The people can only keep the covenant if they are given new hearts - and only God can do that.

And it’s precisely at this point that Deuteronomy turns to hope. God’s law and its curses do stand against the people. But God himself, as this book comes to a close, makes some astounding promises of grace.

First, he promises restoration for all who repent of breaking his covenant. 30:2-3: “[When you] return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you.” For disobedient Israel, the curses don’t need to be the end of the story - if they only would repent and trust in God’s promises. What a message of hope for all of us who feel condemned by the weight of our sin!

Second, God himself promises to give a new heart to his people. Back in 10:16, the Lord commanded the people to “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.” What he was after wasn’t mere externalities, seen in circumcision of the flesh. But inward transformation: circumcision of the heart. So what refreshing news that in 30:6, Moses declares that even after the people go into exile for their disobedience, “*And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*” What God commanded, and yet the people were unable to do on their own, God does. He will transform their hearts.

So is the book of Deuteronomy a covenant of works or a covenant of grace? I guess it’s both, isn’t it? The Mosaic covenant is there to be sure. And yet behind it is the covenant of grace God made with Abraham, that depended in no way on obedience. *God* will restore them. *God* will circumcise their hearts. So which is it, works or grace? The next few books in the Old Testament - and the entire rest of the Old Testament for that matter - will wrestle with that. And we will finally see in Jesus Christ that it is both: a covenant of works that he kept perfectly on our behalf so that we might receive *by grace* the blessings of the covenant of works.

So, it’s not that the law was God’s plan A and the gospel was plan B. This law is part of God’s perfect plan to set apart his people and to expose their need. It paves the way for the divine intervention that would enable true obedience and a new intimacy with God through the redemption

that would come in Christ.⁴

For us, as we read this Third Speech of Moses, we should pay attention to God's concern for the heart. Even as Christians, our hearts can be tempted to turn away to the "other gods" (29:18) of our age. How do we respond to this temptation? We learn here that to have a pure heart we must *depend on God*. God's Spirit is the one who changes us so radically that we do desire to "choose life," which is the final plea that Moses makes in Deut. 30:19. So, depend on him through prayer. Confess your need. And choose life.

Conclusion: Israel's Future – Chs. 31-34

As we turn to the conclusion of Deuteronomy, remember that this is a book of transitions. The people have affirmed God's covenant as they prepare to transition into the Promised Land. And now we see a great transition of leadership: in chapter 31 Moses transfers his authority to Joshua and prepares to die. But in another sense, this close to the book of Deuteronomy actually functions as a great transition to the rest of the Old Testament. The Torah, the books of Moses, have come to an end. So now we wait to see, in the next books of history and prophecy, exactly how these blessings and curses - and promises of grace - will play out. But before that happens, God offers a preview of their future so that the people will be without excuse when they fail to trust him.

He does that through the song of Moses in chapter 32. In fact, as you study the Old Testament, Deut. 32 is a great chapter to keep turning back to: in many ways, it's the sneak preview for the hundreds of years that are to come. In it, Moses looks ahead to future Israel and says, "You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth." (32:18). But Israel's unfaithfulness will not be the last word. After the exile, God will "avenge the blood of his servants" and make atonement for his land and people. (32:43).

A promise of atonement! The tone here, as Moses blesses the tribes in chapter 33 and even as he breathes his last in chapter 34, is one of hopeful expectation and trust in God's grace. God will make all wrongs right. God will atone for his people. This covenant will not be the last. A new covenant is coming. And that is the hope that propels the rest of the Old Testament forward.

And as we close, there's one more thing in the final verses of Deuteronomy that should strengthen our hope in this covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. First, turn back quickly to Deut 18:18. In this verse, God promises that in the future, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you

⁴Paraphrased from J. G. Millar, "Deuteronomy," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 164.

from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” A prophet who speaks only God’s words! A prophet even greater than Moses! And, praise God, we know that prophet! He is Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh (Jn. 1:14), who spoke all that the Father gave him to say (Jn. 8:28) and confirmed his message through miracles (Jn. 14:11). Just as the great prophet Moses was the mediator of the covenant in Deuteronomy, the greater prophet Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant by his blood. He bore our curse. And we receive the eternal blessing that only he deserved.

