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Old Testament Basics - Lesson 05.

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Lesson Five.

In this lesson, we talk about the period where Israel actually moved into their land and settled there. Remember last lesson we talked about the period of the book of Numbers where the people get right up to the land, they sent in the spies, and the spies brought back a bad report, and the people were afraid to go in the land.

So God said, "If you don't want to go in the land, you don't have to go in the land. But you can't go back." So that story was a tragic story of these people dying off in the wilderness by their own choice. And now we're back to the land again, their children are ready to go in, and the books of Joshua and Judges tell us that story.

So there are actually four books that talk about the story of the settlement. Joshua and Judges are the chronological books. They move the story forward. But then we also have the book of Ruth, which occurs during the period of Judges. Judges is about the failure of the people. The book of Ruth talks about the success of a family in that period of time.

And then we have really what's called a bridge book; the book of Deuteronomy takes us from the period of the Numbers to the period of Joshua. You remember we said that it was the children of the people who came out of Egypt that actually went into the land of Canaan. And at Sinai, God gave the Law, the Ten Commandments and all of the laws of Israel, to the generation of people that had come out of Egypt.

And now to make sure that this generation understood that this was not their parents' law, it's their law, we have a whole rehearsal of God's Law that He had given to Moses. That's why it's called Deuteronomy. Deutero means second; nomos is the Greek word for law. So it's really the second giving of the Law, and so we put the book of Deuteronomy as a bridge between the period described in Numbers and the period described in the book of Joshua.

Now we take this period called the settlement. It's a period that covers about 350 years. And we have to divide that era into two subsections. The book of Joshua talks about how the people actually invaded the land and divided the land up among the tribes. Then, the book of Judges talks about the period following Joshua's death. And it's a period of rather tragic time where the people disobeyed God. That covers a period of about 320 years.

So the settlement is a total period of 350 years that we divide into two eras, the era described in the book of Joshua, which covers about 25 years, and then the book of Judges, which covers about 320 years. So you get some sense that as you read the books of Joshua and Judges you're covering a vast amount of time, a vast amount of history in Israel's life.

Let's look more closely for a bit at the book of Joshua. We said the book of Joshua, which covers a period of about 25 years, is a crucial period in Israel's life. It talks about how they invaded the land and how they divided the land up among the tribes. In this early part of the invasion and the settling down of the land, we have some miraculous events. We have the crossing of the Jordan River, and this event of crossing the Jordan River sort of is a bookend that closes out the period of going across the desert.

You remember in the book of Exodus the Red Sea opened so that the people could go through safely out of Egypt, and now the closure of that period and the beginning of their settling in their land is a similar miracle of the Jordan River drying up so that the people could go across and go into their land.

The first city they encountered was this mammoth scary city of Jericho with its huge walls. And you can see this group of people looking at those massive walls and saying, "Now what do we do? You know, maybe our parents were right. We have no business trying to take this land." But God said, "You know what? I've got a plan for you." So to reassure these people and to give them confidence that they really could go in and take this land, God not only dried up the Jordan River so they could cross, but then in the first place they encountered, this mammoth city, God said, "I'm going to destroy that city too."

And you perhaps remember the story of Jericho. And then the rest of the story of the book of Joshua talks about various battles and how they went to place after place, many times looking at these cities and these armies and saying, "There's no way we can conquer these people." And time after time God reassured them: "I'm in this with you. You follow Me. You're going to win."

And so that's the early story. And then one of the most wonderful stories in the whole book of Joshua, which you really shouldn't miss as you read it, is Caleb's story. Caleb and Joshua were two of the spies, two of the 12 spies that originally went into the land the first time they were at the land and came back with a favorable report.

They believed, they knew, they were confident that in spite of the giants, in spite of the walled city, in spite of the trained armies, as Caleb said, "We can certainly go in and take that land." So don't miss the wonderful story of Caleb.

Also don't miss the personal story of Joshua in all of this. Joshua was a man particularly selected by God for this overwhelming task of leading these people into that land. We read that under Moses, during Moses' life, Joshua was the general. Whenever there was a battle, it wasn't Moses who led the troops. It was Joshua.

We also see, as we mentioned, that Joshua, along with Caleb, was one of the faithful spies who came back believing God. Joshua was with Moses on Mount Sinai. Nobody else was there, just Moses and Joshua.

We read that God commanded Moses to appoint Joshua as his successor. So Joshua wasn't Moses' choice only, Joshua was also God's choice. And when God told Moses to put Joshua in charge after he departed, He promised Moses that He would be with Joshua just like He was with Moses.

