

Lesson 17: Building Spiritual Life in the Israelites

Previously...

Yahweh interrupted history to create a counterculture to the rebellious, godless, pagan culture that the world chose for itself. He would do this by building and equipping the nation of Israel to preserve and carry His history and truth to all the world.

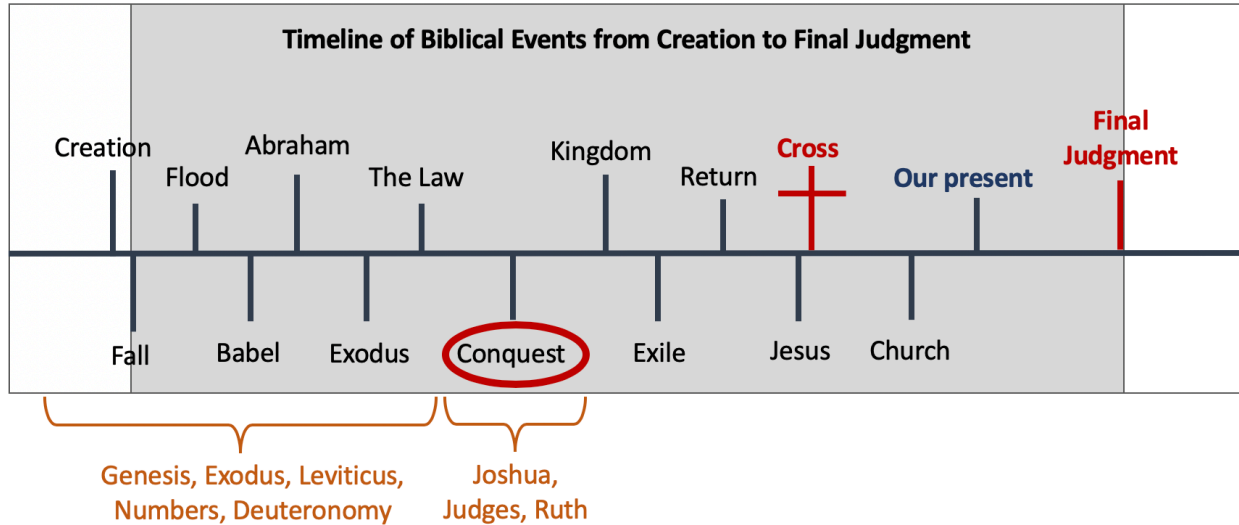
When God gave Israel His Law at Sinai, He said they were to obey Him out of thankfulness for saving them from slavery. What was important to God was their heart attitude towards Him. He wanted behaviours that came from a pure and sincere heart. He wasn't interested in the meaningless actions from fake obedience.

Pagan Kingdom of Man Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	Kingdom of God Based on GRACE God would save man
 <p>Babel</p>  <p>Egypt</p>  <p>Canaan</p>	Election
	 <p>God chose Abraham</p>
	 <p>God saved Israel</p>
	 <p>God built Israel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Law ▪ National anthem ▪ Temple worship ▪ Feasts & festivals
 <p>God taught Israel about spiritual life: Period of the Conquest</p>	

During the time of the desert wandering and the period of the conquest, God focused on teaching Israel how to trust in Him and how to have a spiritual life. How did God do this? Most people do not learn just by being told what is right and wrong. Most people learn through experience when they are faced with real-life choices. God taught His son, Israel, lessons on spiritual life through the many different situations that Israel encountered.

In certain events, the Israelites obeyed Yahweh and were blessed and rewarded with success in their endeavours. In other events, they disobeyed God's commands and ended up with hard lessons to learn.

The books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth and parts of Deuteronomy contain many of these accounts of God's interaction with His people where He taught them lessons about spiritual life. These lessons are so rich in truth that many writers of Bible devotions love to write on these parts of Scripture.

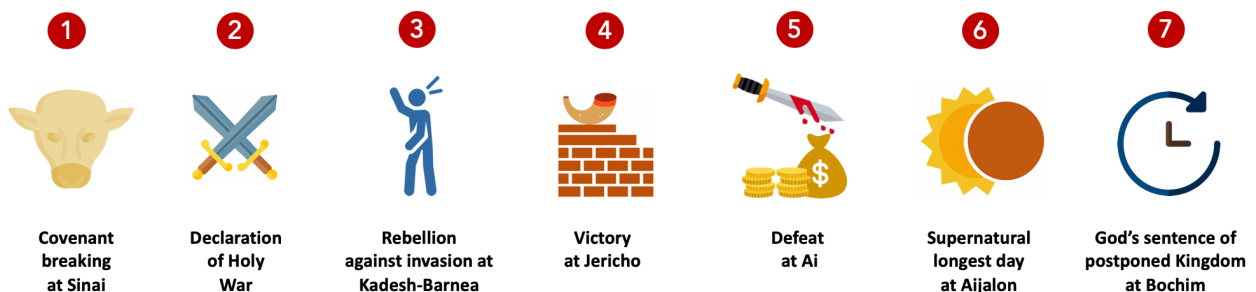


In this lesson, we will:

- i. cover seven of these events
- ii. observe what God was teaching the Israelites and also
- iii. glean lessons that we can apply to our spiritual lives.

While this lesson goes through each of these events quickly, it would be beneficial for us to take some time afterwards to meditate on the truths that God reveals through each of them.

The Spiritual Lessons



These seven events occurred over a span of 40 years. In earlier lessons, we had covered the first three events in part. We will summarise them here before proceeding with the other four.

The following map shows the locations where each of the events occurred. The shaded area represents the land that God told the Israelites to occupy.



1. Covenant breaking at Sinai with the calf idol (Exodus 32)

While Moses was receiving the Law from God on Mount Sinai, the Israelites grew impatient and manipulated Aaron to build an idol for them to worship.

They showed exactly what was in their hearts. They wanted to:

- Define what god is (a calf) and
- Claim the Exodus was the work of this calf god instead of Yahweh, the Creator-God of the universe (Exodus 32:1, 4).

God was rightly furious with them. After He punished them, this is what He said through Moses.

Deuteronomy 10:12, 16

¹² “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? He requires only that you fear the LORD your God, and live in a way that pleases him, and love him and serve him with all your heart and soul.

¹⁶ Therefore, change your hearts and stop being stubborn.

The word “change” is also translated as “circumcise” your heart. Years earlier, God told Abraham to physically circumcise all his male descendants as a sign of the covenant God made with him (Genesis 17:10). This physically set them apart to God.



God now talked about “circumcision” or “change” of the heart. This was an inward change. God said for a person to be obedient to Him, the heart (or soul) must be spiritually changed, just as the outer organ is changed in circumcision.



Only an inward heart change is acceptable to Yahweh. This is because God wants Israel’s Father-son relationship with Him to be based on the attitude of their hearts. He wanted them to be grateful and thankful to Him. God didn’t want mere outward actions.

What God wants is a **heart of repentance**.

- He wants the Israelites to **turn away from relying on themselves**. They are to reject the pagan Kingdom of Man, that is, the idea that mankind is the ultimate authority and can save themselves.
- He wants the Israelites to **turn towards Him**. They should put their faith in Him and submit willingly to the truth that He is the ultimate authority.

<p>Pagan Kingdom of Man Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas</p>	<p>Kingdom of God Based on GRACE God would save man</p>
<p> Canaanites</p>	<p> REPENTANCE</p>

A circumcised heart is what makes a person a “believer” in Yahweh. People with uncircumcised hearts do not have faith in God and are not accepted by Him.

Uncircumcised heart



- Naturally rebellious towards God
- Needs change and correction

Circumcised heart



- God (Holy Spirit) works to change heart and life
- Willing and motivated to obey God



What God was teaching the Israelites at Sinai
God requires them to have circumcised hearts.



