

TUTORIAL
1.33

God took the Israelites into Canaan. He chose their leaders & king

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: ***Numbers 27:18-23, Deuteronomy 34:1-8, Judges 2:7-13,16-19, 1 Samuel 8:1-7, 13:13,14, 2 Samuel 7:1-17, 2 Chronicles 2:5,6.***

Last time

God brought the entire Israelite community right to the border of Canaan, the land He'd promised to them. But when they chose to fearfully listen to the negative reports of their spies rather than trust God to help them occupy the land, He declared that they would never enter - it would be the next generation who would go in. Later, when the community was plagued by lethal snakes, God graciously provided a solution (and a powerful metaphor for sin and salvation) - a brass serpent was put on a pole so that when someone was bitten, they could look at it and be cured.

Joshua is appointed as Moses' successor

As God had declared, the adult generation who'd come out of Egypt never entered into the promised national homeland of Canaan. Because of their unbelief back in the border area of Kadesh Barnea, they all eventually died during the years the 12 tribes were moving from place to place in the inhospitable wilderness. Their unbelief and its dire consequences provides us with an instructive analogy of the result of all unbelief.

The only exceptions were Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who'd insisted that, although the obstacles were great, they should trust God and move in to occupy the promised territories. Only they, from the original generation, would have the privilege of entering the land. In fact, God now tells Moses to appoint Joshua as his successor to lead the Israelites. Joshua had proved his faithfulness over many years as Moses' assistant, and had demonstrated his faith in God. (Numbers 27:18-23)

Not long after, God has Moses go to the top of a mountain overlooking Canaan, reminding him that this is the land He'd long ago promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Moses dies there on the mountain with no witnesses but God Himself.

They possess the land but problems persist

Time and space force us to condense a great many events of God's Story at this point as He assists the Israelite nation to move in and occupy Canaan. Joshua leads them in the ensuing battles as they displace many of the communities previously occupying the territories God has promised them. At times they act in obedience and faith and see God's power displayed through their victories. But their frequent failures to believe and follow His instructions implicitly mean that the occupation and eradication of their enemies takes much longer and is less complete than He desires. As a result, for generations, the 12 tribes deal with hostile enemies living on their doorstep, seeking to reconquer their lands and expel the Israelites.

But the more insidious danger is spiritual, as God's people are repeatedly seduced by the cultish practices and idol worship of these communities living on their doorstep, or even among them. The results of this will echo down through history. The Narrative records (Judges 2:7-13) how after the death of Joshua and his generation, "who had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel", those who come next abandon God in favour of false gods.

We're reminded of the tireless efforts of Satan to deceive and turn God's image-bearers away from the light of truth to the darkness of deception. Behind everything – apart from God - that humans ultimately look to for their answers, rely on for their needs, or elevate as primary in their lives, we find evidence of Satan's involvement. He's there in the shadows, ably assisting, encouraging evil desires and willing people on to their destruction. The unfaithfulness of the Israelites, the text says, makes the Lord "burn with anger" against the nation and He allows enemy raiding parties to inflict heavy defeats and carry off their possessions.

The time of the "judges" or "rescuers"

A cycle emerges which repeats itself many times over the next few hundred years. Periodically, the Israelite communities turn away from God and indulge in the cultic practices of neighbouring peoples. God allows their enemies to wreak havoc and even conquer large sections of their territory. In their desperation they finally turn back to the Lord and repent – agreeing with His perspective and acknowledging their treacherous sin. At this point God brings to prominence an individual who unites the tribes in effective military action against the oppressive, occupying enemy forces. (Judges 2:16-19)

The traditional English translation "judges" does not do justice to the role of these various individuals who surface to lead the fledgling nation in periods of military conflict and then in the ensuing peace. Another term, occasionally used, "Deliverer" or "Rescuer", carries an echo of the one, great, promised Deliverer who would come through this nation. Despite the Israelites' repeated

unfaithfulness – God often characterises it as spiritual *adultery* – He remains faithful, graciously ready to rescue them when they turn back in humble repentance to Him. In doing this He also demonstrates His commitment to the promise, first made long ago in the dark day of the Fall, to send one who will destroy the strangle-hold of Satan, sin and death.

