

Judges

Broken people, faithful God

After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.

Judges 2:10

Bible studies and notes for individuals and groups.
St Phil's Anglican Church Eastwood. 2021.

An introduction to Judges

Background

The book of Judges is the story of the repeated failure of God's people to trust him, yet God continues to remain faithful to his people, Israel. The sinful actions of Israel repeat again and again: God's people turn away from him, their enemies attack, they cry out to God for mercy, and God sends a rescuer (judge) to rescue them. The cycle repeats:

Rebellion → retribution → repentance → rescue

The book follows on from the period after the death of Joshua, one of the greatest leaders of God's people (Joshua 24:29), a time when Israel had served the Lord (Joshua 24:31). The book begins with the question:

"Who of us is to go up first to fight against the Canaanites?" (Judges 1:1).

The question opens up the story of the book of Judges – who will go up to fight? Who will trust the Lord? Who will be obedient to him? And of course, who is in charge?

Moses had been the leader. Joshua had then led the Israelites into the Promised Land. But what now? Who is in charge? Who will lead them? King David and Solomon had not yet arrived on the scene. This was a time between human leaders.

Of course, The LORD is their leader – and always has been. All of Israel should be following him. Yet, as we read in Judges 2:10 –

"After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel."

What the book of Judges shows us is that no matter how broken and unfaithful God's people are, He remains faithful and continues to shower his grace on them, despite their disobedience – a theme which is concluded and fulfilled in the salvation offered through King Jesus.

Outline of Studies

Study 1: Joshua and the Judges.

Judges 2:1-15, 2:16-3:6

Study 2. Ehud

Judges 3:7-11, 3:12-30

Study 3: Deborah

Judges 4:1-17, 4:18-5:3

Study 4: Gideon

Judges 6-8

Study 5: Jephthah

Judges 10:16-12:7

Study 6: Samson

Judges 13-16

STUDY 1: Joshua and the Judges.

Judges 1 – 2

During this study, there will be a lot of plain reading of the Bible text to help give us background and prepare us for the road ahead. Take your time to read the passages and enjoy the narrative.

Opening discussion

“The Old Testament God is a God of war and violence.” Discuss.

READ Joshua 24:19-28

1. What does the final chapter of the book of Joshua tell us about the relationship between Israel and God?

READ Judges 1:1-11

2. What does this introduction tell us about the situation of Israel as we begin reading the book of Judges? What is happening and how does it follow on from the book of Joshua?

READ Judges 1:1-19-36

3. In these verses, how do we see the continuing challenges of driving all the people from the land?

READ Numbers 33:50-56

4. What was the instruction to the Israelites about the takeover of the land of Canaan? **Why** were they to drive out **all** the inhabitants? Compare also Deuteronomy 9:4-6 – to answer the question as to why God wanted the Canaanites destroyed.

READ Judges 2:1-15

5. What is God's response to Israel after their failure in chapter 1 to drive out all the inhabitants of the land? Why such a response?
6. What are the characteristics of this new generation arising after Joshua's death, and how does God deal with them?

READ Judges 2:16-3:6

7. How does God show grace in his response in these verses, and how does Israel respond to his actions?
8. How do these early chapters of Judges reflect the human heart today?

STUDY 2. Ehud

Judges 3:7-30

Opening discussion

Who are our modern day “saviours” or “rescuers”? What are their characteristics and, as a society, how do we treat them?

READ Judges 3:7-11

1. In this first example of the judge Othniel, what is the pattern of Israel’s behaviour and God’s intervention that is happening here?
2. Where does the power of Othniel come from?
3. How many years of peace did they have after this event?

READ Judges 3:12-30

4. What behaviour leads to the Moabites reigning over Israel? Who is responsible for allowing Moab to overtake Israel?
5. Why does God so easily hand over his people into the hands of their enemies?

