

# Judges & Ruth

God's *Faithfulness* Remains

women's | BIBLE STUDY

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LESSON *One*

Failure to Conquer the Land

**J**oshua, the successful leader of Israel, died. Though he was faithful in many ways, Joshua did not raise another God-fearing leader to take his place. This lack of leadership and an increasing tolerance for sin, caused chaos to ensue. God instructed Israel to drive out or destroy the Canaanites, the people inhabiting the Promised Land, so their hearts would not be swayed toward foreign gods. Yet, as Israel attempted to take control of Canaan, they made small compromises. This is when we enter their story. Israel's military was failing to fully conquer Canaan as God instructed. Yet this military failure was only a symptom of a deeper problem. Ultimately, their problem was spiritual.

### HELPFUL HINTS FOR STUDYING JUDGES:

First, before the time of the judges, God told Israel to destroy, or drive out, the people living in the land of Canaan. Why? Because **God loved His people fiercely and did not want their hearts to be swayed by foreign gods.** It was an act of protection as Israel went into the land God promised their forefathers (Genesis 12:1-3). This conquest, however, had some allowances. If the Canaanites fled, God said to let them go. If they repented from their sin and placed their faith in God, Israel was to accept them. If the Canaanites fought, however, rebelling against God and His chosen people, Israel was to kill them. While God cared for His creation, it was a sign of judgment because the people continually rejected Him. Ultimately, this conquest was less about the Canaanites and much more about their sin of idolatry. What you will see throughout Judges is that God was just as concerned with Israel's sin as he was with the sin of the Canaanites.

Second, during this time, the Israelites were living under the Old Covenant, a promise made between God and the nation (under the leadership of Moses). This covenant, also known as the Mosaic Law, included the Ten Commandments, the sacrificial system, dietary laws, and other rules distinguishing Israel from all other people. **The covenant was conditional, meaning if Israel obeyed God's law, they would experience blessing; if they did not, they would experience hardship (Deuteronomy 28).** When Jesus came, He fulfilled the Old Covenant and established a new, unconditional covenant. Under this covenant when you believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus, you receive the forgiveness of sin and are adopted into God's family. As part of the New Covenant, you receive the Holy Spirit, who empowers you to walk in God's ways. Believers today, due to God's grace, are no longer under the Old Covenant.

Lastly, throughout the book of Judges we witness the people of Israel cause their own downfall. It can be easy to compare your repeated mistakes to theirs and get discouraged. However, challenge yourself to learn from their example. Set your eyes on God and see how His faithfulness remains.

### ENTIRE PASSAGE

In every lesson you will be asked to read the entire passage before answering the questions. This will help you get a broader picture of the story before jumping into the details.

**Read the Introduction (pages 8-10) and Judges 1:1-2:5 before answering the following questions.**

1. Read Exodus 19:3-6 and Joshua 24:14-31. These passages describe the conditional covenant made between Israel and God under Moses. What was the consequence if Israel did not follow God's instructions?

- List the repeated words/phrases you notice while reading Judges 1:1-2:5. Do you see any themes after looking at these repeated ideas?

**Read Judges 1:1-21.**

- What does Israel do in verses 1-2?
- Verses 11-15 describe the situation surrounding the city of Debir, as well as introduce Caleb and Othniel. Where do you see Caleb's daughter, Achsah, take initiative?

Describe a time you took initiative in a way that honored the Lord and helped other people.

- According to verses 16-22, where is the Lord in their battles?

**Read Judges 1:22-36.**

- Remember God had instructed Israel to destroy the Canaanites. Now consider: How did the house of Joshua conquer Bethel? What is the problem with this situation?

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## THEMES

Some chapters will list many names and places. Do not worry about remembering them. Instead, look for the bigger themes, such as God's character and the deceitfulness of sin.

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## SUCCESS

"The initial success of the conquest had been due to God's blessing on His obedient people. The complete extermination of the Canaanites, and the Israelites' full possession and enjoyment of the land, would require the same obedience and blessing."<sup>1</sup>

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## JOSHUA

Joshua took over the leadership of Israel after Moses. To read more of his story, see Deuteronomy 31:1-8 and Joshua 1:1-9.

