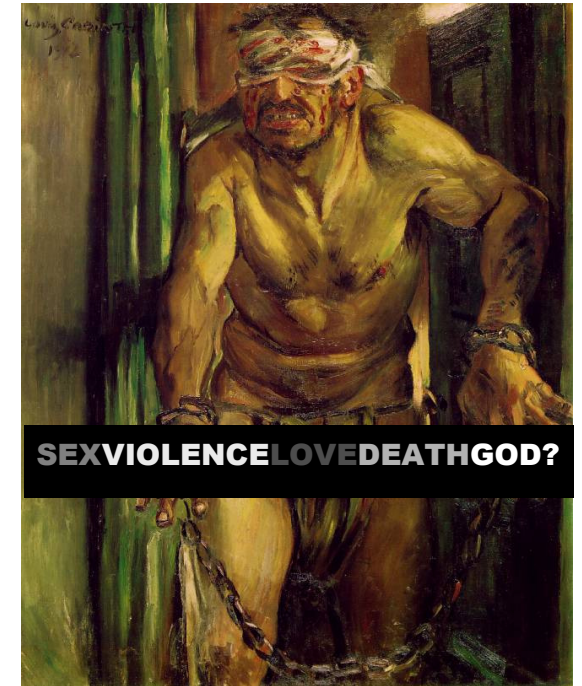


'In those days there was no king in Israel. Each person did as they saw fit.'



Judges 21:25



SEX VIOLENCE LOVE DEATH GOD?

Lovis Corinth, 1912 image reproduced from www.encyclopedia.com

JUDGES



5 bible studies

St John's Maroubra

Introducing Judges

Welcome to the blood and guts horror of the book of Judges. It is hard to imagine that anyone could call the bible a pale book if they have read Judges. At university, an English lecturer showed us one particularly awful chapter and asked 'Now tell me how anyone can believe this book?'. I was shaken.....will you be? And in what way?

author and date

The period of the Judges occurred following the entry of Israel into Canaan under Joshua. Some people suggest there were several versions of Judges before the final version that may have been written as late as Josiah's reformation in 621 BC. Parts of the book such as Deborah's song, seem to be much older than the rest. Certainly what we have now was carefully crafted and composed for us.

Context and theme

Moses, for his sin (cf Deuteronomy 1:37), was forbidden by God to enter the promised land and died on its border. Joshua, his assistant, was commissioned by God (Deuteronomy 1:38) to take Israel into the promised land, driving out the ungodly nations living there (an action which was itself a judgment from God on those nations).

When God had given the Israelites victory and they were enjoying rest from their surrounding enemies, Joshua called together the elders and leaders to farewell them and warn them to keep the covenant. He then called together all of Israel and together they renewed the covenant.

The book of Judges tells of what happens after the death of Joshua as Israel lives in the promised land. God has repeatedly offered them two futures: one of blessing as a result of obedience, or curse as a result of disobedience. Which is it to be?

Week 5: Levite & his Concubine

Decision? How was it made? Outcome?

20:6-11 & 18
20:22-25
20:26-30 & 35 & 47-48

How did the decision making process change? Why? Did that affect the results?

Why does God give the victory in battle to the Benjamites several times before they are defeated?

Going Deeper...

Benjamin shares in the punishment of Gibeah. What was Benjamin's crime?

This story is most obviously about evil in Gibeah and Benjamin, but is the rest of Israel guiltless? What responsibility might they have for what happened? Why?

Are we ever like them -- what do we do when we see open sin within the church (see Colossians 3:5-7 for examples)? Do we share responsibility for it? If we don't stand up against it, do we share in the guilt? If this question raises issues that you have any doubts about or trouble resolving, please talk to Jim!

This episode starts and finishes with the statement that at this time Israel had no king (19:1 and 21:25). What are some of the ways this episode demonstrates the people "doing as they saw fit"? What is the significance of that statement? (Read 1 Samuel 8:1-8.)

Going Deeper...

How did God eventually solve this problem? Divide up the following verses and report back.

Temporarily: 1 Samuel 8:4-18 and 2 Samuel 7:12-16
Permanently: Daniel 7:13-14 Ephesians 1:20-22

How would you say Judges fits into God's plan for the world?

