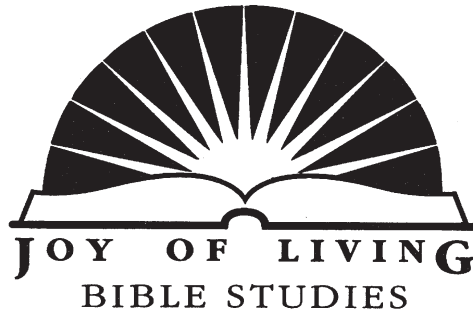


Judges & Ruth

Lesson 1



God's Call, God's Promise (Genesis 11-35)

Although the events related in Judges take place between 1000 and 1400 B.C., the story begins with one man over a thousand years earlier in the city of Ur of the Chaldees. The descendants of Noah had spread out, multiplied and populated the earth, and they had again abandoned the God who created them.

Yet God had not abandoned man. He called one man, Abram, and told him that if he would leave his country and go to a land God would show him, He would make of Abram a great nation, give him that land, and bless all the world through him. (It would be through his descendants that the Savior of the world would come.) In faith Abram (later called Abraham) obeyed God.

Abraham settled in the land that God led him to, the land of Canaan, and lived for many years among the heathen people who dwelt there, yet he remained childless. When Abraham questioned God about this childlessness the Lord reassured him that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, and then the Lord spoke to him of these future offspring, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for *the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure*" (Genesis 15:13-16, italics added). This is important to remember as we study the book of Judges.

Well, Abraham finally had a son, Isaac, to whom the promises were given, and he in turn had a son, Jacob, to whom the promises were given.

From a Family to a Nation (Genesis 46—Exodus 18)

Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel, had 12 sons. When Jacob was an old man he, his sons and their families (70 people in all) went into Egypt to escape starvation during a great famine. One of the sons, Joseph, was already there and in great power. He was second only to the pharaoh, and because of this, the family was well cared for.

However, generations passed and the children of Israel (Jacob) grew in numbers. A new pharaoh arose and was fearful of this great number of foreigners living within the borders of his land. To protect himself and his country, he placed the Israelites in bondage, where they remained for nearly 400 years.

As always, God was faithful, and in His time He raised up a man named Moses to lead them out of bondage. With great and mighty miracles God delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians and led them to the land He had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

A Covenant Made — A Covenant Broken (Exodus 19 — Joshua)

Prior to their entering the Promised Land, the general area of Israel today (see map on page 57), God made a covenant with the Israelites. At Mount Sinai God said to them, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6). They agreed to serve the Lord and obey His commands. He gave them His Law and promised to bless them as long as they served Him. But even as God gave them His glorious Law, they were rebelling against Him and worshipping other gods. And so began the cycle of God's blessing, Israel's rebellion, God's disciplining, their repentance, and God's deliverance and blessing again.

Because of their continued disobedience and rebellion, the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years after leaving Egypt and prior to entering the Promised Land. God, however, miraculously provided for them during that time. Finally, poised on the verge of entering the Promised Land, God designated Joshua, son of Nun, to lead them in the conquest of their new homeland. The final chapter of the book of Joshua states, "Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel" (Joshua 24:31).

God's Plan

The Bible unfolds for us God's beautiful plan to redeem mankind and restore to us everything that was lost in the Garden of Eden. The conquest of Canaan and the consequent removal of the ungodly and

wicked people living there were part of God's plan. God chose (see Romans 9:4-5):

- ☛ To establish Israel as a "holy nation" (Exodus 19:6),
- ☛ To give them His laws and the temple worship,
- ☛ To reveal to them His glory, and,
- ☛ Through them to bring forth the Messiah, the Savior, to redeem the world.

Acts 17:26 relates a truth we either don't know or often forget: "From one man [Adam] he [God] made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he [God] determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live." This is God's world; we are God's creation. God determines the *where* and the *when*...and God had promised the land of Canaan to Abram (and his descendants). As we learned at the beginning of this lesson, God warned Abram that his descendants would be enslaved for 400 years, but "in the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure" (Genesis 15:16).

The Amorites were one of the Canaanite peoples, all of whom were to be driven out of the land because of their wickedness.¹ God had given them over 400 years to repent, but they hadn't responded. In Exodus 23:23-24, God told Moses, "My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces."

In the Bible's account of Israel's conquest of the Promised Land, we read about slaughter that we would normally view as an atrocity. We must realize, however, that God is the giver of life, and He has the right to determine how many years each person lives. If He decrees that a people are to be wiped out or destroyed, He does so in righteousness. In the case of the Canaanites, He had given them over 400 years to repent, yet they had refused.

