



The Circle of Life...

Homegroup Studies in Judges 1-5

Summer 2020

Introduction

Dear friends,

Here are some studies based on a part of Scripture we haven't looked at together yet, Judges 1-5. I hope these notes help you to get into it, and to help you apply the events that took place all those years ago to your lives.

Some notes from the *ESV Study Bible* are included at the end if you would like a bit more background first, including the difficult moral questions about the whole conquest of Canaan.

The studies are undated, as we're having a bit of a flexi-summer due to the current situation.

As always, please do get in touch with me if something doesn't sense, or you just want to check something.

Every blessing,

James

List of studies

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Study 1 *The Promises*

Judges 1:1-26

Intro Q. This study is about promises. What promises have you made recently, or have been made to you?

Pray & read Judges 1:1-26

Q1. Who can remind us where we are in the story or timeline of the Bible?

Q2. What happens in v1-10? How is this a fulfilment of God's promises?

Q3. What do you make of the incident recorded in verses 11-15?
(There could be a link here to Gen 12:1-3 or John 10:10...)

Q4. Albeit imperfectly, how is room made for Israel in the Promised Land in verses 16-26?

Q5. Take a look at Romans 15:4. How is this account of Israel's possession of the land of Canaan of use to us today?

Q6. What are you looking forward to about life in glory, our Promised Land?

Study 2 *The Problems*

Judges 1:27-2:10

Intro Q. This study is about problems. What problems have you come across or experienced recently?

Pray & read Judges 1:27-2:10

Q1. Well done with all those place names! What happens in verses 27-36? (building on 1:19-21)

Q2. How does this compare with what God had called Israel to do? (See Deuteronomy 7:1-10)

Q3. Try and picture what it would have been like to enter Canaan (interesting people, attractive spirituality, need for buildings etc). What may have caused Israel to disobey God's instructions?

Q4. What reasons/ excuses might we give for not keeping God's instructions to us in the Bible?

Q5. Look onto the second half of this passage (2:1-10). What does God say to the people in verses 1-3? Why does this cause tears?

Q6. What's the problem in verses 6-10?

Q7. What might 2:6-10 mean for us as (i) parents, (ii) a church family?

Perhaps have a sing / listen to a song such as 'What a friend we have in Jesus' to finish

Study 3 *The Provocation* **Judges 2:11-3:6**

Intro Q. This study is about provocation, action that causes others to become angry. How many other different emotions can you think of?

Pray & read Judges 2:11-3:6

Q1. Who's provoked in this passage and what by? (v.11-13)

Q2. What happened to God's people as a result? (v.14-15)

Q3. What do we learn about the relationship between God and his people in verses 16-23?

Q4. Look onto 3:1-6. How do the people of Israel get on with God's test in verse 4? What grade would you give them?

Q5. God sometimes tests our faith to see if we do indeed love him and want to follow him (James 1:2-3). What type of tests/trials does he sometimes cause us to go through?

Q6. How is the news of God being (i) Father (ii) Son (iii) Holy Spirit good news for us today?

Finish with some classic 'Thank you – Sorry – Please' prayers

Study 4 *The Provision*

Judges 3:7-31

Intro Q. This study is about provision. If you were to go off on a nice long walk what different things might you need?

Pray & read Judges 3:7-31

Q1. What are your first reflections on this passage?

Q2. Verses 7-11 give the pattern for the book of Judges. What is it?

Q3. What do you make of the story of Ehud and Eglon in verses 15-30?
Why all the details?!

Q4. What does this extraordinary tale tell us about how God saves?

Q5. An ox goad was a piece of farming equipment – a stick with a spikey end. What does verse 31 tell us about how God saves?

Q6. Do you ever wonder whether the message of Jesus dying on a cross to save us is really true? How does this passage help us believe that it really is?

Thank the Lord for his incredible provision for us

Study 5 *Girl Power*

Judges 4

Intro Q. This study is about being humbled. Can you think of an occasion when another person has done something better than you? How did you feel?