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## MAIN IDEAS

As you move through Judges, here are two questions to continually ask yourself: "How is Israel doing what is right in their own eyes?" and "Where is God in this story?" Both are useful to understand the main ideas of the book.<sup>2</sup>

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## 12 TRIBES

In Genesis, God chose Abraham to be the one through whom He would bless the nations of the world. Abraham fathered Isaac, and Isaac fathered Jacob (later known as Israel). Jacob had 12 sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.

## TRIBE OF JOSEPH

The tribe of Joseph eventually became known by his son's names, Ephraim and Manasseh.

## TRIBE OF JUDAH

God set aside the tribe of Judah as leaders among Israel (Genesis 49:8-12). It would not have been surprising that they would be the first to fight the Canaanites.<sup>3</sup>

## CHARACTERS

This section of Scripture introduces some characters the original audience of Judges would have known. First, Caleb, who was leading under Moses when Israel was called to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 13). Second, Othniel, who would be the first judge over Israel (Judges 3:7-11).

## CALEB'S PROMISE

Caleb promises his daughter to the conqueror. While strange for readers today, the writer of Judges frames it in a positive light. This was so Achsah would "have a worthy husband and that [Caleb] would have a capable son-in-law who shared his faith and courage."<sup>4</sup>

## ACHSAH

"Hardly passive, Achsah grasps the opportunity to get more of "the land" (something neither her father nor her husband have considered). ...Achsah is the first woman mentioned in Judges, and her exceptional spiritual qualities are greatly extolled."<sup>5</sup>

7. From verses 27-36, fill out the chart below.

VERSES	TRIBE	WHAT HAPPENED?
27-28	Manasseh	
29	Ephraim	
30	Zebulun	
31-32	Asher	
33	Naphtali	
34	Dan	

In light of this chart, what is the main point of this section? What does this teach you about Israel's relationship with God?

8. What is wrong with compromising in our obedience to God's commands? (See 1 John 2:3-6.)

**Read Judges 2:1-5.**

9. Compare Israel in Judges 1:1-2 and Judges 2:1-5. What differences do you see in Israel from the beginning of this passage to the end?
  
10. How is God going to use Israel's enemies (Judges 2:3)? What is your reaction to God's plan? (See Deuteronomy 8:5 and Hebrews 12:5-7 for help.)
  
11. Israel's problem conquering the land ultimately has spiritual roots. Yet, even in their disobedience, God's faithfulness remained. Where do you see evidence of God's faithfulness despite Israel's disobedience in this week's passage? (See Appendix: Faithfulness.)
  
12. Sometimes starting a story with the end in mind can be helpful. Judges 21:25 says, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." When was a time you did what you wanted with little regard for God or others? How does this help you relate to Israel?

"Essentially, the Israelites said: We could not. And God answers here: You would not. It is worth asking ourselves: Where am I saying, "I can't" but God is saying "You won't"? Israel's failure to obey was based on what they saw as good reasons—God said they were flimsy excuses. Why? Because "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear" (1 Corinthians 10:13). God will never put us in a position where we cannot obey him."

— *Tim Keller*<sup>8</sup>

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## MAP

Understanding the geography of Canaan helps you understand the breadth of Israel's successes and failures. Use the map on page 11 as a resource while studying Judges and Ruth.

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## PARTIAL OBEDIENCE

Notice how Israel's trouble with the Canaanites increased over time. This is a consequence of partial obedience. Partial obedience is still disobedience. Israel did take possession of the land as God commanded, but they did not drive out its inhabitants.

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## ANGEL OF THE LORD

"The angel of the Lord was God's representative, speaking authoritatively to the people about their apostasy."<sup>6</sup>

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## MORAL CHAOS

"...in the midst of the moral chaos depicted in this book, we see a God who is patient and compassionate as He disciplines and preserves His covenant people."<sup>7</sup>

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## GOD'S INSTRUCTION

Read Numbers 33:50-56 to recount God's instructions to the Israelites upon entering the land of Canaan.

## FAILURE

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Judges 1 is historical; it reveals Israel's military failure. Judges 2 is theological; it reveals Israel's spiritual failure, which is ultimately the root of their problems.

13. Despite their rebellion, God remained faithful to Israel. Today, thousands of years later, His character remains unchanging. According to the following passages, how does God remain faithful to you even when you are unfaithful to Him?

*Lamentations 3:22-23*

*Ephesians 2:4-5*

*Titus 3:3-5*

## BIG IDEA

What is your biggest takeaway from this week's lesson?

Notes