

Epic: Conquest & Judges

I love our time together in worship; And can't wait to get into the Word; Josh 1
We're in the middle of a series called Epic, that's intended to refresh your *memory*, and your love; Your memory about all that's *happened* in God's work of redemption . . .
And your love for the One who did it

And thus far we've covered 6 historical periods
Creation, which calls us to praise and worship
The Fall, calling us to honesty and hope
The Flood, calling us to thankfulness and holiness
The Patriarchs, calling us to trust
The Egyptian Sojourn, calling us to faith
And the Desert Wandering, calling us to righteousness

6 periods in God's epic work in our world, which brings us to the 7th

Conquest & Judges

After wandering the desert for 40 years, the people of Israel were on the banks of the Jordan River (**map**), the verge of the Promised Land; Moses had just died . . .
And God gave Joshua his marching orders to go in and take the land

There was only one problem – Jericho; A fortified city with walls so thick and so high, that people lived in them
But after the spies came back, who were helped by a prostitute named Rahab, they gave a good report and basically said, “Let's go” (Josh 1-2)

So they did – crossing the Jordan on dry *ground*, just like the Red Sea
And after marching around Jericho for a week by *faith* Heb 11 says (v30) – the walls *fell* to the ground, and the city was overthrown*****
Except for Rahab and her family – they were spared by faith as well

And so began a period of 350 years where the Israelites conquered the rest of the land, divided it among the 12 tribes of Israel, and followed the leadership of various judges

Time Period – 1404-1050BC

Key People – Joshua, Rahab, Gideon, Samson, Ruth

Key Places – Jordan River, Jericho, Canaan – the Promised Land

Main Events – Jordan Crossing, Fall of Jericho, Gideon's Success, Samson's Revenge, Ruth's Marriage

➤ And the first of **God's Purposes**, was . . .

To establish his people in the land he promised

At its most fundamental level, that's what this time period was all about; To establish his people in the land he promised to Abraham way back in Gen 15, 700 years earlier
And the land they'd vacated for some 470 years now; He was restoring them; Josh 1:1-3
[1] *After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, [2] “Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. [3] Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses.*

And then in v6 – *Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.*

One of God's purposes in all this was to establish his people in the land he promised

But that wasn't it; God also intended . . .

To purge the land of evil nations

It wasn't just to establish the Israelites, it was to purge the Amorites – the *inhabitants* of the land; Like Moses says in **Dt 9:5**

Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you

Their sin was finally full (Gen 15:16), and God's patience finally gone

Saying later on that they should be completely destroyed, and shown no mercy; All b/c of their *abominable practices* (Dt 20:16-18)

Like burning *their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods* (Dt 12:31); And indulging in depraved sexual rites in their worship of idols*****

➤ You see, sometimes God's work has less to do with us than it does with others; Which is so far outside of our paradigm it's not even funny
We tend to think that everything that happens to us is all about us
If it's good, God's blessing us; If it's bad, he's testing us

But this Scripture indicates otherwise; It could be that God is doing what he's doing in your life, b/c of *others*

IOW your *life* is not just about you; *My* life is not just about me; And God's *work* is not just about us

Which means we shouldn't be too eager to take credit, nor too quick to take blame
God's weaving a tapestry of life that has many threads, for many reasons; And this situation is a case in point

God was not only establishing *his* people in the land, but purging those who were *evil*
Wanting a holy and fitting place for his treasured possession, *and* for himself
And Joshua did it; *He left nothing undone* the Bible says (Josh 11:15)

➤ But when he died, they reverted; They let the other nations hang around; And creep back in; And the influence wasn't good; Look at Judges 2:11-15
[11] *And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. [12] And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. [13] They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashteroth [an idol representing fertility and love]. [14] So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. [15] Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress.*

In a vacuum of leadership, the Israelites did just the *opposite* of what God told them to do

In fact, they abandoned the Lord altogether, worshipping idols
And suffered for it – God punished them; Just like he disciplines *us* when we disobey

But notice, he didn't *abandon* them; In spite of their sin, he raised up a series of judges . . .

To save his people and test their allegiance

That's the 3rd of God's purposes for this time period; Judges 2:16-19

Then the LORD raised up judges [think warrior-leaders with a helmet, not courtroom leaders with a wig], who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them [he didn't abandon them]. [17] Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so. [18] Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. [19] But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.

This time period in God's epic work of redemption was meant to save his people from their enemies; The problem was, they didn't always *want* to be saved
And that cuts a bit close to home, doesn't it? So often, we treat God like a bad boyfriend
"Come here, come here, come here; Get away, get away, get away"; We're as fickle as the wind; And he doesn't particularly appreciate it; Just like he didn't then – v20

[20] So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he said, "Because this people have transgressed my covenant that I commanded their fathers and have not obeyed my voice, [21] I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, [22] in order to test Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their fathers did, or not." (Jg 2:20-22)

And then again in Jg 3:4-6 – [4] They [the evil nations] were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. [5] So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. [6] And their daughters they took to themselves for wives [that was a no-no], and their own daughters they gave to their sons [another no-no], and they served their gods.

Failure; One of God's purposes in all this was to test them, and they failed; Miserably
Despite the fact that God raised up various leaders to deliver them and lead them
Like Deborah, the prophetess; And Gideon; Remember him?