[Questions]

Historical Books

Now we are going to move into the narratives of Joshua and Judges. The books of Moses, the first five books, have been completed. And so we now journey out of the “Torah”, or the “Pentateuch”, and into the “the Historical Books.”

Before we look at the detail of Joshua and Judges, let’s start by looking at some context. The book of Joshua was probably written by Joshua himself within the first 15 years of the 14th century BC. At the start of the book, as you might remember, the nation of Israel is outside the land of Canaan, eastward over the Jordan River. But by the end of the book they will have taken and occupied the land (as you can see from the map). We can summarize Joshua by saying: Joshua is all about conquest. The Israelites enter the land, take the land, possess the land, and come to rest.

The book of Judges picks up right where Joshua leaves off. Israel has taken the land, but now the question is whether or not they’ll be able to keep it. As the second map shows, God’s people come under pressure from a number of surrounding nations. The events told in Judges take place over a period of roughly 350 years, from the time Joshua died until the time of Israel’s first king. We don’t know who wrote Judges, but we do believe it was written shortly after the last events were recorded, somewhere in the mid to late 11th century BC.

Let’s start by previewing some major themes in these two books.

- Now, as you might expect **land** is a big idea in both books: Joshua is all about taking it, and Judges is all about keeping it.
- Very closely related to that is the idea of **rest**. Rest is the goal for God’s people. Joshua ends positively in this manner with God’s enemies at bay and God’s people enjoying fellowship

with him. Judges, however, is almost the reverse; God's people start with rest and quickly lose it.

- The two books are also about **trust**. In Joshua, God's people must trust in Joshua, their saving leader, if they are to take the land and enjoy rest in it. Similarly in Judges, it will become clear that God's people need to trust a savior if they're to keep what God's given them.

Consequently our two themes sentences are as follows:

For Joshua we have...

TRUSTING a FAITHFUL savior to LEAD God's people to land and rest

While in Judges we have...

REQUIRING a PERFECT savior to MAINTAIN this land and rest

Well, with these themes in mind let's start into Joshua with an overview of the whole book. The book of Joshua divides neatly into four chronological sections, or four periods of trust for the Israelites. As we quickly run through these sections, you can flip through your Bible to watch the chapter headings and follow along.

In chapters 1-5 we discover that the Israelites must trust God as they **ENTER the Promised Land**. The Israelites start off (chapter 1) confidently trusting God in the plains of Moab, but they must depend on God as they spy out the land (chapter 2), and then finally as they cross the Jordan (in Exodus-like fashion in chapters 3 and 4).

Next, in chapters 6-13 we discover that this trust must then extend to war as they begin to **TAKE the Promised Land**. In chapter 6, the walls of Jericho famously fall at a trumpet blast. After that, the Israelites march South through the land, conquering nation after nation. Then in chapter 11, the people move North, and defeat all Northern Canaanite tribes. Chapter 12 ends this section by reviewing the land taken.

Then, with the land taken it's time to **DIVIDE the Promised Land** in chapters 13 to 21. The land to be shared by the 12 tribes is reviewed in chapters 13 and 14. And then dividing it up goes all the way from chapter 15 to chapter 21.

Finally, as the book of Joshua comes to its conclusion in chapters 22-24 we see the need for Israel to remain faithful as they **ACCOMPLISH promised rest**. And so in these last three chapters God's people reflect on how they are to enjoy this rest. That is, rest from war, from wanderings, and from their enemies.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

Joshua

OK well with that overview in mind, let's return to our theme sentence for Joshua – “**trusting a faithful savior to lead God's people to land and rest.**” There are four ideas, which flow out of that key sentence that I want us to focus in on this morning.

The first, as you'll see from the handout, is **Trusting as God's people.** Turn with me to chapter 1 and verse 5...

“Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.”

So here they are – God's people on the edge of the Promised Land and the call is to be strong and courageous. Is that *self*-confidence? No: it's confidence that the same God who was with Moses will be with his promised people again.

This idea of trusting in the fact that they are *God's* people is further emphasized when they are circumcised in chapter 5, marking them out from the other nations. And it's reiterated in chapter 8 when the people renew their covenant with God.

