

**Series on the Book of
Judges
Term 2 2019**



Acknowledgements

Resources:

Judges – such a great Salvation by Dale Ralph Davis

Judges for You by Timothy Keller

Judges and Ruth – God in chaos by Barry Webb

Judges, Galatian, Ephesians by Timothy Keller and Richard Coekin

Some of the questions have been taken from these various resources combined with those written by St Paul's staff members.

Some things to keep in mind.

As you go through the book of Judges it is important to keep a couple of things in mind. Firstly, the flow of the book and that it sits between Joshua and Ruth. Joshua is a book where we see Israel claiming her inheritance under God's hand, as well as being an instrument of judgment. Under Joshua Israel obeyed God and they trusted him. The book of Judges begins with a reminder of the ending of their time under Joshua. The book of Ruth, which follows Judges, is set in the time of the Judges and has a mix of the corruption of the Israelites coupled with hope. We meet a man, Boaz, who does treat women well, who recognises his obligations and obeys. We also meet Ruth who is faithful and true. At the end of this book we see a genealogy that leads to the king and redeemer that is desired and needed.

Secondly, Judges sits within the greater story of the Bible. The Bible is one big story made up of lots of smaller stories. To take the book of Judges out of this bigger picture is to leave the reader without hope and a proper understanding. It is a stark critique of the human condition and our need of rescue. As we look forward from the book of Judges to Jesus we see redemption but also how Jesus reforms relationships, trust in God, reorients our distorted desires and idolatrous ways.

Judges follows the time when the God's people entered their inheritance of the promised land under the leadership of Joshua. Judges gives a realistic yet stark view of a people that live without a leader. There is a need for not just a leader but a king who will bring rest and justice that lasts. Judges points us to the need for someone who would fulfil this. It is left with God himself. Judges shows how much greater Jesus is, how much greater his sacrifice, how much greater his kingship, how deeper his grace, how much deeper his power in setting things right rather than seeing them constantly fall into decay. God provided Messiah types to rescue his people each time they cried for help but none of these could lead the people and each judge was worse than the one before. Jesus is the answer to the Judges dilemma of violence and injustice. In books like Judges we can tend to place the blame on God for such decay and allowing such liberty (everyone did as they saw fit Judges 21:25) rather than seeing that he is the remedy for it.

A note about caring for your group as you study this book.

Judges is a challenging, confronting and often violent book. As we see Israel's decline into idolatry and unfaithfulness this is reflected in their lives and their treatment of others. For any survivors of abuse or trauma it is possible that you may find some of the chapters in Judges distressing. Some of the passages may raise memories for you. And you may have questions: Does God approve of these things? Does God care about my own experiences? What should I do if hearing these passages at small group or church affects me emotionally? Where can I go to for support? How does God's Word speak comfort into my pain?

As a ministry team we want you to know that we are grieved by these passages, the impact of sin on our lives and the experiences you have been through. While as a church we want to engage with these difficult passages, we also want to care for and support you. We hope that you will feel comfortable at any stage during this series – at church or in your small group – to leave the room if you need some time to yourself.

We encourage you to approach your small group leader or a staff member about any concerns and support you need. Or contact the Care Minister Jo Gibbs during the week on 8858 1111 or on Sunday through the Welcome Desk.

Some additional services you might find helpful:

- 1800 Respect National Helpline: 1800 737 732
- Women's Crisis Line: 1800 811 811
- Men's Referral Service: 1300 766 491
- Lifeline: 131 114
- Kids' Helpline (ages 5 - 25): 1800 55 1800

Notes from sermon series architect

Preliminary Notes for Leaders

The closing sentence taps into a yearning that resides deep in the soul of every man, woman and child.

In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.
- Judges 21:25

If only there was a king! Not like Abimelech (ch 9). No, we want a king who knows how to rule and lead and care for us such that we live.

