

THE STORYFORMED WAY

Part 4: Judges and Kings

Questions for Personal Study

- What have we learned about God and humanity thus far in the Story?
- Where have we seen God's justice? His love? His faithfulness?
- Where have we seen humanity's greatness? Brokenness? Sin?
- Read Joshua 24. How does God summarize The Story he is weaving?
- Read Judges 2. What causes the cycle of sin, oppression, and rescue?
- Why do you think God keeps rescuing Israel despite them?
- Why does God insist on being faithful to the promise to Abraham?
- Read 1 Sam 16-17. What is the contrast between Saul and David?
- Read 2 Sam 7. What does God promise David? Why?

Questions for Study in Community

- How have we seen the Family Identity in the story thus far?
- Why does God work through a nation, rather than through just one man?
- How does a Family/Nation display God more fully than an individual?
- Is the Family God created able to do what he intends? Why or why not?
- How does Israel's failure help us to see our need for a Savior?
- What does this mean for how we live as a community in this Story?

Questions for Staying on Mission

- How is the mission of blessing the nations working out in this section?
- How does Israel's failure and God's provision of David help the mission?
- How is Jesus - God's Forever King - working through your community?
- Is God's blessing coming to your neighborhood through your community?
- What are your scattering plans for March 17th?

For Further Reading and Learning

The longing of Israel for a human mediator is in the heart of every person. It is why we love hero tales - a great prince rescues a maiden at great cost to himself! - and why we love the story of David and Goliath! We want someone who can do what we could never do! In Jesus, God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. This brings great humility - I wouldn't have done any better than Israel! - and great courage - the Lord's Anointed King won for *me*!

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Understanding The Story

If you have much church experience, you probably know a ton of Bible stories. (If you don't, consider yourself lucky!) You may know about Noah, Abraham, Moses, Ruth, David, Esther, Jesus, Paul, and all the rest. You know that these were great men and women of God, and you likely learned that you should imitate their example. Unfortunately, though you know the stories, you may not know *the* Story. The Bible tells just one Story, front to back, though all these smaller stories fit in. The Bible is really One Story about God, who makes a people whom he can love, but who refuse to let him love them. These people keep running off after created things, spurning their Maker, and creating a huge mess in the process. These people refuse to believe that God loves them. So God pursues them through a very long process, calling this people out of their sin and foolishness, and offering his own Son to pay the price for their rebellion. The Bible tells the Story of Jesus, and it is the true story of the world.

Reviewing the Story

The Story began in a garden, where a good and loving God created humanity, creating them to live in joyful dependence on him. They had all they needed by looking to him. In spite of His good intentions toward them, humanity chose to disbelieve God, and decided they'd be freer if they lived independently. And God, not wanting to force them to love him, let them run from him.

The early chapters of Genesis reminded us our deepest problem - refusal to believe God's goodness - won't be fixed easily. God is not willing to just wipe out what he has created, so he initiates a rescue plan, beginning with a man named Abraham. To this man - a worshipper of false gods! - the True God makes an incredible promise: through Abraham, God will rescue his creation and restore them to himself in love.

The rest of the book of Genesis traces the messy lives of sinful people for whom God has chosen and promised to be faithful. Despite them, God begins to work out his 3-fold promise to Abraham. First, God will make Abraham into a nation. Second, God will give this nation a new home, a land in which he can

pour his blessing on them. Third, God will bless Abraham and make this nation a conduit of his blessing to the rest of the world. The book of Genesis ends, however, with God's people in Egypt (not the Promised Land!), hardly a nation (70 people!), and without any sign of God's blessing on them (in fact, they end up as slaves of the king of Egypt!).

But God is not done. After 400 years in Egypt, God initiates the next stage of his plan: draw this people out and bring them to himself. Through a fumbling murderer named Moses, God rescues Israel from the grip of slavery through the blood of a sacrificed lamb. He then blesses this people with his good Law, and comes to dwell among them in the tabernacle. From Abraham's people, God has created a nation and begins to pour his blessing on them.

Joshua

We pick up the Story this week with God's people on the edge of the Promised Land of Canaan. Though they failed to go in the first time God brought them there, after 40 years of wandering in the desert a new generation of Israelites is ready to take the land God promised. So God raises up a new leader, Joshua, who takes God's people across the Jordan river and into Canaan, driving out the pagan nations. In Joshua 24, God reminds his people of all that he has done to rescue and love them, and Joshua commands the people to respond with grateful obedience to the God who saved them.

If the Exodus, Law, and tabernacle described what God *desired* his relationship with Israel to be, the books of Judges and Kings describes the sad reality of what the relationship *actually was*. As soon as they were in the land, they forgot God, and worshipped other gods. There seemed little hope Israel would ever be faithful to God, nor would the nations ever again receive His blessing.

Judges

One of the most interesting sections of the Story takes place after Joshua's death. During this time Israel was a loose conglomeration of tribes, living in Canaan, but only partially obedient to God's command to drive out all the other nations. The nations that are left entice Israel to worship the Baals, false gods who promise fertility in the family and in the land. The book of Judges traces a haunting pattern: Israel forsakes Yahweh to worship the Baals, so He gives them over to their enemies; Israel cries out to Yahweh for deliverance, so He raises up a military leader, called a judge, and rescues His people. Though Israel repeatedly forgets the Story they are in, God remains consistently faithful.

Kings

The sad story of Israel's failure to hold faithfully to God sets up a new development in the Story. The repeated refrain of the book of Judges is, "There was no King in Israel in those days; everyone did what was right in their own eyes." Israel begins to long for someone who can keep her faithful to God, unite her as a nation, and make her useful to God again. The first King, Saul, though humanly speaking a perfect choice, proves to be just as unfaithful as Israel ever was. So God chooses a humble shepherd, a boy named David, and proceeds to raise him into the kind of King Israel needs. David is far from perfect - he commits adultery and murders the woman's husband - but he understands that God is after the heart, not just the outward actions. David truly loves God and wants to live dependently on him. Can David be longed-for King?

In David we see a man who, though he doesn't obey the law perfectly, models the heart-level relationship that God longed for with all of Israel. When David decides to build a temple for God, God surprises David with a great promise: one of David's sons will be God's King forever. This King will be the one who will perfectly represent Israel in obedience and finally and fully usher in God's blessing on the nations. God promises David that he will one day send this King, later called the Messiah, to do what Israel could never do.

David's son, Solomon, seems at first glance to be this promised King. Solomon begins well - he, too is a worshipper of God, who fulfills David's wish of building a temple for God. And God blesses Solomon with great wisdom, making him a conduit of blessing for the surrounding nations. It seems that God has finally fulfilled his promise: Israel is a nation, in a land of blessing, where God is permanently residing in the temple so he can bless the nations!

Unfortunately, Solomon does not remain faithful to God, and the great kingdom slides into disarray. The promise of God fades into the background as the wickedness of Israel and her kings continues to grow. Increasingly it becomes clear that if God is going to fulfill his Promise to Abraham, it is going to look very different than Israel has thought. What will God do now?

God's people can't remain faithful to God, so they look for someone who can stand in their place. They look for a mediator, and God grants one in King David. Though David fails, God points Israel forward to another humble king who will stand in their place, fight the real giants of sin and death, and win the final victory that brings God's people fully into his blessing!