Now, it's not that the people earned this right. In fact, both of these events happen before a single battle is fought. They are reminded of their status as God's people, *and that gives them confidence* that they can take the land.

And, of course, we're in the same position, aren't we? As Christians, we are God's people. Not because we earned it but because of his grace alone. And *because* we are God's people. We can have every confidence that we will enter the land he's promised to us: heaven.

The second theme I want to draw out in this section is the fact while the Israelites are to trust in God, they do that by **Trusting in God's faithful savior.**

Did you notice in that first verse we looked at how closely the nation's success is tied up with Joshua's faithfulness and leadership? The people are God's but it is Joshua who will lead them into the land. He must mediate on God's Word day and night and be careful do everything in it (verse 8). And because of this that God's people must trust him. And wonderfully, they do! Look down with me to verses 16-17. Still in chapter 1...

“And they answered Joshua, ‘All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you, as he was with Moses!’”

And so, because Joshua and the Israelites do trust and obey, Joshua is able to lead them into the land. Indeed, in contrast to Moses and all the disobedience that went on in the desert, this new generation of God’s people obey Joshua. They trust him as a savior who will obey the Lord.

Again, the New Testament parallels for us shouldn’t be that difficult to make. Joshua (just like Moses) prefigures the coming of God’s ultimately faithful savior. Jesus Christ perfectly obeys God’s law. So he’s the one who brings us into the New Heavens and New Earth, if we obey him.

The main theme in the book of Joshua, and the third theme, which flows out of our theme sentence, is the need to **trust God for land**. This is huge, as you might imagine. Now just to clarify, the significance of the land is a major concept to grasp. Because Canaan is more than just a physical piece of property. It is a picture of what the Garden of Eden was, and what the New Heavens and the New Earth are going to be.

To see this land parallelism fleshed out, turn with me to one fascinating text in chapter 5:13-15. As you turn there let me quickly set the context for you. God’s people have just crossed the Jordan, and God’s people are about to enter God’s place first time.

However, this is no easy task - you’ll remember how Eden ended up in Genesis 3 - with an angel with a flashing sword barring the entrance forever. And so what does Joshua see as he nears God’s promised place? Verse 13:

13 When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” 14 And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?” 15 And the commander of the Lord’s army said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

So the land of Canaan is holy ground - it reminds us that God is there - and because of sin there is no right for sinful people to be in it. That’s why an angel’s sword met them at Canaan. But now, just as promised in Exodus 23, there is an angel of the Lord. But this time the angel doesn’t bar the way to God’s place. Instead, he actively helps God’s people to take the land.

Now, the people trust God for the land. God sends his angel ahead of them. And... well, no surprise: they win! So Joshua 21:43-45 gives us the peak of redemption history so far:

43 Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. 44 And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. 45 Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

Not a single word has failed. The people are in possession of God's place, safely with him. Just like we will be able to say when we stand before him in heaven.

But we can't help but be disturbed at the bloody and brutal chapters in between the angel's arrival in chapter 5 and this wonderfully fulfilled promise in chapter 21. Indeed that is really much what so much of Joshua is about.

And so we read 6:21 of Jericho - "Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword."

And of the Northern cities of Canaan in 11:20 - "For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the Lord commanded Moses."

What are we to make of such violence? And of the God who seems behind it? What's going on here?

Now, we can't spend too much time here, but let me make a few comments that I hope will help.

First, it's important to say that God is not condoning holy war here or telling Christians that they should engage in Middle Eastern crusades. Rather, Joshua's military campaign is to be understood as a unique event that was commanded by God at one time in redemptive-history. At the time of Joshua the physical land then was deemed holy. It was therefore for God's holy people - a people who were to be righteous - who were to be just - who were to be loving and kind. It wasn't for the Canaanites, who according to Deuteronomy 9 and Genesis 15, were a wicked people, with whom God had been extremely patient.

Beyond that, as we talked about earlier, this physical land loses its significance once Jesus arrives. God's people today are not an ethnic, national people. They are from all corners of the earth with one citizenship: a heavenly one.