Our faith lesson

God also requires us to have a change of heart. He wants us to turn away from sin, an empty spiritual life and from making ourselves our own final authority. He wants us to turn to Him for:

- salvation
- meaning in life
- instruction
- a new way to live where He is our final authority in all matters.

Pagan Kingdom of Man	Kingdom of God
Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	Based on GRACE God would save man
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am my own person. I am not accountable to anyone. • Truth is whatever I make it. I make my own law. • I do what is right in my own eyes. • I make up my own meaning of life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am a creature who is accountable to my Creator. • My Creator is the source of all Truth. • My Creator defines what I do. • He gives my life meaning.



REPENTANCE

This turning away from ourselves and towards God is the circumcision of the heart that God requires.

Thankfully, God doesn't leave us to circumcise our own hearts. He knows when we rely on our own effort, it results in failure. Instead, God the Holy Spirit changes our hearts so we can love and obey God. Paul explains this when he writes to Jewish believers in Rome.



Romans 2:28–29

²⁸ For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. ²⁹ No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by the Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.

We will learn more about how the Holy Spirit circumcises hearts in a future lesson.

 **2. Declaration of Holy War**

When Israel was in the desert, God commanded them to declare holy war on Canaan’s inhabitants.

Deuteronomy 20:16–17

¹⁶ In those towns that the LORD your God is giving you as a special possession, destroy every living thing. ¹⁷ You must completely destroy the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, just as the LORD your God has commanded you.

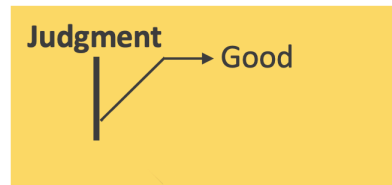
The conquest and settlement period gives us these pictures:

- The Jews—a picture of God’s grace in history.
- The Canaanites—a picture of evil people being removed permanently.



The Jews...

...are a picture of...

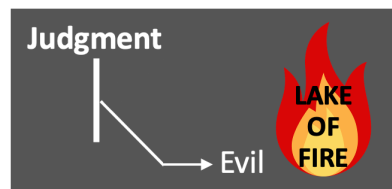


...God’s grace in history



The Canaanites...

...are a picture of...



...evil people being removed permanently



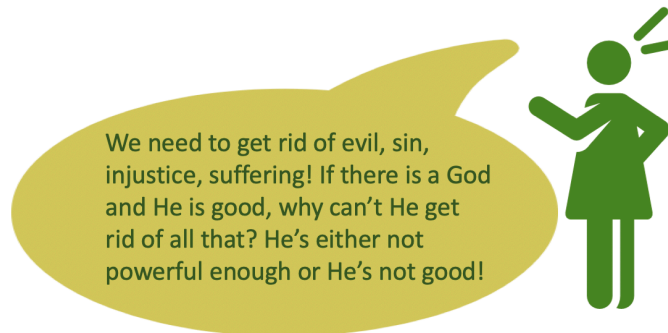
What God was teaching the Israelites while in the desert

The holy war is a warning preview of the final judgment that God will enact on all mankind.



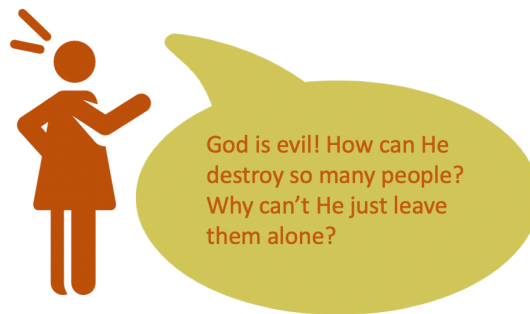
Our faith lesson

Whenever bad things happen to people, they often curse God. They wish they did not have to live with evil, sin and suffering.



Accusations against God during the time of grace

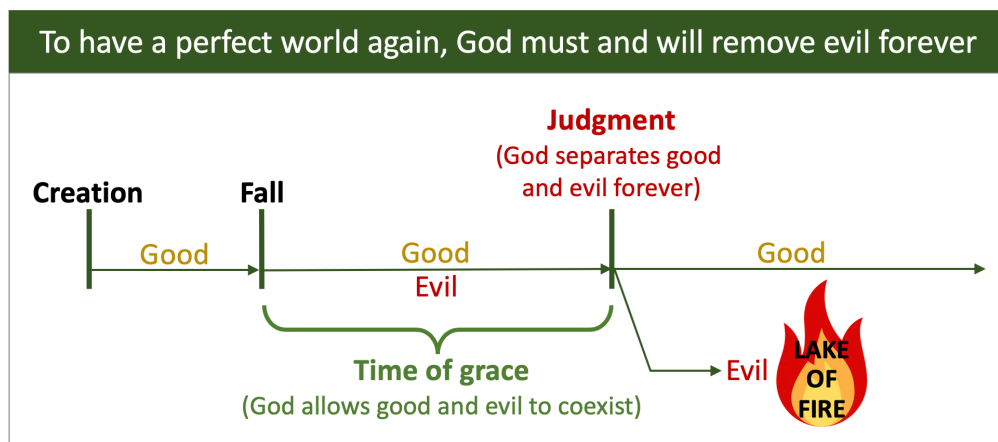
However, when God judges sin such as during the conquest and settlement period, these same people turn around and condemn God because He is judging evil.



Accusations against God when He judges sin

People cannot have it both ways!

If people object to evil and want it gone, there has to be judgment! This also means there must be an end to grace!



In the future, God will bring about the final judgment of evil. There will be no negotiations, no peaceful coexistence, no agreements between the god of this world (Satan) and Yahweh, the Creator-God. There will be no more extensions of grace.

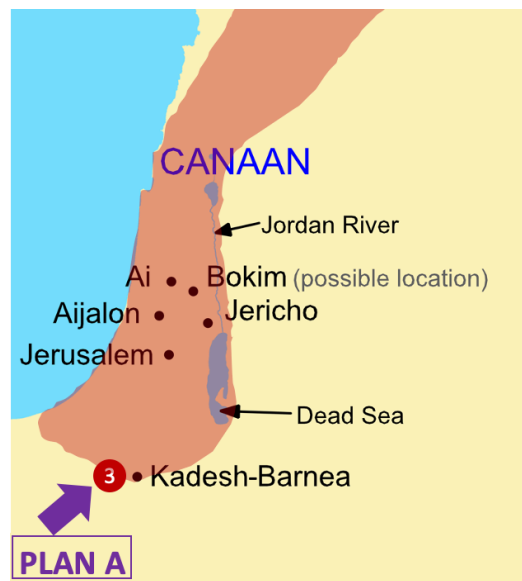
Instead, God will trigger a total holy war that will put an end to all evil forever. These two opposites cannot coexist. Either Satan and his followers will win and evil will rule forever or God will get rid of Satan and evil forever.

Through the conquest and settlement period, God shows what salvation looks like in a fallen world. In order to fulfil His promise of creating a perfect world with no evil in it, He must remove evil forever. The conquest is a small-scale version of Yahweh's ultimate elimination of evil from the earth. The war is His, not Israel's and not ours. We have full assurance that our all-good, all-loving and all-righteous God will indeed get rid of evil, sin and suffering permanently.



3. Rebellion against invasion at Kadesh-Barnea (Numbers 13–14)

God gave the Israelites Invasion Plan A: enter the Promised Land through the southern town of Kadesh-Barnea (Deuteronomy 1:19). He said He had already frightened the Canaanites and that He would destroy them completely.



Twelve spies were sent to scout the land but they brought back two different reports. Ten of them feared the Canaanites but Joshua and Caleb told the people to proceed with the invasion. The people listened to the fearful 10. They didn't trust Yahweh and rejected the invasion plan.