At the nation's insistence, a human monarchy is instituted

The last of the judges, Samuel, was God's mouthpiece to Israel for many years. However, with Samuel growing older and with no obvious successor, the nation demands that a monarchy be established. (1 Samuel 8:1-7) This was, in effect, a rejection of God's divine rule over them as a people, the role He'd willingly and graciously assumed since Egypt. Now, despite God's warnings through Samuel of the consequences, they insist on a tangible human kingship like the ethnic groups around them.

The first king, Saul, starts out well but gradually moves away from reliance on God and becomes increasingly belligerent towards the Lord's instructions that come through Samuel. No royal dynasty will be established through Saul. In response to his defiance, God appoints a successor, David. (1 Samuel 13:13,14) In time, after many fascinating and instructive events recorded in the Narrative, and Saul's eventual death, David is crowned. He goes on to become Israel's greatest and most famous king. David, of course, like all human beings, was part of Adam's lost race and a sinner by choice. But he continually acknowledged his failings and wrongdoings; his approach to God was on God's terms. In the Narrative, in all of history, David stands out as a human being who truly desired a close relationship with the Lord. He was not only appointed by God as king of His people, but also one of His storytellers...a prophet, specially enabled by God to speak His Word.

As we know, David wrote many of the Psalms - heartfelt, often painfully real, cries to God for mercy, and also songs of joy and praise for who He is. They form a unique part of the Narrative: a remarkable, very personal record of God's relationship with a human being He loves dearly.

A permanent dwelling for God – a temple – is built

As king, David consolidates Israel's borders and leads the nation into a time of peace and prosperity. With the nation's nomadic years long in the past, and conscious of the splendour of his own palace, David wants to build a permanent and more fitting dwelling place for God – a temple. God is pleased, but through His prophet, Nathan, says it will be David's son who will undertake the building of the temple. (2 Samuel 7:1-17) God also gives an undertaking that

David's lineage will hold the throne forever. As the Narrative unfolds, this will prove to be a promise about the coming Deliverer who will be a direct descendant of David. The second king of Israel has become the recipient and guardian of the messianic promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

King David sets about accumulating the gold, silver, special timber and other materials for the building of God's permanent dwelling place in the community. It is his son, Solomon - the third king of Israel – however, who undertakes the huge task of building the Temple. (2 Chronicles 2:5,6) At its completion, the Temple is dedicated to God with the offering of many animal sacrifices. As God enters the Temple, intense, bright light is seen by the people as visual evidence of His glorious presence. In grace, He has come to the Most Holy Place in the Temple - as He had in the Tabernacle - to have a direct, tangible presence with His people.

As always, it is His desire to be at the center of the individual and communal lives of human beings who approach Him humbly, in repentance and faith. He never wavers in His commitment to be the one Storyteller for His people and to graciously write their stories into His true Narrative.

The nation of Israel would never again know a time of peace and prosperity as it did under David and Solomon. In time it would split over rival succession claims into separate northern and southern kingdoms. Of their respective kings - some 20 for each - all but a few would fall to the seduction of the cultish practices and idolatry of the surrounding nations. Remarkably though, although repeatedly grieved and angered by the nation's unfaithfulness, God never gives up on them. He pleads, rebukes and punishes, but He at every point in their often tragic history as a people, He gladly receives them back when they turn to Him in humble repentance and faith.



DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. What would be your response to someone who thought it unreasonable of God not to allow that generation of Israelites into the promised land of Canaan? What does this tell us about God's view of unbelief? Describe any difference you see between the unbelief God apparently views so harshly, and doubts that might be considered "normal".

2. The lesson makes the point that God is the one who determines when someone will die – that life, and death, are in His hands. How does this reality contrast with the generally accepted view in our society? Would you agree that for most people science and medicine have filled the slot that is rightfully God's? What are some of the ethical dilemmas this creates for a society?
3. In the short history of the Israelite people covered so far we've already seen them turn to idolatry on more than one occasion. Trace out what you believe are the reasons for people's readiness to turn away from the true, living God to worshipping other tangible things, including "gods" of their own creation. What are some of the ways you can identify that this human disposition plays out in today's society?



ACTIVITIES

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1. List the Judges of Israel and in just a few summary sentences, in your own words describe: (a) their background, (b) Israel's situation that brought them to prominence, (c) the part they played (e.g. as military leaders etc.).
2. Research the chronology of King David's life.