6. How, if at all, are the (somewhat disgusting) details of this story helpful to us as we read them?

7. What is significant about Ehud being left-handed?

8. How many years of peace did they have after this event?

READ Judges 3:31

9. Why include Shamgar and why is it so brief? What does this story add to the wider story of the time of the Judges?

READ John 5:39

10. How does the book of Judges testify about Jesus?

STUDY 3: Deborah

Judges 4:1-17, 4:18-5:3

Opening discussion

Excluding the usual things like snakes, spiders, heights, and darkness, what are you most afraid of in everyday life? For example: confrontation, arguments, losing your job, receiving bills you can't pay...

READ Judges 4:1-13

1. So, the cycle begins again! Who are the major players – leaders and nations in this event?
2. Deborah is noted also as a prophet. How is this significant?
3. Why is Barak afraid to go on his own, without Deborah?

READ Judges 4:14-23

4. Outline the major events that happen in this battle. Which part of the battle stands out the most? Why?

5. In verse 15 it clearly says “The LORD routed Sisera. What is the purpose of this sort of language (that is, rather than saying “Barak and his army routed Sisera”)?

6. List down the things you know from this passage about:

a. Deborah

b. Barak

c. Sisera

READ Judges 5:1-31

7. What does the song of Deborah add to the story, or your understanding of the people involved and God himself?

8. How many years of peace did they have after this event?

STUDY 4: Gideon

Judges 6-8

Opening discussion

Have you ever tested or questioned God, or asked him to prove something to you? For example: “God, if you want me to do this, give me a sign...”

If so, what made you question him?

There is a lot of reading in this study also. Enjoy the narrative and take notes of anything that stands out to you as you read.

READ Judges 6

1. In what ways were the Midianites oppressing Israel?
2. Why do you think Gideon tests God so many times? And why does God not get angry with him because of this?

READ Judges 7

3. Why did God tell Gideon to reduce the number of fighting men?
4. In verses 13-14, why do you think God gave this man a dream/vision? What part does this play in the story?

5. Was the defeat of the Midianites in verse 22 just clever battle tactics, or was it divinely orchestrated?

6. In verse 22, it says “the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords.” Wasn’t it just dark and they were confused? Why say that the LORD caused it?

READ Judges 8:22-35

7. Why do you think the Israelites again fell into the snare of worshipping objects instead of the LORD? (verse 27)

8. How many years of peace did they have after this event?

STUDY 5: Jephthah

Judges 10:16-12:7

Opening discussion

For what sorts of reasons would you call someone your enemy?

Jephthah is one of the most enigmatic figures of the book of Judges - he is not an easy character to understand. Bear that in mind as you read these chapters!

READ Judges 10:16-11:11

1. What is Jephthah's back-story? Are there any other Biblical characters you can think of who had a similar back-story?

1. What drove the Israelites to beg Jephthah to return and lead their army?

READ Judges 11:12-27

2. Jephthah asks the King of the Ammonites as to why he was attacking Israel. The king of the Ammonites says that he wants his land back (verse 13). How does Jephthah respond? What reasons does he give?

3. "The Spirit of the LORD came on Jephthah" (verse 29). What do you think this means?

4. Why do you think Jephthah makes the promise he does in verse 31? He never needed to say this sort of thing before. Why now?

5. What is the result of Jephthah's promise? How do you feel about this?

READ Judges 12:1-7

6. Why were the Ephraimites against Jephthah? What does this encounter, of Israelites against Israelites, which such a huge number of deaths, tell us about the state of the nation of Israel at the time?

7. Jephthah only led Israel for 6 years. What was the end result of his time as leader?

4. In verse 19, we again see the familiar phrase “Then the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him”. Until now it was not clear to Israel that Samson would be another judge and Saviour of Israel.

Why were the Philistines so desperate to know the answer to Samson’s riddle?

READ Judges 15

5. The chapter starts with yet another conflict between Samson and the Philistines. Why do they treat Samson like this? And how does Samson respond?

6. What or who does Samson’s cry remind you of in verse 18?

READ Judges 16

7. Finally, we reach the “well known” chapter! It starts with our hero visiting a prostitute. Why does God use a person of Samson’s questionable character to be a deliverer for his people?

8. Many see a similarity with Samson and Jesus, especially at this point as he tears down the pillars, bringing death to himself and his enemies. In what way is Samson’s death NOT like Jesus’ death? Compare especially Samson’s words in verse 28.

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