Because of their lack of faith and their disobedience, God declared He would punish them by making them wander in the desert for 40 years until all that generation, except for Joshua and Caleb, died.

When they heard this, some of them tried to correct their mistake and proceeded to invade. But this was also against God’s instructions. Yahweh already told them He wouldn’t battle for them because of their original rebellion. They didn’t care. Many Israelites died as a result.



What God was teaching the Israelites at Kadesh-Barnea

They need to trust God’s Word over their own feelings (their psychological state).



Our faith lesson

At Kadesh-Barnea, the irony was the Israelites were terrified of the Canaanites who were also terrified of them! The Israelites were mentally defeated even before the battle started.

Do we sometimes allow ourselves to be mentally defeated? Are our subjective feelings more important than what God has promised? Sometimes we think, speak and act like we’ve already been defeated. We see the persecution of other believers, we feel the hostility of family and friends who are against our beliefs and we feel defeated. We walk around discouraged, fearful and depressed. But the Bible tells us how the story will end!

Philippians 2:9–11

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Knowing the end should make a difference to the way we live. God tells us Jesus has already won the victory over sin and eternal death. There is no need for us to be mentally defeated.

<p>Pagan Kingdom of Man Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas</p>	<p>Kingdom of God Based on GRACE God would save man</p>
	<p>Why are some believers endlessly...</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> discouraged </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> fearful </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> feeling hopeless </div> </div>
 LAKE OF FIRE	 Jesus won the victory! Believers will be with God!

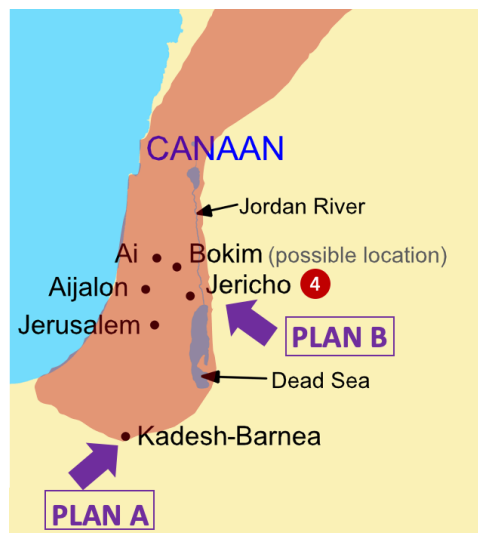
Instead of trusting our up-and-down feelings, we should trust God who has revealed the victorious ending of human history. Instead of living defeated, we need to ask God what today should look like for us. What does He want us to do today so we can be a reflection of Him and be a blessing and encouragement to everyone He puts in our path.



4. Victory at Jericho (Joshua 6)

The Israelites wandered in the desert for 38 years until everyone of the earlier adult generation died, except for Joshua and Caleb.

On the 40th year, God gave them Invasion Plan B: enter Canaan through Jericho.



Moses had died and Joshua was now in charge. He was to attack Jericho, a fortress-city that was the gateway to Canaan's eastern settlements. From Jericho (which was higher than the surrounding area), it would be easier to conquer the land and move towards Jerusalem.

The day before the attack, a man appeared before Joshua. Joshua wanted to know if this man was for or against the Israelites. The man answered that He was for neither.

Joshua 5:13–15

¹³ When Joshua was near the town of Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with sword in hand. Joshua went up to him and demanded, "Are you friend or foe?" ¹⁴ "Neither one," he replied. "I am the commander of the LORD's army." At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground in reverence. "I am at your command," Joshua said. "What do you want your servant to do?" ¹⁵ The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did as he was told.



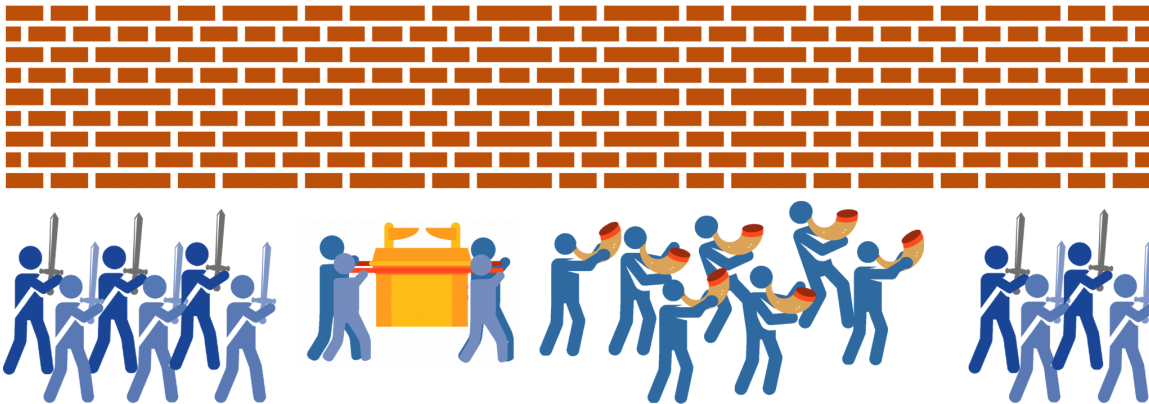
This man was God Himself! How do we know?

- **First, He didn't answer Joshua's question.** This was because He was in charge and didn't need to answer to anyone. He was not under any man's authority. Instead, He is the ultimate authority.
- **Second, He allowed Joshua to worship Him.** Only God is to be worshipped. This "commander of the LORD's army" was actually the pre-incarnate Jesus. In different places in the Old Testament, Jesus also appeared as the "angel of the LORD". We will learn more about this in a later lesson.

After this introduction, God gave Joshua an incredibly strange battle plan. God Himself was going to lead the attack through the presence of the ark.

Joshua 6:1–5

¹ Now the gates of Jericho were tightly shut because the people were afraid of the Israelites. No one was allowed to go out or in. ² But the LORD said to Joshua, "I have given you Jericho, its king, and all its strong warriors. ³ You and your fighting men should march around the town once a day for six days. ⁴ Seven priests will walk ahead of the Ark, each carrying a ram's horn. On the seventh day you are to march around the town seven times, with the priests blowing the horns. ⁵ When you hear the priests give one long blast on the rams' horns, have all the people shout as loud as they can. Then the walls of the town will collapse, and the people can charge straight into the town."



Despite the odd battle plan, the Israelites didn't flee in unbelief this time. Instead, they did exactly as God had instructed. Yahweh gave them the victory and they took Jericho!



What God was teaching the Israelites at Jericho

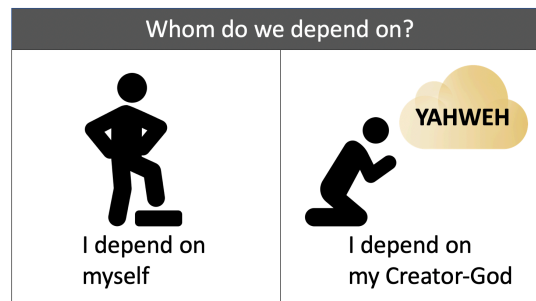
To trust God more than what they might think was an insufficient and foolish battle plan.



Our faith lesson

Why did God give such a silly battle plan? This is because if He had given them a more conventional one, the Israelites might have thought they won with their own strength and intelligence. They would forget that God had given them the victory and would have failed to thank Him.

In our life, God might present an illogical solution to our problem. He might do this so we would stop depending on ourselves. Or, He might want us to know for certain that He is the One who acted. And then our hearts would be thankful to Him. Would we have faith enough to trust Him and go along with His plan?



If you trust God, does it mean you don't have to "do" anything?





Some believers think that "trusting" God means letting God do whatever He pleases and we simply stand back and observe. Yet, the victory at Jericho gives a different picture of what God expects from our faith and works.