We want a king like YHWH:

- The One in Judges because he is the Holy God. Being true to Himself, He punishes sin (in the first instance, in Judges, he brings justice on the Canaanites. Their sin has reached a point. YHWH sends Israel into the Promised Land to administer justice – more of this in sermon one).
- The One who has bound himself by covenant to his people. He will not abandon his people, or his Creation purpose. (Judges 2:1)
- The One who, despite his people's repeated offences, continues to shower grace on them (we will see this over and over again)
- The One who is totally engaged with his people. YHWH is not the mechanised God who simply offers blessing for obedience and punishment for disobedience. As we will see, YHWH is so engaged in relationship with his people he gets to the point of pure and total exasperation. Like Samson, our God gets to a point where the groaning and whining of his people leaves him shoulder drooped, head hung, exasperated. He falls silent which, according to one theologian, is the 'other side of anger'. And yet, YHWH does not give up on his people or his Creation purpose. He continues to lavish grace on his people. How else do we explain the fact that Israel is not destroyed with a Judges 21:26? How else do we explain the movement of Scripture to Ruth (in our English bibles) or 1 and 2 Samuel (in the Hebrew bibles)? These books tell us salvation history means YHWH is at work to provide a King: David and then, as we know from NT, David's greater son, Jesus Christ (Messiah, Anointed King).

In Judges we will see our Great and Good God is not spared the pain of His people's amnesia-powered sin. We may see ourselves, parts of the Western Church and even aspects of SPCH. When we do, we recall Romans 15:4

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

Judges: Its Structure

This is not a book of random stories. It is highly structured.

It begins, 1:1, with a death notice: Joshua has passed (the death noticed is posted a second time in 2:5).

It then picks up God's command from Joshua to take the Promised Land (Joshua 23:1 – 11).

The 2 death notices and the material in 1:1 – 3:5 tell us there are 2 introductions. The one deals with the socio-political environment. The other looks at the religious practices.

These introductions are echoed in the 2 epilogues: chapters 17 – 18 (which deals with religious practices) and chapters 19 – 21 (which deals with the socio-political environment). Note the reversal of the introductions' order.

The Israelites question (1:1) and The LORD's answer (1:2) are echoed with a twist in 20:18. In 1:2 Judah is to go up against the Canaanites (upon whom God is bringing justice. See Dt 9:4 – 6; 18:9 – 14; Lev 18:6 – 30) but in 20:18 Judah goes up against the tribe of Benjamin! These markers call us to learn what happened in between 1: 1-2 and 20:18.

Our learning begins in the introductions.

The root cause is a people's amnesia: they have forgotten YHWH, His saving acts, his Torah (teaching/directions for living in the Promised Land). With amnesia they live with and among the Canaanites and then the Philistines. Israel adopts their world views and gods. Israel plays the harlot thereby. Their unfaithfulness white-ants their love towards YHWH and YHWH's people.

YHWH is understandably angry (remember He is not a mechanised god).

We are told a pattern then:

- Israel suffers amnesia
- she sins (this facet is thrown into the spotlight by the 6 repetitions: "The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD". See 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1),
- God is angry, he hands her over to be punished,
- they cry out,
- he sends a judge/saviour. Sometimes grace is poured out through wildly unexpected people: Ehud, Shamgar, Jael, Samson.

It would be simplex repeating pattern except Judges teaches us with each successive generation the sin of YHWH's people is worse than the one before. The individual lowlight is seen in one judge in particular: Samson. He is THE mirror for Israel (and us?). Total dismay confronts us with the complete disintegration of a people in ch 19 - 21. (Ezekiel 16 offers YHWH's revealing comment on Israel). What we see is a journey to a land far from God's Creation Purpose. We are, if you will, once more taken (way) outside the Garden (or, Cosmic Temple). Even worse – we are left with YHWH's people living as though they were citizens of Sodom. Everything in Ch 19 is designed to this end. Ch 19-21 is one of the most disturbing passages in all Scripture, if not the most disturbing.

Even more perturbing is the realisation that ch 17 – 21 chronologically predate Ch 3 – 16. Ch 17 – 21 date from days of Jonathan, Moses' grandson (18:30) and Phinehas,

Arron's grandson (20:28). It is not long after Joshua's death notices. Despite all YHWH's saving grace activity in Ch 3 - 16 (over some 230+ years) the editor of Judges wants us to see there-has-been-no-progress.

What we are seeing is a people who have been shaped by their world. They should have shaped it (Gen 1:28; plus YHWH's call on Israel to be a working model of his Creation Purpose. Israel was supposed to draw people to YHWH and to life in His Kingdom).