And then in the early chapters, the first two chapters of Joshua, we read that God personally commissioned Joshua and gave him the secret of success. He said, "This book of the Law, this Law that God gave to Moses, shall never be absent from your mouth. But you will walk in it, you will meditate on it, and you will follow it, and you will teach it."

So the book of Joshua tells us the people invaded the land against overwhelming odds, were led by this godly man named Joshua, and they settled in their land, they divided it up, and the people began to carry on life there in their new land that God had given them.

After Joshua died, the story moves into the second phase of the settlement period. And it is as tragic as the book of Joshua is successful. Unfortunately, after Joshua died there was no single strong godly leader to keep people on track, to keep people focused on God. And so the story of Judges really is a story of a cycle. The people would turn away from God, they would start to follow the gods of the Canaanites, and God would raise up a nation to judge them, a nation to oppress them.

The people would then under that oppression cry out to God, and God would raise up a deliverer. He would raise up a hero to rally the people together and drive out that opposing army. Those individuals who God raised up to rally the people were called judges, and that's where the name of the book comes from.

The period of Judges as we said covers a period of about 325 years. This was a long time. This covered many generations of Israel's people. There were 14 judges from Othniel, who was the first one, to Samuel, who we'll see in the book of Kings as well. Samuel was the last of the judges. And this cycle of disobedience, oppression, and restoration under a judge carries on throughout that whole period of 325 years.

Some of the judges you may be familiar with. You just never placed them here before. But the story of Gideon, remember the story, the marvelous story of Gideon and how God delivered the people of Israel from the Midianites, from this small army that Gideon had put together? The reason God took Gideon through such a process is He wanted there to be no question that this was not Gideon's work; this was God's work. Fascinating story! You really need to read that story of Gideon.

Another of the famous judges that most people know about is a man named Samson. Again many people don't associate Samson with this period of Judges. They know the name, they know the story, but they don't remember who he was. And he was one of these men that God raised up to deliver the people of Israel from the Philistines. So also as you're reading the book of Judges, look for this fascinating story.

One of my favorites is a judge named Deborah, a woman who God used in a marvelous way to deliver the people of Israel from oppression. She was able to do what the men couldn't do, and so it's wonderful to read how God used this marvelous woman as a faithful servant to drive out the enemies of Israel by raising up an army and inspiring them to do what no one else thought they were able to do.

Another important thing to understand is that these judges really never rallied the whole nation of Israel. These judges were local, they took a particular tribe or sometimes they combined a couple of tribes, but these weren't national leaders. They weren't leaders over the whole nation. Also it's important to understand that there were long periods of time where there were no judges, and in fact one of the themes that we find repeated in the book of Judges is this theme that everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

We also read four times in the book of Judges, "there was no king in Israel." Now you remember who their king was? You remember on Sinai when God gave the Law, He said, "I am your King." So it's really not that there was no king. It's that the people accepted no king. So the tragic story of the period of Judges is a period of leaderless-ness, except when the people were in such desperate straits that they would cry out to God and God would raise up a leader for a temporary period of time in a certain locale to deliver the people from oppression. Sounds kind of grim, doesn't it? Sounds like nobody remembered God. And that's why we have this one color book called Ruth, because what God wanted us to know is that even though generally the people refused to follow God, they would not have God as their king, and everyone did what they thought was right, the book of Ruth tells us that throughout the nation there were pockets of people who still followed God.

And this book of Ruth tells a story of a woman named Naomi and her family going to a foreign country to Moab and settling there. And it tells a story of how one of Naomi's sons married a Moabite woman named Ruth. The men in the family died, and we see this scary moment with Naomi and Ruth, Naomi being in a foreign land without a husband. Now in those times that was a very vulnerable position to be in.

Naomi said, "I'm going home." Ruth said, "I'm going with you." And so they came back to Bethlehem where Naomi was from, and they followed the laws of God. And there was a man there named Boaz who also followed the laws of God. And because Ruth and Naomi and Boaz were faithful to God and followed the pattern that God had laid down for them to follow, Ruth and Boaz married and they had a son.

And right at the end of the book we understand why this story is included. We find, at the end of the story, old Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, holding this baby in her arms. And the writer gives us a brief genealogy to tell us that this baby that was born to Boaz and Ruth would be the father of Jesse, the father of David, the father of Jesus.

And this story tells us how God in His sovereignty in that terrible period of unfaithfulness maintained His faithfulness to His promises that He had made to Israel; and this Moabite woman, because she was faithful to God's leading, became the great, great, great, however great grandmother of Jesus Himself.

So in our periods of great unfaithfulness, it's important to realize that God is always faithful. And no matter how grim the world is around us, God is looking for men and women who will say, "I'm going to follow God." And we have no idea what God is going to do with our life if we just faithfully follow Him.