Optional extra intro Q. Which was / is your favourite Spice Girl? ;)

Pray & read Judges chapter 4

Q1. What situation are God's people in again by verse 3?

Q2. What do you make of verses 4-10?

Q3. Thinking about the culture of the day, how was it significant that Sisera was to be given 'into the hand of a woman.' (v. 9)?

Q4. Look on to verses 12-24. What happens in the Barak vs Sisera showdown?

Q5. How do you think Barak would have felt in verse 22? How is the Christian gospel both great and humbling news?

Q6. On the flip side, do you ever feel too insignificant for God to use you? How are verses 17-22 both an encouragement and a spur for such times?

Q7. How is this story a great encouragement for God's persecuted people across the world?

Q8. How would you summarise this chapter in a short sentence?

Praise God for his salvation!

Study 6 *Getting Involved* Judges 5

Intro Q. This study is about involvement. What different projects or organisations have you been involved with over the years?

Pray & read Judges chapter 5

Q1. What are your first impressions of / questions about this passage?

Q2. Look first at verses 1-11. What do we learn about God and his people?

Q3. We learn in Judges 4:3 that God arose because his people cried out to him. What do you long to see God do in the world? How much are you praying about this?

Q4. Look next at the last line of verse 11 up to the end of verse 23. Who gets involved in fighting off the enemy and who doesn't?

Q5. How available are you for the great task of bringing salvation here in Elburton? Who could you point towards the Lord over the summer and how?

Q6. Now look onto verses 24-31. How does the story end for (i) Jael and (ii) Sisera's mother?

Q7. Why is the ultimate eradication of God's enemies good news? (See 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10)

Q8. You might like to finish these studies with the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). In what ways could this prayer be considered a fitting way to end?

Notes from the ESV Study Bible

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Introduction to Judges

The name of the book of Judges comes from the title given to the 12 leaders (“judges,” whose temporary leadership was both civil and military) of Israel during the period between Joshua and Samuel. The book is anonymous; nowhere in Scripture is any author indicated. The book consists of various blocks of material about different judges, which conceivably could have been written by multiple authors over a period of time. Late Jewish tradition ascribes authorship to Samuel, which is certainly possible. However, in the end, the book’s author is not known.

The events in Judges took place in the period between Joshua’s death (either mid-14th or late-13th century B.C.) and the rise of Samuel and Saul (mid-11th century).

The book of Judges was written to show the consequences of religious apostasy and to point the way to a king who, if righteous, would lead the people to God. In contrast to the serene way in which the book of Joshua ends—with all Israel obeying God’s commands, for the most part—the book of Judges shows that, in fact, Israel began to disobey God even during the time of Joshua. This disobedience continued and grew more serious—and more debased—throughout the period of the judges. Time and again Israel turned its back on God and embraced the gods and the ways of the Canaanites, as the introductory summary in 2:16–23 indicates. Israel’s history unfolded in this period in a cyclical or repetitive way: each cycle took Israel further downward in its debasement and apostasy. By the end of the book, Israel had violated its covenant with God in almost every way imaginable.

Canaanite religion and culture. The major problem for Israel during the period of the judges was its penchant for turning away from the Lord and toward the gods of the Canaanites. What was it about Canaanite religion and culture that proved to be such an irresistible attraction? The land of Canaan was awe-inspiring to the Israelites, as can be seen in the story of the spies who reported on its wealth and strength (Numbers 13). To a recently freed slave people, accustomed to the hardships of life in the wilderness, the cosmopolitanism and material wealth of Late-Bronze-Age Canaan, with its large urban centers, could not have failed to impress. The Canaanites were clearly superior to the Israelites on many levels: art, literature, architecture, trade, political organization, and more. It is not difficult to see how the Israelites would have been tempted by the elaborate Canaanite religious system, which ostensibly supported—and even provided—all of this.