Prayer

Thank God for His word and what we have learnt throughout Judges. Praise God for his plan and pray for us playing our part in it.

Week 5: Levite & his Concubine

Introducing Judges

Outline of the Story (We'll read bits later on the way)

19:1-28 The arrival of a Levite, his concubine, and servant in Gibeah set the scene for a particularly shocking rape-murder.

19:29-20:11 In response the Levite summoned the tribes of Israel who decide to punish Gibeah.

20:12-48 The Benjamites decide to defend Gibeah, and have two victories before being defeated. Only 600 men escaped. Israel destroys the other towns of Benjamin.

21:1-24 Eleven tribes took an oath not to allow their daughters to marry any Benjamite. The 'total war' had left only 600 men, no women or children, so this led to the prospect of the entire tribe of Benjamin disappearing. The rest of the book describes the solution to the tribe of Benjamin disappearing.

Starting Up

Israel was punished for her sin whenever she did evil in God's sight. How is the church, as God's people today, dealt with? Is it different? Why?

Getting into the Story

Read Judges 19:1-4 and 19:11-30

19:30—Why is what's done here worse than all that Israel has done since being rescued from Egypt?

(Compare Genesis 19:1-11. What does this imply about the state of Israel? Why doesn't God react as He does in Genesis?)

How does the Levite's account of what happened 20:4-7 differ from the original account in chapter 19:20-26? Why does he change it? What do you think might have happened if he had told the whole story?

After the Levite summoned Israel in an unusual and grisly fashion, there were several decisions made, each resulting in some action. Look at the following verses and answer the questions for each of the listed verses on the next page.

Structure

1:1-2:5 After the death of Joshua, the conquest is continued.

2:6-21:25 After the death of Joshua, the people live in the Promised Land. After the prologue there are the stories of the judges, several of whom are described in more detail, followed by two other stories (Micah and the Levite with his concubine).

2:6-3:6	Prologue
3:7-11	Othniel
3:12-30	Ehud
3:31	Shamgar
4:1-5:31	Deborah
6:1-8:35	Gideon
9:1-57	Abimelech
10:1-5	Tola followed by Jair
10:6-12:7	Jephthah
12:8-15	Ibzan, Elon, then Abdon
13:1-16:31	Samson
17:1-18:31	Micah
19:1-21:25	The Levite and his concubine, and the consequences for Benjamin

References

- The New Bible Commentary -- the article on the book of Judges
- The New Bible Dictionary -- article on the book of Judges, and the map of Palestine in the time of the Judges.
- New Lion Handbook of the Bible -- the map in the "Introduction to the Old Testament" and the article on the book of Judges
- The Message Of Judges (Series: Bible Speaks Today) (Koorong \$19.95)
- The Jewish Encyclopaedia -- <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com> for a Jewish perspective.

Week 1: Life in the Promised Land

Starting Up

The bible contains a long record of mankind's inability to remember God and remain obedient to Him. Does the church do a good job of remembering and obeying God? Why or why not?

Background to Judges

This study is going to have a glance at the end of the book of Joshua because the expectations for the patterns of Israel's life in the Promised Land are shown there.

Joshua speaks to Israel just before his death . Read Joshua 23:1-13.

What has God done?

What has He promised to continue to do?

What is expected of the Israelites?

What are the consequences of not doing as they are told?

What was the people's response when Joshua urged the people to be faithful to God? Joshua 24:24

How is Israel to ensure continued blessing from God? Compare Joshua 1:8-9 and Deuteronomy 5:32-33 and 6:6.

Does God only bless us if we get things right?

Keep these things in mind as you do the following studies in Judges and see how God's words are fulfilled.

Setting the Scene

Israel's actions as the conquest of the promised land continues following the death of Joshua have enormous consequences. The rest of Judges looks at what they are.

Read Judges 1:1-10 and 2:1-5

When Joshua dies not all of the allotted land has been claimed 1:3. Why not? (See Deuteronomy 7:22-24)

What command did Israel disobey as they conquered the promised land? 2:1-3 What were the immediate consequences? In the long term? How was God testing future generations? 2:3, 2:20-3:6

Chapter 15: Samson and the Philistines

"Do you know that the Philistines are rulers over us?" In this chapter, we see the rise of Samson as Judge who begins to lead Israel.