Yahweh gave Joshua a strange battle plan. But in faith, Joshua and the Israelites followed His instructions. Joshua didn't stop thinking and do nothing just because God was leading. Rather, he acknowledged God as the all-knowing Creator. And he knew that as a man, his understanding was limited and he would never be able to understand God's mind. So in faith, Joshua led the battle charge. We can see that:

- Faith is believing God and thinking, speaking and doing what He instructs while looking at Him. This means our "works of faith" are made up of our thoughts, words and deeds that are done in obedience to God while we acknowledge our insufficiency.
- Faith is not just standing back, minds unthinking, mouth unspeaking and body not moving (unless of course, God had given specific instructions to do nothing). In His original purpose, He had created man as under-lord over the world. Man had to think, speak and act as God directed.
- Faith is not selfishly deciding what we want to do and assume God will go along with our plan. The commander of the LORD's army was the one giving instructions, not Joshua. As believers, we must never tell God what to do and expect Him to fulfil it just because we said it. He is God. We are not. We must never cross the Creator-creature distinction.

One more observation

After Joshua destroyed Jericho, he pronounced a curse.

The Curse	The Fulfilment (500 years later when Ahab was king)
<p>Joshua 6:26 At that time Joshua invoked this curse: “May the curse of the LORD fall on anyone who tries to rebuild the town of Jericho. <u>At the cost of his firstborn son,</u> he will lay its <u>foundation</u>. <u>At the cost of his youngest son,</u> he will set up its <u>gates</u>.”</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; gap: 20px;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Firstborn son</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Youngest son</p> </div> </div>	<p>1 Kings 16:34 It was during his reign that Hiel, a man from Bethel, rebuilt Jericho. When he laid its foundations, it cost him <u>the life of his oldest son</u>, Abiram. And when he completed it and set up its gates, it cost him <u>the life of his youngest son</u>, Segub. This all happened according to the message from the LORD concerning Jericho spoken by Joshua son of Nun.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; gap: 20px;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Firstborn Abiram</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Youngest Segub</p> </div> </div>

The city planner who rebuilt Jericho lost two sons, just as Yahweh said. These are two easy-to-miss verses, but God recorded them to make a crucial point.

God wants us to understand that His promises will always be fulfilled, regardless of how much time has passed. Five hundred years is not a short time. For us, 500 years ago would be the 1500s!

God is demonstrating that He is sovereign and His promises hold true regardless of how much time has passed.

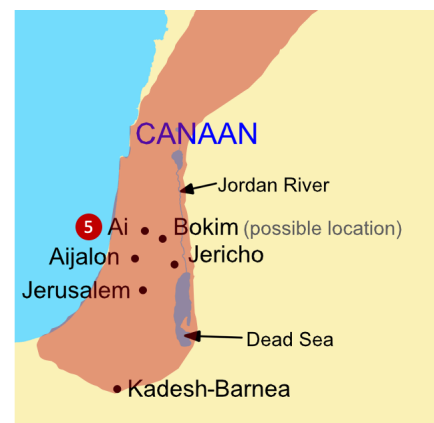


5. Defeat at Ai (Joshua 7)

At the battle of Jericho, Yahweh gave instructions not to take any loot. Everyone obeyed except for one man named Achan. He took and hid some silver, gold and a beautiful cloak.

Because of this disobedience, Israel lost at their next battle when they fought the town of Ai.

Joshua and the elders fell on their faces and asked God why they had been defeated.



Joshua 7:10–12

¹⁰ But the LORD said to Joshua, “Get up! Why are you lying on your face like this? ¹¹ Israel has sinned and broken my covenant! They have stolen some of the things that I commanded must be set apart for me. And they have not only stolen them but have lied about it and hidden the things among their own belongings. ¹² That is why the Israelites are running from their enemies in defeat. For now Israel itself has been set apart for destruction. I will not remain with you any longer unless you destroy the things among you that were set apart for destruction.

It was common for soldiers to take loot as their wages. While the Bible does not say specifically why God forbade them to take loot at Jericho (sometimes He allowed it), one thought to consider is this: it was a faith issue. If the Israelites took loot, they would be no different from any other rampaging army. They would be supplying their own need and would think God was not providing for them. This would not build their faith in God.

And so, Achan, his children, and all their livestock were killed. Why were Achan’s children put to death if God’s law forbids that children be punished for their parents’ sins?

Deuteronomy 24:16

Parents must not be put to death for the sins of their children, nor children for the sins of their parents. Those deserving to die must be put to death for their own crimes.

It was most likely that Achan’s children were adults who participated in their father’s sin and so all were killed. God held them accountable for their own sins.

After Israel dealt severely with Achan’s sin, God gave Israel the victory over Ai.

**What God was teaching the Israelites at Ai**

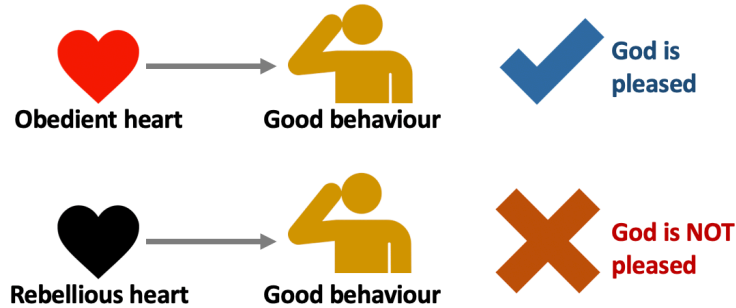
God wants a person’s outward actions to be an outflow of their inner obedience to Him.
God doesn’t want fake outward obedience nor does He want partial obedience.

**Our faith lesson**

Achan stole the items secretly. Joshua and the other leaders didn’t know this. Though outwardly it appeared that every Israelite obeyed God’s instructions fully, this wasn’t true. God dealt with them severely because He wants a person’s outward actions to flow from a true heart of obedience.

This was the same problem at Kadesh-Barnea where the Israelites only decided to invade Canaan after God said He wasn’t going to go with them.

They thought that just doing the right thing even though they didn’t trust God would be acceptable. It was not. Similarly, unless our words and actions come from an obedient heart, God will reject our actions and evaluate us poorly.