➤ An unlikely farmer at the time, God tapped him to lead the Israelite army against the mighty Midianites; And when he finally accepted the role, God then told him . . .
To trim the troops down to 300; What? And then to carry only torches and trumpets
But it worked; 200,000 Midianites were routed in one night, and the Israelites went on to enjoy 40 years of peace and prosperity; B/c of the response of *one* willing man

➤ And then there's Samson; Remember him? The crazy-strong womanizer with the long hair? Who defeated the Philistines . . .
Only to be seduced by Delilah to expose the secret of his strength?

But God still used him, didn't he? B/c in the midst of his imprisonment, he brought the house down – literally; Overthrowing the Philistines yet again
And so it went with several other judges; When the people cried out for help, God raised up leaders to save them

➤ Unfortunately, their allegiance only lasted as long as the judge; When *he* died, *they* died – they reverted; *Everybody did what was right in his own eyes* (Jg 17:6)
And so went the roller coaster of sin, devastation, repentance, and deliverance; Sin, devastation, repentance, and deliverance – for 325 years

How about you? Does that describe *your* life? Do you only call out to God when your back is against the wall? When the consequences of sin have you *down*?
And then when he answers, do you walk with him just long enough to find your feet?
Just long enough to catch your breath and run off again? I hope not

And what about the tests of *allegiance* in your life? Are you pursuing the pleasures of sin, or the cross of Christ? Are you taking up your cross, or denying it?

Are you passing or failing? I hope it's passing; B/c that's where the joy is for *you*, and the *glory*, for God

One of his purposes was to save his people and test their allegiance; And it still is

As is his intent . . .

To show his amazing sovereignty

Toward the end of this time period, God orchestrated a series of events through a Moabite woman, a foreigner, named Ruth . . .

To show once again, that despite how things might seem on the *surface*, God is at work weaving an amazing tapestry of epic proportions; Ruth 1:1-5

[1] In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab [on the other side of the Dead Sea], he and his wife and his two sons. [2] The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. [3] But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. [4] These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, [5] and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman [Naomi] was left without her two sons and her husband.

At which point she decided to go back to Israel; And urged Orpah and Ruth to stay in Moab, their homeland; But Ruth had other plans; She wanted to go with her
Uttering those famous words in 1:16-17 – "*Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. [17] Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.*" Can you say loyalty? So off they went

And one day, while picking up leftovers in the field of a man named Boaz back in Israel, Ruth caught his attention; And after showing her kindness, she sought his favor
Which eventually led to their marriage, and a child, and "happily ever after"; True

➤ But lest you think this is just a nice, heart-warming “Chicken Soup for the Soul” kind of story, think again; B/c God, in his amazing sovereignty . . .
Was orchestrating events like you wouldn’t believe

You see, Boaz is the great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandson of a man named Judah; One of Jacob’s sons . . .
Who God just happened to bless with a promise, back in **Gen 49:10**
Saying – *The scepter [the power] shall not depart from Judah [referring to his lineage], nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet [a symbol of leadership], until tribute comes to him [aka worship]; and to him [to Judah and his lineage] shall be the obedience of the peoples.*

God, through Jacob, was saying that someone from the line of Judah would rule and reign over the nations, and receive their worship, forever; It wouldn’t depart

➤ Except 8 generations *after* this prophecy, Boaz is single and growing old; There’s no one to carry on the line
And what’s more, he’s the scandalous offspring of a foreign prostitute named Rahab;
Surely God’s not going to use him
But since when do cracked pots prevent God from making crystal vases?
He’s got it, doesn’t he; Does now, and did then

And took it a step farther in raising up Ruth, *another* foreigner – to *marry* Boaz, carry on the line, and become the ancestors of kings like David and Solomon
Who ruled just like Jacob had said

But more importantly, they became the ancestors of Jesus – King of *all* kings, and Lord of *all* lords
The one referred to in the book of Revelation as the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5)
Meaning that Jesus is the one of whom Jacob spoke in Gen 49, and the one made possible by the unlikely marriage of Ruth and Boaz*****
It’s a story of epic proportions, intended to show God’s amazing sovereignty

And it wasn’t just for them; It’s for us as well
He’s the same yesterday, today, and forever – weaving the tapestry of *our* lives, just like he did theirs

All of which begs for a response of courage; That’s . . .

Our Response – Courage

The very thing God said to Joshua at the *beginning* of this period (**Josh 1:9**)
[9] *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous [it’s a command]. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed [discouraged], for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*

And at the end of his life in Josh 23:6, Joshua said the same to those in *his* footsteps
Be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left
It’s courage, start to finish; Just like that of Gideon; And Samson; And Ruth
They responded to God with courage, and we should too*****

Courage to do the *hard* things in life; Courage to have the conversation; Courage to stand up for what’s right; Courage to keep the faith when others don’t
Courage to give a reason for the hope that lies within you

Or maybe for you these days, it’s courage to stay the course when you want to quit
Or courage to *endure* in the face of persecution or trouble
Or courage to be baptized despite your fears
Or courage to surrender your life to Jesus in the first place (**Summary**)

Whatever the case, be strong and courageous; *For the LORD your God is with you*, just like he was them

Pray – Refresh us with these truths; Bolster our resolve; Solidify our allegiance; And increase our courage; You are indeed, sovereign over our lives, and we love it
And give now, with full and thankful hearts