Where is God in all of this? Throughout this chapter, it seems that Samson's motivation is in his revenge (v. 11). And yet God gives him the strength to achieve it. Why?

How can our terrible plans and God's good plan work together?

Chapter 16: Samson and Delilah

By this stage Samson seems to be more concerned with self-destruction than with saving Israel. First he sleeps with a prostitute and is almost killed for it, then he marries a foreigner who conspires with his greatest enemies. Is there a plan of God in this, or is Samson simply walking in the wrong direction?

Summing up....

Samson is the ambiguous judge!

'...he shall *begin* to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.' (Judges 13:5)

Samson is the only judge who has that qualifier—'begin'. There is something incomplete, tragic, sad and disappointing about Samson. He is a very ambiguous saviour.

What effect does this have on you?

(Let everyone share a bit. This will probably feel open-ended, unresolved and well...ambiguous. That's the story!)

Pray

Why not share some of the horrible ambiguities in your Christian life and commit these areas of weakness and contradiction to God together?

Week 4: Samson

Getting started

From anything you can remember about Samson, what do you think the moral of the story is?

Samson was weak, but God uses weakness

Samson was strong, but God is stronger

Samson is naughty, but God uses naughty people

Philistine women are bad news

Let's get into the story and see what it leads us to.

Story-time!

Get the story-teller to read Samson, get out the popcorn, settle into the lounges....and enjoy! (It should take 10-15 minutes)

NOTE: Work through the following chapters quickly—don't agonise over them.

Chapter 13: the Nazirite

Samson was a Nazirite! A what? (Check out Numbers 6:1-8)

Samson is set aside for God and his mission—read 13:12 again—What mission do you expect?

What does the story with Manoah and the angel add to all this?

Chapter 14: Samson and His First Wife

How many ways does Samson disobey God? Can you count them all?

Why would God allow this disobedience? (14:4)

What does this say about God?

So we see that Samson has rebelled against God and now to make matters even worse, he now appears to treat his vows very lightly and with no sincerity: Check out these verses - 14:8-10

Week 1: Life in the promised Land

What might have led to Israel disobeying God's commands?
How had God prepared Israel so that it shouldn't have happened?
Whose responsibility was it? (see 2:6-10)

Going Deeper...

Does this have a warning for us so many years later and in a different context? (See Hebrews 3:12-15) What is it? What can we do to help you heed that warning?

In the Promised Land 2:6-21:25.

(The New Bible Dictionary articles on Ashera and Baal gives background on the gods of the surrounding nations.)

Read 2:14-19

There is a cycle in this passage which describes life in this time. Identify the parts of the cycle, who is involved and what they do.

verses	Who does what
2:11-13 (also 2:19)	
2:14-15	
2:16-18	

and then back to the beginning of the cycle again!

What is the overall trend throughout the repeated cycles? 2:19

Going Deeper...

What do God's actions show about His character?

What does this cycle suggest about the character of Israel?

How does God react when the Israelites call to Him for help in the following verses (Judges 3:15, 6:7-12, and 10:11-16)? Is there a trend?

Could Israel have prevented this cycle? (Check out Deuteronomy 5:32-6:9ff and Deuteronomy 30:15-20)

Will the way that God responds to the church today differ? If so. Why?

Week 2: Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah

Starting Up

How does the godliness of Christian leadership affect us in the church, home groups, elsewhere?

Context

Although there are so many judges, it is possible to get a reasonable idea of how God used them to rescue His people by looking at just a few.

After the death of Joshua, the cycle of disobedience, punishment and salvation was followed several times before Deborah. We pick it up from Deborah.

Judges 4:1-5:31 Deborah

Read 4:1-22.

The victory of Israel under Deborah has several parts -- the killing of Sisera the commander of the Canaanite army, and the defeat of the army itself, and then the final destruction of Jabin the Canaanite king. How was the defeat the army accomplished? Of Sisera?

Deborah commands Barak in accordance with God's instructions. How does Barak react? Why do you think he acts as he does?

Why do you think Sisera was not destroyed with his army?

5:1-2 gives a verdict on Israel's leaders and peoples—who fares well under this verdict?