So how should we think about these horrific events? Well, Deuteronomy 9:4 tells us that the Canaanites were being judged for their wickedness. For their idolatry, and cruelty, and child sacrifice, among other things. Which should be quite sobering for us. Because it means that this one-time military campaign of complete destruction in Joshua is simply foreshadowing something else. The one-time certain and terrible judgment that all will face when Jesus returns.

We shouldn't somehow think that we're any better than the Canaanites were. And we ought to remember that the conquest of Canaan pales in comparison to that great and awful day of reckoning coming for everyone. So we should be all the more thankful for salvation in Jesus - salvation from certain judgment.

Well as we close Joshua, I want us to look at one more aspect of it - that final word in your sentence overview - rest. **Trusting God for rest.**

Turn back again to Joshua 21:43-44 and let me read it again:

43 Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. 44 And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands.

Notice here in these climatic verses how much is made of this idea of "rest." In verse 43 it says that God gave them the land. And in verse 44 it says He gave them rest. The two, the land and rest, are nearly synonymous.

But, of course, that rest was tenuous, wasn't it? It was guaranteed only so long as the people kept their end of the Covenant - which they knew they would not do. So Hebrews 4 picks up this idea of the Promised Land as rest and explains that this tenuous rest pointed ahead to a perfect rest of unshakable fellowship with God. Verse 8:

"For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his."

As you read through Joshua, then, take all that longing for rest and apply it to your own life. Long with these people for rest from your own works, as you trust the perfect work of Jesus Christ in your place. As Jesus said in Matthew 11:28,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest".

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

Judges

So that's Joshua. On to Judges. How tenuous is this rest? Quite tenuous indeed, we'll see. Let's do a brief overview of the entire book and then we'll get into some specific themes.

In chapter 1 the picture starts off rather bleak – five words in and Joshua has already died. Not only that, but in the rest of the chapter we discover that Israel has failed in their mission to wipe out certain tribes.

The upshot of this is that Israel descends into a repeated cycle of rebellion, followed by suffering, followed by a crying out to God, followed by God raising up a savior - a judge who rescues them from their enemies. Followed by rebellion

This cycle repeats 9 times through 14 chapters. But it's important to note that this cycle isn't the same each time. It's a downward spiral. In fact the victory of each judge is increasingly elusive as the book continues. Othniel, in chapter 3, has complete victory... but Ehud, who follows him, has victory only through deception. In chapter 4, Deborah has victory, but some of the tribes are cursed. Gideon has victory, in chapters 6-8, but eventually we have civil war. Jephthah, in chapters 10-12, has victory but it is marred by the tragedy of his daughter, and again things eventually devolve into civil war. And even though he does great damage, Samson, the last and most famous judge of all, never actually defeats the Philistines, in chapters 13-16.

So by the time we reach chapter 17, Israel is at the depth of their sin. Chapters 17-18 reveal their religious corruption while chapters 19-21 reveal their moral and social corruption. As the book concludes the author sadly reflects on the Israelites' plight and their desperate need for a perfect savior and true rest in the land.

OK. Let's return to our theme sentence for Judges – “**requiring a perfect savior to maintain this land and rest.**” We'll flesh out three key ideas and application points from it.

First of all, it is important to note that throughout the book of Judges the Israelites desperately **require separation as God's people**. Well what do I mean by this? Look down with me to where the root of the problems in Judges begin. Chapter 1:27-29...

27 Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages, for the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. 28 When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not drive them out completely.

And so it goes on...

You see the core of the problem for the Israelites is that they forgot that they were to live separately from the nations. They were to be holy – to be set apart from the world. They've been told to remove God's enemies from the land and to live holy lives. But as chapter 2v10 sadly points out, this new generation "did not know the Lord or the work he had done for Israel." They lived with the Canaanites and then they lived like the Canaanites. That's one of the main points of the book. From the very first account, in chapter 1 verses 1-7, of how they treat a captive king just like the Canaanites would, instead of how God had told them to. To the revolting story of rape, mutilation, and murder at the end of the book. When an Israelite passed by a Canaanite town to take refuge in a Hebrew town - and acted, and was treated, far worse than the Canaanites would ever have done.