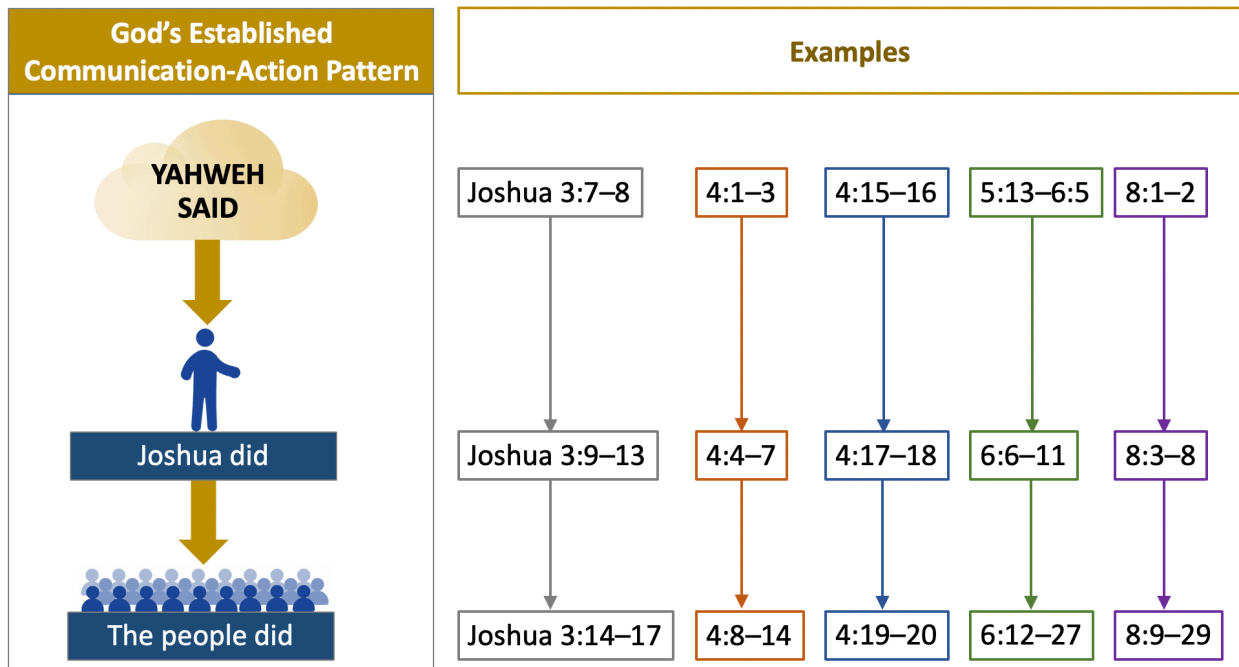


Before giving the law, God gave Israel the reason they should obey the law: **gratitude for what He had done for them**. He had rescued them from Egypt.

For us, this means God wants us to do things for Him out of **gratitude for what He has done for us: He graciously provided us salvation**. God doesn't want "right" actions that come from empty hearts and wrong motives.

One more observation

In many parts of the book of Joshua, there is a very clear communication-action pattern:



This was good and right because Yahweh was the leader. Joshua, as God's representative, communicated God's will to the people. The people obeyed God's and Joshua's instructions.

However, at Ai, this pattern was missing. Nowhere in the account did it mention “Yahweh said”, “Joshua did” or “the people did”. They didn’t consult God at Ai.

Do we pay attention to God’s guidance in our life decisions? Do we actively listen out for the “Yahweh said” in our life? Or are we drifting along, content and unaffected by Him?



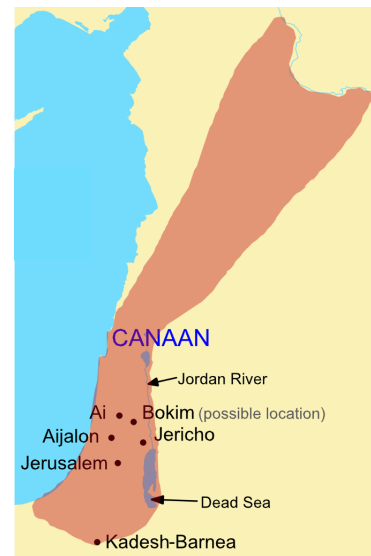
6. Supernatural longest day at Aijalon (Joshua 9–10)

After conquering Jericho and Ai, Israel was to continue taking the surrounding areas (the shaded parts in the map). Just as God had promised, all the people groups were frightened of the God of the Israelites, because they had heard what He had done to Egypt and the other nations.

One such group, the Gibeonites, decided to protect themselves. They tricked Israel into thinking they were from a faraway land and deceived the Jews into a peace treaty with them. The Israelites agreed to the treaty without checking with God.

Joshua 9:14–15

¹⁴ So the Israelites examined their food, but they did not consult the LORD. ¹⁵ Then Joshua made a peace treaty with them and guaranteed their safety, and the leaders of the community ratified their agreement with a binding oath.



Later on, five Amorite kings banded together to attack Gibeon for making this treaty. Panicked, Gibeon called on its new ally, Israel, to fight with them. This battle had started because of Gibeon’s deception. Nevertheless, Joshua kept his word and came to their aid.

Israel’s army marched all night and was probably exhausted by the time it reached the enemy. They were at a disadvantage as they faced a fresh enemy army.

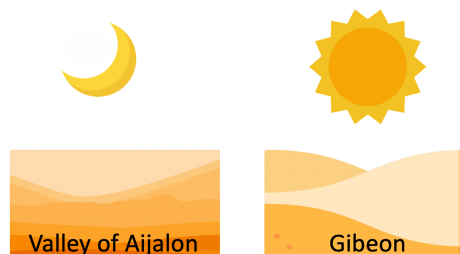
However, God supernaturally ensured the victory by controlling the natural world that He created. God sent hail to destroy the enemy and also caused the sun and moon (in other words, time) to stop!

Joshua 10:11–14

¹¹ As the Amorites retreated down the road from Beth-horon, the LORD destroyed them with a terrible hailstorm from heaven that continued until they reached Azekah. The hail killed more of the enemy than the Israelites killed with the sword.

¹² On the day the LORD gave the Israelites victory over the Amorites, Joshua prayed to the LORD in front of all the people of Israel. He said, “Let the sun stand still over Gibeon, and the moon over the valley of Aijalon.” ¹³ So the sun stood still and the moon stayed in place until the nation of Israel had defeated its enemies. Is this event not recorded in The Book of Jasher? The sun stayed in the middle of the sky, and it did not set as on a normal day.

¹⁴ There has never been a day like this one before or since, when the LORD answered such a prayer. Surely the LORD fought for Israel that day!



The holy war was ultimately God’s work. It was His war against sin and evil. God would provide the Israelites all they needed for success.



What God was teaching the Israelites at Aijalon

God compensates for the weaknesses of those who obey Him.
Joshua was deceived, but he kept his word to defend Gibeon and God graciously helped him.

**Our faith lesson**

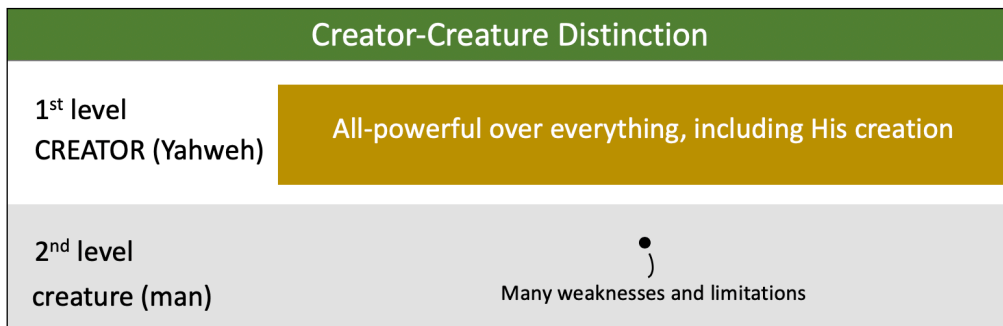
Joshua was deceived, but he honoured the treaty he had made. God compensated for Joshua’s weakness by honouring Joshua’s word. He supernaturally stopped the whole world to help the Israelite army! Yahweh is the God of the universe. He can do anything to frustrate the plans of those who go against Him and He has uncountable ways of helping those who are obedient to Him.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul talked about his weakness that God chose not to remove. God told Paul that His grace, power and glory are best seen and understood when people lack the resources to solve their problems, and instead have to rely on God.

2 Corinthians 12:8–10

⁸ Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. ⁹ Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. ¹⁰ That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

When we are at a disadvantage or have weaknesses that we can’t overcome, we need to remember that Yahweh is limitless. He has unlimited resources to use in any way He wants to help us. We just need to trust and rely on Him.



7. God’s sentence of the postponed Kingdom at Bochim (Judges 2:1–5)

In Numbers 34, God told Moses the boundaries of the land that they were supposed to conquer. (In a sense, that was their “land title deed”.)

After Moses’ death, Joshua and the Israelite army were faithful in obeying God’s commands. They continued to conquer the land that God had given to them.

Then Joshua distributed the land among the tribes.

Joshua 11:23

So Joshua took control of the entire land, just as the LORD had instructed Moses. He gave it to the people of Israel as their special possession, dividing the land among the tribes. So the land finally had rest from war.