Judges 6:1-8:35 Gideon

(Note: We are going to look at Gideon in more depth next week. You can work through this fairly quickly this week.)

The seven years of oppression under Midian is described in detail that paints a much bleaker picture than any of the oppression that Israel has suffered so far.

Gideon is given his task (6:11-18) and called "a mighty man of valour". He responds with a series of objections.

	Objection?	God's answer?
6:13-14		
6:15-16		
6:17-21		
6:22-24		

Why does God allow Gideon to "test" him like this? What was Gideon's aim?

Week 3: Gideon

The Battle

Read 7:1-8 and 19-25

Why did the Lord order Gideon to get rid of his men so that only 300 were left to go into battle against the Midianites?

It seems that really the Lord is the mighty warrior in this story. Gideon is afraid, but God is insistent that he lead Israel against their oppressors.

By the end of the story, we see a changed man in Gideon.

Read 8:13-21

He is punishing those who disobey the Lord with violent retribution.

Think over again Zebah and Zalmunna's final words:

"As is the man, so is his strength."

These are grand words from noble warriors, but what are we to make of this statement as followers of the living God?

Check out 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

Look back over your first list of what you need to do well in life. From the story of Gideon, and Paul's words, evaluate them. Do they matter?

In what areas of your life do you feel the temptation to do things in your own strength? How can you stay 'weak' in these things so that you may get your strength from Christ?

You may feel weak in worldly terms, but you may also feel weak in godly terms. Rest assured, we are to delight in all these weaknesses, knowing that Christ will make us strong for his purposes.

Pray...

Share with each other one of these areas of your life where you struggle to let God in and pray about it. Give thanks that we are loved by a God who will do anything to see us used in his plan.

For Next Week: Someone from the group volunteer to prepare for and give a storytime reading of the story of Samson (Judges 13-16). Plan for popcorn, pyjamas, bedtime reading-lights—whatever will help you have a good storytime.

Week 3: Gideon

List 5 things you think you need to do well in life (includes material things, personal attributes, relationships).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What attributes in Christ or other Christians do you wish you had?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Read Judges 6:11-12

The Lord calls Gideon a “mighty warrior”... But does Gideon really match up to this title?

Keep reading 6:13-18

Each time the Lord calls Gideon to action against the Midianites, how does Gideon react?

Read 6:25-27

Build up an image of Gideon from these verses—is it what you would expect of the Lord's “mighty warrior”?

The Laying of the Fleece

Read 6:36—40

This story of Gideon's laying of the fleece is often used in Christian conversation to justify the exercise of testing God... “Lord, if you want me to do this, then show me by...”

Have you heard or seen this being done?

But this story is actually just one more instance where Gideon's cowardice gets the better of him. The Lord has promised him over and over that He will be with him, but still Gideon needs proof. Yet the Lord puts up with Gideon's reluctance because He has a plan...

Week 2: Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah

What does God then instruct him to do? 6:25-32 Why do you think God asks this of Gideon? What does it show about: God? Gideon? His father? The Israelites in his community?

In 6:36-40 Gideon proposes two tests for God. What does he want to know? Why? Does he really want to know this, or is he just trying to make it hard for God? Why do you think God acts as He does in response?

5:1-2 gives a verdict on Israel's leaders and peoples—how does Gideon fare under this verdict?

Judges 10:6-12:7 Jephthah

Read 11:1-11 & 29—How was Jephthah chosen as the judge? What was God's part in the choice? What did God do following the choice of Jephthah?

The Spirit comes upon Jephthah, Jephthah then makes a vow—11:29-31. Did he need to make this vow?

Jephthah was victorious (11:32-33)! The bible doesn't give an obvious judgment on what Jephthah did with his vow. Will you give a judgment?

Getting the Big Picture....

Look at how these judges differ. Are there any trends?

Character Relationship with God Leadership

Deborah

Gideon

Jephthah

What movement would you say is clear through these 3 Judges? If Judges is a cycle—what way is the cycle heading?

Going Deeper...

Hebrews, in 11:32-34, asserts that the Judges achieved victory through faith. In view of their obvious weaknesses, in some cases apparent lack of faith, and sinfulness, can we take this seriously? Does it imply anything about faith?

(you might consider 2 Cor 12:8-10; Romans 5:6-8;)