This major problem, often referred to in the commentaries, as 'Canaanization' should act as a stark warning us as God's people in the world today. No matter how secure we think we are as Christians, we must remember that apostasy can be right around the corner. The Israelites were in the midst of enjoying 'Joshua' rest when everything went downhill. And it went downhill so fast.

Beyond that, we should take careful note of what caused their falling away. God's people forgot who they were - unlike the previous generation, who always remembered through the reading of God's word, Passovers and circumcision. They acted as the nations around them. They mixed with them, married them, and were drawn quickly into sin. As Christians we rightly live in the world, but we must be careful how we live in it, for we are to be nothing like it.

The second point is that **God's punishment that leads to repentance**, which is echoed through the nine cycles of Judges. To help us see this idea a little better let's track through one cycle, the cycle of the first judge, Othniel, in chapter 3.

The cycle begins, chapter 3v7, with Israel forgetting God and serving other gods. Consequently, God is rightly angry, verse 8, and this leads to God's punishment. In verse 8, you can see that this specific punishment is slavery. But in verse 9, the Israelites cry out to God. So God provides a savior, verse 9, who goes to war, verse 10, and, verse 11, restores peace. But in verse 12, the cycle starts over again.

As I said, you can look for that pattern of events in all the following stories about the Judges. The point is always to emphasize Israel's constant stubbornness and sin, and Yahweh's great justice and then great mercy. Sadly, God's people continually require God's judgment. Indeed, they are continually being oppressed by foreign enemies, sent by God to bring them to repentance.

Now, we need to be very careful how we apply this, this side of the New Testament. But in one sense I think we often see God's Spirit acting in this way. Sometimes it's only by seeing the consequences of life *without* God - in the utter decay of our world around us - that we realize our need *for* God. Which leads us to cry out in repentance.

However, following this idea, we must see that the biggest theme in the whole book of Judges is the **requirement of a perfect Savior who leads to true rest.**

You see, every cycle in Judges reminds us that God's people need a perfect Savior. Previously God's people had Joshua, but Joshua dies. After him come these judges, who are *types* of Christ. But they are neither lasting nor faithful. Yes, they save them briefly, but these judges are not the best ethical role models, nor do they ever bring a lasting rule. What is needed is a monarchy - a line of perfect savior kings, who lead God's people to obey His word perfectly.

What's interesting is that in Judges, right in the center of the book, right in the center of this dark book, God's people get a king. No it's not Saul or David, but Abimelech. Look with me to Judges 9v6: "all the leaders of Shechem came together, and all Beth-millo, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar at Shechem."

But this is no faithful king. He does whatever he thinks is right: he has many wives, he ruthlessly kills his own brothers, and leads God's people in total unfaithfulness.

So by the time we reach the end of the book it is no surprise to read the final summarizing line of Judges 21v25: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

It's as though the author is saying that, "This sort of stuff that we've seen in Judges, all the sin of the people and the invasions of the foreign armies and the loss of rest. That wouldn't happen if we had a king who was faithful to God's covenant!"

This is the momentum that pushes the narrative forward into the rest of the Old Testament. The people need more than the prophet Moses. They need more than the priest Aaron. They need more than the savior Joshua, and definitely more than these savior judges. They need a king! But what kind of king? As we get into 1 and 2 Samuel, we'll see it's definitely not a king like Saul. Or even David or his son Solomon. All these figures are getting closer to that perfect king, but they all fall short.

Who do all these leaders point us to? As you can guess, Jesus. Only He can perfectly deliver His people from all their pain. And as we saw earlier, in Matthew 11, only He brings a lasting "rest." Only Christ solves problems that these judges could only temporarily address. For only Christ

ever obeyed all the laws of God. And only Christ is the perfect King over His people. But, I get ahead of myself. We'll talk more about Christ as our great king next week. For now, we leave off with the book of Judges calling and praying and hoping for a king.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

[PRAY]

This material is adapted from a course with the same name developed by Capitol Hill Baptist Church. It has been modified for our purposes and has been condensed to fit our time schedule. The original version is available on their website at <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/core-seminars/series/old-testament-overview/>