Deuteronomy 32:3-4, 39-41 says, "I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.... [The Lord says] 'See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand. I lift my hand to heaven and declare: As surely as I live forever, when I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me.'"

We must trust and believe that God is who He says He is—holy, just, righteous, good, wise, merciful, loving, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. We cannot judge His actions from our limited understanding. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. As the heavens

1. Perhaps God intended "the Amorites" in Genesis 15:16 to represent all of the Canaanite peoples.

are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." We must trust who He is.

Allotment of the Land

Within the Promised Land, each Israelite tribe was given areas of land. Remember, the Israelites were the descendants of Abraham, through his son Isaac, through his son Jacob. Each tribe of Israel consisted of the descendants of each of Jacob's (Israel's) sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, and Benjamin. (You can learn more about this family and these men in the Joy of Living study on Genesis.)

There is no tribe named Joseph because his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were adopted by Jacob (Genesis 48:5); therefore they are known as half-tribes. The tribe of Levi was not given a portion of land because they were chosen to be the keepers of the tabernacle (later the temple) and its furnishings (see Numbers 1).

The Book of Judges

The book of Judges opens immediately after the death of Joshua, and we see the continuing cycle of God's blessing, Israel's rebellion, God's disciplining, their repentance, and God's deliverance and blessing again.

Judges covers the period in Israel's history after the death of Joshua until the establishment of the monarchy under King Saul. We will study Judges chapters 1-16, which is the main body of the book. (Chapters 17-21 of Judges are appendices to the book, and do not refer to any of Israel's judges or to the times of oppression suffered by the people of Israel. We will not address these chapters in this study.)

The Land

As you read through the book of Judges, look at the locations on the maps on page 57 and consider the terrain as it is described in the Bible passage. The terrain—the physical features of the location—determined whether or not that particular area was suitable for human settlement and how they would survive: Was there water? Would it be good land for crops? Could it only be used for grazing sheep?

The terrain also determined how a particular area could be attacked and conquered, or, how it could be defended against invaders: How would troops and materials be moved? How would supplies be obtained?

The Book of Ruth

The book of Ruth is set during the time of the judges. A beautiful story of love and grace, it reminds us that no matter how evil the time, God has His people; no matter how hopeless a situation may seem, God is greater (see Romans 5:20; 11:4-5). No matter what, God's plan and purpose will be accomplished (see Psalm 33:11).

Study Questions

Before you begin your study this week:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the “Challenge” questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the “Personal” questions with the class only if you want to share them.
- ☞ Each day the assigned Scripture may include long passages. If necessary you may read only the specific portions cited for each question. If you have more time, you may wish to read the entire assigned passage.

First Day: Read the Introduction to Judges and Ruth.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the Introduction to Judges and Ruth or from your teacher’s lecture? What personal application did you choose to apply to your life?

2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, tack it to your bulletin board, on the dashboard of your car, etc. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its “address” (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Scan Judges 1-5, concentrating on 1:1—2:5.

1. a. Challenge: To understand the Israelites’ situation at this time, read Moses’ instructions to them in Deuteronomy 7:1-11. Who would bring Israel into the Promised Land, drive out the nations before them, and “deliver them over” to Israel? (Deuteronomy 7:1-2a)

b. What was Israel’s responsibility? (Deuteronomy 7:2b-3,5)

2. From Judges 1:19-21,27-35, did Israel obey God’s command to completely drive out or destroy the Canaanite peoples? Write down phrases that summarize Israel’s situation at this time.

3. What human or natural reasons are given for Israel’s failure to completely take possession of the land in Judges 1:19 and 27?

4. What did the angel of the Lord say was the real reason for their failure? (Judges 2:1-2)

5. a. What would be the consequences of Israel’s disobedience? (Judges 2:3)

b. How did the people respond to this message from the Lord? (Judges 2:4-5)

6. Personal: We, too, suffer the consequences of our disobedience to God, our sin. Even after we repent and confess our sin, and are forgiven through the work of Jesus Christ, the consequences of our past actions often remain as “thorns” in our sides. In what way has your past sin been a thorn in your side?

Third Day: Review Judges 1-5, concentrating on 2:6—3:6.