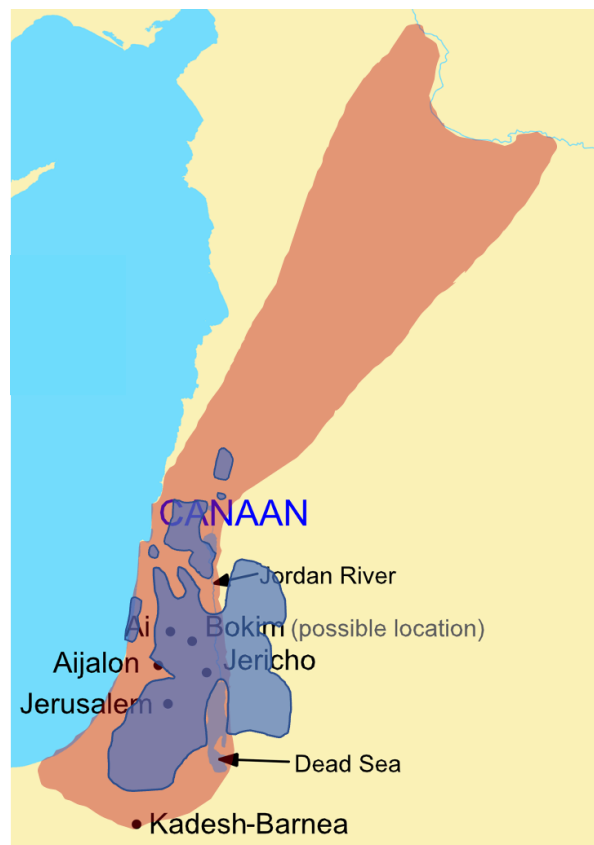
Though God gave them the land and Joshua conquered and divided it up among the tribes, it was still necessary for each tribe to push out the remaining Canaanites in their allotted land.

However the tribes did not complete the job. Judges 1 is filled with “(tribe name) did not drive out (name of people living there)”.

Because groups of Canaanites remained, the land was never fully conquered during this period.

Judges 1	
Verse 19	Judah... failed to drive out the people living in the plains...
Verse 21	The tribe of Benjamin, however, failed to drive out the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem.
Verse 27	The tribe of Manasseh failed to drive out the people living in Beth-shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo, and all their surrounding settlements
Verse 28	When the Israelites grew stronger, they forced the Canaanites to work as slaves, but they never did drive them completely out of the land.
Verse 29	The tribe of Ephraim failed to drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer
Verse 30	The tribe of Zebulun failed to drive out the residents of Kitron and Nahalol, so the Canaanites continued to live among them.
Verse 31	The tribe of Asher failed to drive out the residents of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Aczib, Helbah, Aphik, and Rehob.
Verse 33	Likewise, the tribe of Naphtali failed to drive out the residents of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath. Instead, they moved in among the Canaanites, who controlled the land.

The orange shaded area of the map shows the land that God told the Israelites to possess. The blue shaded area is the land they actually possessed after Joshua's time.



God was angry with Israel for their incomplete obedience.

Incomplete obedience

is

Disobedience

He had warned them if they allowed evil to remain, they too would become evil. They would end up intermarrying with the Canaanites, learning from them, worshipping their idols and following their detestable ways. The Israelites would be prone to idol worship, pagan rituals and wicked practices.



Because they disobeyed, God would no longer drive out the Canaanites for them. Yahweh spoke to them at the city of Bochim (also spelt Bokim).

Judges 2:1–3

¹ The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said to the Israelites, “I brought you out of Egypt into this land that I swore to give your ancestors, and I said I would never break my covenant with you. ² For your part, you were not to make any covenants with the people living in this land; instead, you were to destroy their altars. But you disobeyed my command. Why did you do this? ³ So now I declare that I will no longer drive out the people living in your land. They will be thorns in your sides, and their gods will be a constant temptation to you.”

Judges 2:21–23

²¹ I will no longer drive out the nations that Joshua left unconquered when he died. ²² I did this to test Israel—to see whether or not they would follow the ways of the LORD as their ancestors did. ²³ That is why the LORD left those nations in place. He did not quickly drive them out or allow Joshua to conquer them all.

At this time, God had not finished giving the Israelites the whole area He had promised to Abraham. He postponed this due to the people’s rebellion and disobedience. But in the future, God would indeed give Israel all the land that He had promised to Abraham.

For this time period, Yahweh would have to train the Israelites a lot more on what it meant to have a relationship with Him. He would have to train them in their spiritual life.








What God was teaching the Israelites at Bochim
As God’s “firstborn son”, the people had the responsibility to follow God’s instructions.



Our faith lesson

Yahweh had made two covenants with Israel, the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant and the conditional Mosaic Covenant.

- Abrahamic Covenant: Yahweh promised a land for the Jews.
- Mosaic (or Sinaitic) Covenant: Yahweh expected the people to do their part by being obedient to His instructions. Failure to do so resulted in a delay in God fulfilling the full promises of the Abrahamic Covenant.

	 Abrahamic Covenant	 Mosaic Covenant
 Parties	God, Abraham and descendants	God and the 12 tribes of Israel (sons of Jacob)
 Promises	LAND , descendants, worldwide blessing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blessings for obeying all the laws • Cursings for disobeying the laws
 Type	Unconditional	CONDITIONAL Dependent on whether Israel obeys

For us, by our faith in Him, Yahweh paid for our sin debt, saved us from eternal death, and made us His children. But this doesn’t mean our life as a child of God is without responsibilities.

God expects us to work hard at being an obedient child. If we fail to do so, we will suffer. Our fellowship with God will be marred with sin, with disappointment, with failure. We would not be victorious disciples. We therefore must not be complacent.

The Result of the Conquest and Settlement Period

This period in Israel’s history showed what happened when the people did not fully obey Yahweh’s instructions. They failed to possess all the land God had given them and they failed to drive out all the evil Canaanites.

Even though there were Israelites who trusted and obeyed God, a nation of fallen people cannot accomplish the task of eliminating evil in the world. Yahweh would have to supernaturally intervene to fully eliminate evil and establish the Kingdom of God. We will learn more how God will do this in upcoming lessons.

What Happened after Joshua's Death?

After Joshua's death, the people forgot about Yahweh.

Judges 2:7, 10

⁷ And the Israelites served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the leaders who outlived him—those who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.

¹⁰ After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the LORD or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel.

Why did the next generation not remember Yahweh? If their fathers were faithful to God, where did the next generation go wrong?

God had already warned in Israel's national anthem that the time of peace would bring wealth and complacency, and this would lead the people to drift away from Him.

Deuteronomy 32:15

“But Israel soon became fat and unruly;
the people grew heavy, plump, and stuffed!
Then they abandoned the God who had made them;
they made light of the Rock of their salvation.



Perhaps those who knew God didn't teach the next generation well. Psalm 78 shows that God intends for each generation to teach the next, so they too would learn to set their hope on Him.

Psalm 78:2a–8

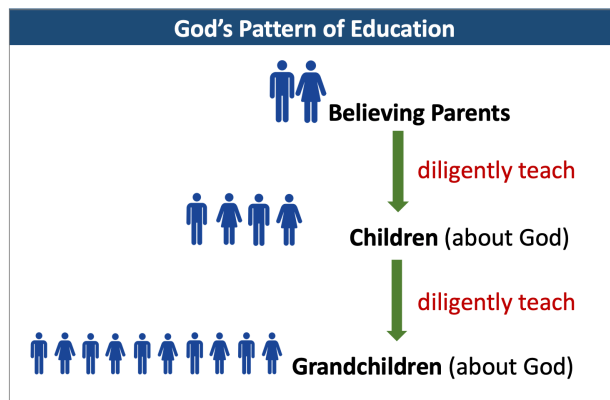
² I will teach you hidden lessons from our past—

³ stories we have heard and known,
stories our ancestors handed down to us.