One prominent feature of Canaanite religion was its highly sexualized orientation. The system of sacred prostitutes—“priestesses” of Baal—allowed people to combine sensual pleasures with worship of Baal. This undoubtedly was attractive to many Israelites (cf. the Israelites seduced by the Moabite women in Numbers 25).

The Destruction of the Canaanites

The account in Joshua [and Judges] presents the sensitive reader with a deep problem, namely, the apparently wholesale slaughter of the indigenous Canaanite population in order to allow the people of Israel to occupy their land. How did Israel have any right to seize that land? And how can it be God’s will for them to spare none of those who resisted them in defense of their own land? Could this be a level of barbarism that God tolerated in the OT but now forbids in the NT? Well

certainly people hostile to the Bible decry ancient Israel for its “ethnic cleansing,” and many sensitive Christians find this deeply troubling as well. To handle the topic thoroughly would take a longer essay, but the discussion here can guide thoughts for fuller reflection.

One must begin by acknowledging that the questions are legitimate. Christians rightly condemn this kind of behavior in other circumstances, and there is no warrant today for nations to destroy other nations in order to take their land. But there are special features of the command to Israel that both make it unique (and therefore not open to be imitated) and allow it to be seen in a moral light. This command is one reason why Exodus records the call of Moses in such detail (Ex. 3:1–4:17; cf. Num. 12:1–15): Moses is God’s unique choice to be the lawgiver for his people, and the commands given through Moses come from God’s own mind (cf. Deut. 18:15–20). Believers accept God’s appointment of Moses to speak his will. Without this command from God as delivered through Moses, Israel would have had no right to the land.

A second point to clarify is that the Pentateuch sets out laws of warfare, distinguishing between battles fought against cities outside the Promised Land (Deut. 20:10–15) and those fought against cities inside the land (Deut. 20:16–18). It is only the latter case that requires Israel to spare no one (“you shall devote them to complete destruction”); see the notes on Deuteronomy 20:1–20 and 20:16–18. The law appears to be unconditional and implacable. With these clarifications, one can now outline why this command is not an unsolvable “problem.”

(1) A fundamental OT conviction is that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the Creator of all there is, and therefore the owner of all lands. He has the right to distribute territories according to his good and holy will (cf. Ex.

19:5; Ps. 24:1). As the universal Creator, he is also the universal Judge, to whom all people everywhere are accountable: cf. Genesis 6–8 (the flood story affects all kinds of people); Genesis 11:1–9 (the Tower of Babel); Exodus 12:12 (judgment on the gods of Egypt); the prophetic oracles about the nations. The NT shares this basic conviction: cf. Acts 14:15–16; 17:24–31. This means that God has the ultimate rights over the land of Canaan, and that he has the right to bring the Canaanites to judgment for their moral condition and deeds.

(2) Since all people are sinners, all are rightly subject to God’s judgment. The Pentateuch gives a moral rationale for the removal of the Canaanites, seeing it as divine judgment for their iniquities (see Gen. 15:13–16; cf. Lev. 18:24–30; Deut. 9:5). This action against these peoples, then, is an expression of God’s judgment on them through the agency of Israel. This judgment therefore announces the moral nature of God to the whole world for their instruction (that announcement in all its clarity is itself part of the blessing that Israel is to bring to the whole world). In ways that are not entirely clear, the faithful will participate with God in carrying out the final judgment (1 Cor. 6:2; cf. Ps. 149:6–7), and Israel’s bringing of judgment on the Canaanites foreshadows that great responsibility as well (see Josh. 6:17).

God’s judgment allows no double standard: he did not base his choice of Israel on any merit of theirs (Deut. 7:6–9), and he calls them to embrace his love faithfully. Unfaithfulness will lead to judgment upon Israel itself, whether at the level of the individual (Ex. 22:20) or the whole people (Josh. 7:11–12; Mal. 4:6; cf. Lev. 18:28). This cannot be called “ethnic cleansing,” since the treatment is just, regardless of ethnicity.