1. a. Challenge: Judges 2:6 begins, "After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites..." In Joshua 24, Joshua had gathered the people of Israel and reviewed the great things God had done for them. What choice did he offer them in Joshua 24:14-15?

b. What was the people's answer? (Joshua 24:24)

2. How long did the people of Israel continue to serve the Lord, according to Judges 2:7?

3. After the death of the generation that had personally experienced the reality of God, Israel began a cycle that was repeated many times in the book of Judges. What do you learn about the steps of this cycle in the following verses? Summarize briefly.

sin (Judges 2:11-13)

defeat and slavery (Judges 2:14-15)

salvation (Judges 2:16,18)

more sin (Judges 2:17,19)

4. When Israel violated God's covenant, He declared that He would no longer drive out the remaining Canaanite people from the Promised Land. For what two purposes did God use the presence of the nations left in Canaan? (Judges 2:22; 3:1-2)

5. a. Review Deuteronomy 7:2b-3. What had God commanded Israel regarding the people in the land of Canaan?

b. What did the Israelites actually do? (Judges 3:5-6)

6. Personal: The generation after Joshua fell into sin. They had not seen the miracles their fathers had talked about; they had not personally experienced the reality of God. As Christian parents, we can teach our children about God, but each one, as they reach adulthood, must make their own commitment to follow Him. Some may choose to go their own way; the best, and sometimes only, thing we can do is pray for them. Have you experienced this situation? What encouragement do you receive from Proverbs 22:6?

Fourth Day: Review Judges 1-5, concentrating on 3:7-31.

1. a. How is the cycle of sin/defeat and slavery/salvation (see Third Day, Question 3) borne out in Judges 3:7-11? Summarize briefly.

- b. How was Othniel empowered to deliver Israel? (Judges 3:10a)
2. Whom did the Lord next give power over Israel, and why? (Judges 3:12)
3. Whom did the Lord raise up to deliver Israel, and why? (Judges 3:15)
4. How long did Israel live in peace after this deliverance? (Judges 3:30)
5. Who was the third judge of Israel, and how did he deliver Israel from an oppressor? (Judges 3:31)
6. Personal: It's so easy to wonder, "Why didn't Israel learn from the past? Why did they keep falling into sin?" Remember, the passage we read today covers almost 150 years—many generations would have come and gone during this time. The main point is, God was faithful to answer His people's cry for help when they finally did remember Him and call out to Him. Has God used difficult times to try to get your attention? What have you learned from these times?

Fifth Day: Review Judges 1-5, concentrating on 4-5.

1. a. Judges chapters 4 and 5 are parallel accounts—chapter 4 in prose and chapter 5 in poetry—of the same period in Israel under the leadership of the next judge. From Judges 4:1 and 5:8a, why were the Israelites being oppressed?
 - b. From Judges 4:2-3 and 5:6-8, what were conditions like for the Israelites?
2. What do you learn about Deborah the judge from Judges 4:4-5?
3. a. At God's command, whom did Deborah send for, and what did she tell him? (Judges 4:6-7)
 - b. How did Barak show a lack of faith? (Judges 4:8)
 - c. What did Deborah warn him would be the result of this? (Judges 4:9a)
4. a. What did the commander of the Canaanites do when he heard of Israel's troop movements? (Judges 4:12-13)
 - b. Humanly speaking, Barak's hastily gathered army had no chance against such might.¹ How did Deborah challenge and encourage Barak? (Judges 4:14)

1. Frank E. Gaebelin, editor. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990)

5. Challenge: Throughout Israel's history, God continually reassured His people. In the following verses, did Moses and Isaiah tell the people that they would not have to fight at all, or that they would not have to pass through any difficulties? What was God's reassurance?

Deuteronomy 20:4

Deuteronomy 31:6

Isaiah 43:1-2

6. Personal: If you are a Christian, God also goes ahead of you and with you, no matter what difficulties you face. What are you facing today? How would it change your attitude and actions if you truly believe that God always goes ahead of you and is with you?

Sixth Day: Review Judges 1-5, again concentrating on 4-5.

1. From Judges 4:15-16 and 5:20-21, what happened in the battle? Who was responsible for the victory?

2.
 - a. Who were the Kenites, according to Judges 4:11?

 - b. Sisera knew the Kenites were on good terms with his king. What happened after he tried to hide in Jael's tent? (Judges 4:17-22; summarize briefly)

 - c. How did this fulfill Deborah's words in Judges 4:9a?

3. What resulted from the defeat of Sisera? (Judges 4:23-24; 5:31)

4. What did Deborah and Barak do after the victory? (Judges 5:1-5)

5. Personal: Do you remember to praise God for all that He has done for you? Do you praise Him so that others can hear about His greatness? Write down your praise here. Whom will you share it with?