⁴ We will not hide these truths from our children;
we will tell the next generation
about the glorious deeds of the LORD,
about his power and his mighty wonders.

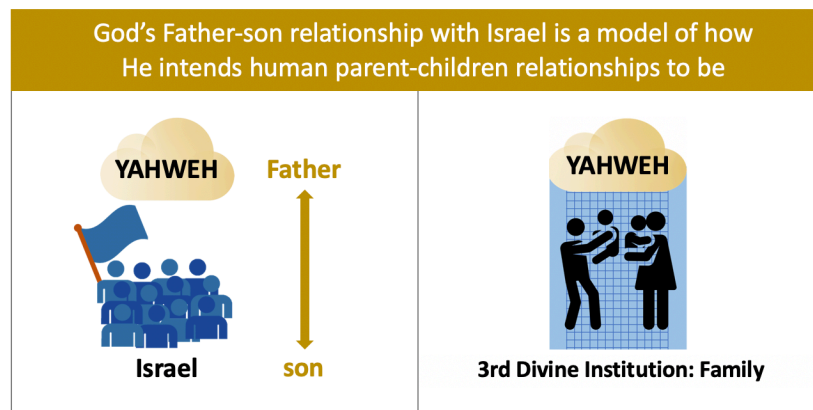
⁵ For he issued his laws to Jacob;
he gave his instructions to Israel.

- He commanded our ancestors
to teach them to their children,
6 so the next generation might know them—
even the children not yet born—
and they in turn will teach their own children.
7 So each generation should set its hope anew on God,
not forgetting his glorious miracles
and obeying his commands.
- 8 Then they will not be like their ancestors—
stubborn, rebellious, and unfaithful,
refusing to give their hearts to God.



Interestingly, as we study the period of the Conquest and Settlement, we see how God as the Divine Father trains His son Israel. Yahweh Himself uses the structure of the family to train and grow His people. Observing how God parents Israel helps us understand more clearly how He expects human parents to train their own children. God Himself, as the family head, is the perfect model of how parents are to love, teach, instruct, encourage, scold, rebuke and discipline their children. Just as God rewards obedience and punishes disobedience, parents are to do the same.

In fact, God intentionally designed the family as the channel for training children to know Him, love Him and obey His authority. Families are a critical Divine Institution!

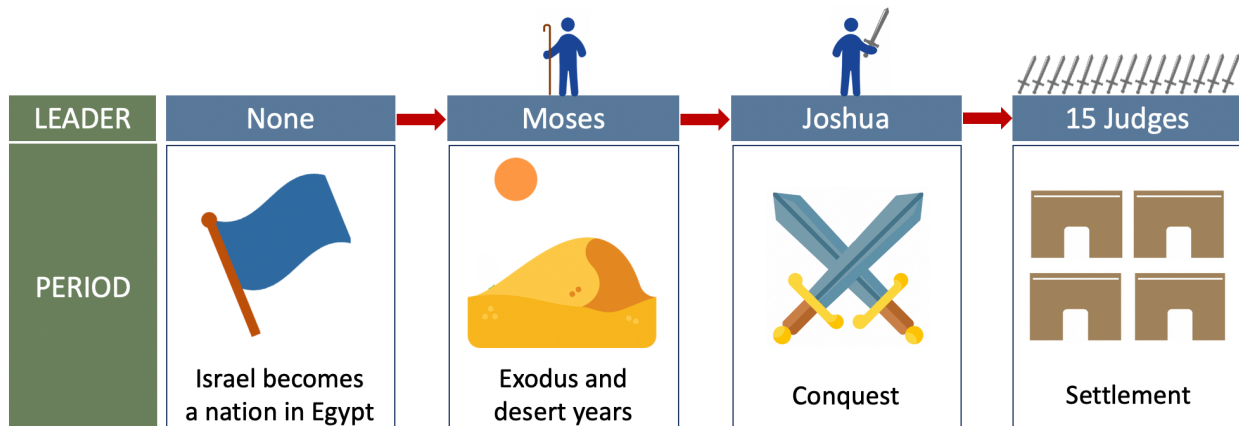


The failure of Joshua's generation is a warning for us. When God blesses us, we must not turn complacent. And we must actively teach the next generation all about God because that is our responsibility.

The Time of the Judges (Judges 2:11–21:25)

Joshua had succeeded Moses as the military and national leader of Israel. However, Joshua did not have a successor. After he died, God Himself was to lead the people.

But the people went against Him. Whenever this happened, Yahweh disciplined them and when they repented, He raised a judge to rescue them.



This constant rebellion led to a downward spiral of spiritual decline.

Judges 2:11–12, 14–19

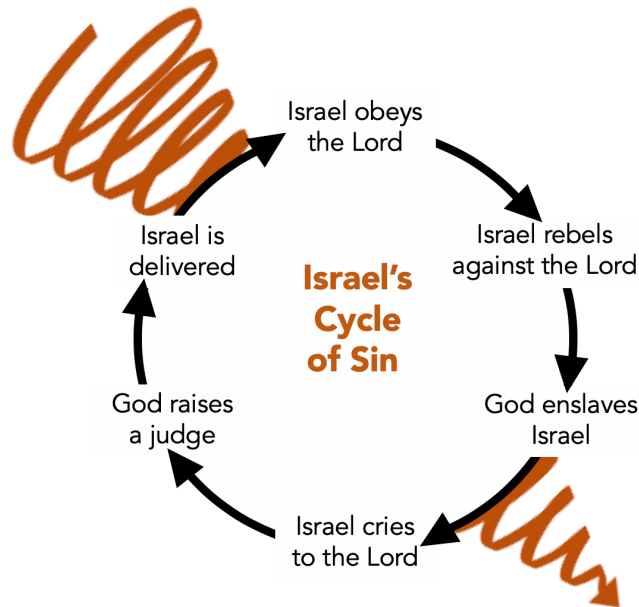
¹¹ The Israelites did evil in the LORD's sight and served the images of Baal. ¹² They abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods, worshiping the gods of the people around them. And they angered the LORD.

¹⁴ This made the LORD burn with anger against Israel, so he handed them over to raiders who stole their possessions. He turned them over to their enemies all around, and they were no longer able to resist them. ¹⁵ Every time Israel went out to battle, the LORD fought against them, causing them to be defeated, just as he had warned. And the people were in great distress.

¹⁶ Then the LORD raised up judges to rescue the Israelites from their attackers. ¹⁷ Yet Israel did not listen to the judges but prostituted themselves by worshiping other gods. How quickly they turned away from the path of their ancestors, who had walked in obedience to the LORD's commands.


¹⁸ Whenever the LORD raised up a judge over Israel, he was with that judge and rescued the people from their enemies throughout the judge's lifetime. For the LORD took pity on his people, who were burdened by oppression and suffering. ¹⁹ But when the judge died,

the people returned to their corrupt ways, behaving worse than those who had lived before them. They went after other gods, serving and worshiping them. And they refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.



This pattern is seen with all 15 judges that Yahweh raised to save Israel from her enemies.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Othniel	Ehud	Shamgar	Deborah	Gideon	Abimelech	Tola	Jair	Jephthah	Ibzan	Elon	Abdon	Samson	Eli	Samuel


The final judge

God allowed the Israelites to suffer the consequences of their rebellion so that they would cry out to Him for help. God wanted the people to know Him. He wanted to be their God. He wanted to teach them His history and truth. It was still through this people that God intended to reach the whole world.

However, the time of the judges was a sad picture of their persistent rebellion. The last verse of the book of Judges best summarises the heart of the Israelites:

Judges 21:25

In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

God’s Law taught Israel how to love Him and love others. It was for their good. Instead of obeying, they chose to do “whatever seemed right in their own eyes”.



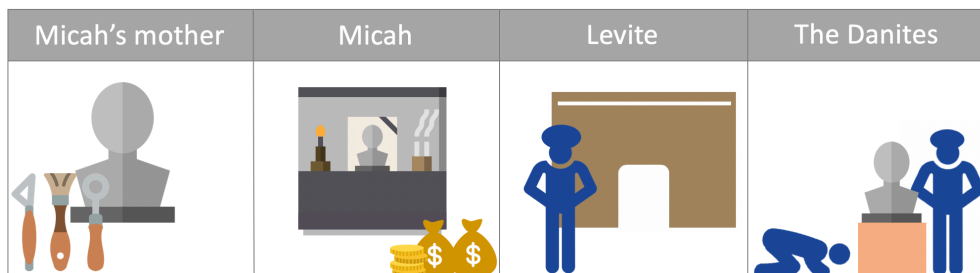
But what was considered “right in their own eyes”? Judges 17–21 shows the depth of Israel’s repulsive sin and depravity when they did what was right in their own eyes.

Here are two examples:

I. Micah and the Levite (Judges 17–18)

An Israelite man named Micah stole silver from his mother. When he returned the money, she made an idol out of it and it was placed in Micah’s house. So Micah first appointed one of his sons to be his household priest. Later, he hired a Levite to be his personal priest, so he would be prosperous. When men from the tribe of Dan were looking for land to settle in, they passed by Micah’s house and stole his silver idol and his Levite priest. They then made this idol their god. What was wrong with what the people did?

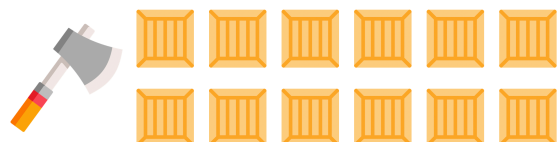
- **Micah’s mother:** She was permissive, had no sense of right and wrong and she aided Micah in idol worship.
- **Micah:** He devised his own religion and made up his own “temple”, shrine and priest! He wanted to be rich and so he manipulated “religion” for his own purpose.
- **The Levite:** He was never supposed to live outside of the designated cities for priests and being a personal priest is in violation of the role of priests who were to lead public worship.
- **The Danites:** They treated God like a “fortune-teller”, became liars, murderers and thieves and they set up their own idol and religion using Micah’s idol!



II. A Levite and his concubine (Judges 19–20)




While passing through the Benjamite town of Gibeah, a Levite and his concubine stayed in a local’s home. That night, the men of the town demanded to have sex with the Levite and the Levite saved himself by giving the men his concubine. They sexually assaulted her, resulting in her death.

The Levite cut her into 12 pieces and sent them throughout Israel.



Horrified at such a thing, the Israelites assembled for battle. They fought the Benjamites, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of men from all tribes. This horrific account is filled with anarchy, idolatry, unfaithfulness, sexual perversion, sexual abuse and dismemberment: everything that God hates!

Why did God record these events in the Bible? God wanted to show how utterly paganised His own people were becoming. (In the diagram below, the grey shading on the right shows the people in the Kingdom of God becoming paganised).

Pagan Kingdom of Man Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	Kingdom of God Based on GRACE God would save man
 <p>Babel</p>  <p>Egypt</p>  <p>Canaan</p>	Election
	 <p>God chose Abraham</p>
	 <p>God saved Israel</p>
	<p>God built Israel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Law ▪ National anthem ▪ Temple worship ▪ Feasts & festivals
	 <p>God taught Israel about spiritual life: Period of the Conquest</p>

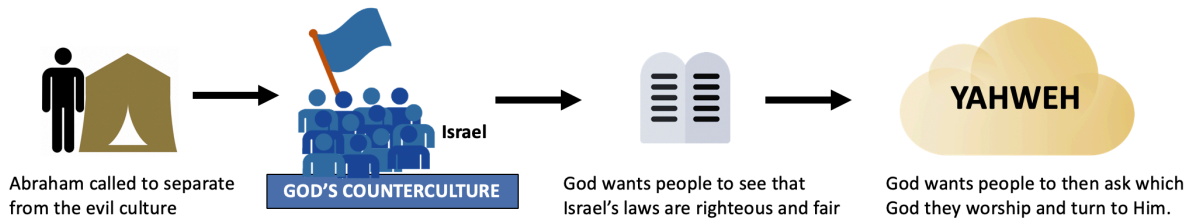
God wanted to show what happens when people do whatever they deem is right. Their sin nature will always lead them to do evil. That is the nature of man's rebellious heart against the Creator-God.



Yahweh disciplined His people severely for their wickedness. But despite all their sin, God remained faithful to the promise He made to Abraham. He kept them alive as a nation. He forgave them when they repented. He showed compassion even when they rejected Him. God continued to work with Israel in order to fulfil the plans He had for all mankind.

Does being a good Christian mean we must be tolerant and “fit into” the world?

God’s plan for Israel was that they would stand out and be visibly different from pagans. The Israelites were to represent God to the entire world and deliver Yahweh’s good news of salvation.



“Tolerance” in the period of the Conquest showed itself as idol worship, sin and evil. The Israelites “fit in” perfectly to the world around them! They were just like the idol-worshipping pagans. There was no difference between them and the Canaanites.

God was angry with them when that happened because they no longer represented Him nor the good news He had for the world. There can be no peace between the Kingdom of God and the pagan Kingdom of Man.

Today, a key concern with many believers young and old is that they “fit into” school, work, a club, their circle of friends, the party scene, etc. They seek to be part of the “in group”. Many people base their entire identity on whether they fit in with a certain group or not.

As believers, if we “fit into” the world, we will be no different and we will fail to attract unbelievers to God. We need to remember that God wants us to stand out—in a good way. God wants us to be His representatives among the pagans but we are to be different from them. We are not supposed to blend into the pagan world! This is very important to understand.



Most children and teens discover that fitting in is a measure of how well they are liked. However, this is a clash with what God is calling us to be. It is no wonder then that so many church-going children and youth are miserable. When they try to fit in, they need to be like the world. This tension between “fitting in” and being “separated from the world” is something that many churchgoers experience.

The Bible and God do not “fit in” to the world’s standards. We and the young people in our lives will fail in this conflict unless we train ourselves and them on how to live in the pagan world, and yet remain separated by having an identity rooted in Christ.

We need to:

1. Be clear why God wants us to be separated from the world (but not live apart from it).
2. Agree to God’s reasons for being separated.
3. Prepare for a degree of not “fitting” into the world.
4. Pray for God to lead us to others who share the same God-centred values and who can journey through life with us.
5. Work with these like-minded people to reach those who are not believers. We need to lead unbelievers to God.

We must remember Jesus’ own words:

Luke 11:33

“No one lights a lamp and then hides it or puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where its light can be seen by all who enter the house.

Jesus is telling His disciples that they are to be lit lamps, standing out in a world full of spiritual darkness. The light of truth needs to shine from us. We must not be hidden but instead, we need to be in the world. We stand out by living differently with godly priorities, outlook and lifestyle. We are to actively take God’s truth into the world.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. How do we cultivate a distinctive Christ-centred life and still live in the society where God has placed us? How do we be a witness for God in an effective way?
2. If we have children or young believers under our care, how can we disciple them and teach them so their understanding of Yahweh is built into a strong foundation? (You may want to write down a plan.)
3. How do we ensure that we don't end up "doing whatever seems right in our own eyes" and claim we are doing what God wants?



Pre-reading for next lesson: Psalm 35, 58; Romans 7:7–8:30; Galatians 5:16–25; Hebrews 12:1–17