

JUDGES

SENDING A SAVIOUR

Freshchurch Growth Group Studies 2010

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES

Do you remember that 1980's American television show, 'The A Team'? It's recently been remade, but there was that line at the beginning of the show, '*They survive as soldiers of fortune. If you have a problem, if no one else can help, and if you can find them, maybe you can hire the A-Team*'. And they were an eccentric crew of tough guys, who would get caught up in all sorts of situations which involved lots of explosions and fisty-cuffs along the way.



The Old A-Team

The colourful and often violent Old Testament book of Judges is sort of like the 'A-Team' but with some important differences. The judges of Israel weren't all soldiers, and in fact they weren't all men. But the biggest difference is that Israel never called on the judges for help. Rather, Israel called on their God to rescue them, and it was then God who raised up the judges.



The New A-Team

What we'll discover is that this book is set in the period after Israel has taken possession of the promised land. It's 'the dark ages' before the time of the kings, when Israel is stuck in a cycle of disobedience and unfaithfulness that is only getting worse. It's in this period that God provides a succession of judges to rescue the people, but it becomes clear they aren't the final solution to Israel's continuing rebellion. We are left wondering—how God can possibly stay faithful to a people who are so determined to rebel against him?



The Original A-Team

Two Tips for Studying Judges

1. Judges is great literature. Appreciate it! Don't be afraid of celebrating the great victories, enjoying the dark irony, and being stunned by the terrible tragedies. It might help to read the passage before you get to growth group. Perhaps you could also do some dramatic readings, where different people in the group read different parts of the story.

2. Learning from stories has it's own method. It's different to learning from other kinds of writing in the Bible. Stories are a powerful way of communicating but, unlike Paul's letters for example, they communicate indirectly. Stories teach using tools like the plot, the characters, the narrator's comments, word plays and variations of patterns. To find the main point of a story you need to look for how these tools have been used to give a main point. Then you work out how the main point applies to us as Christians. This might sound like a daunting process, but that's what these studies are designed to help you do.

Thanks to Andrew Richardson from Clayfield Presbyterian Church, Phil Campbell from Mitchelton, and Andrew Poyser. These studies are adapted from their previous series on Judges.

THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM

JUDGES 1-2

BACKGROUND BRIEFING

The book of Judges begins after the death of Joshua, Israel's great military leader. Just before he died he gathered the Israelites and gave them a pep talk. **Read Joshua 23:4-7:**

⁴ Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain--the nations I conquered--between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west. ⁵ The LORD your God himself will drive them out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you. ⁶ "Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. ⁷ Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. ⁸ But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.

What does Joshua say will happen after his death? What does he urge the Israelites to do?

STARTING WITH A BANG...

Read Judges 1:1-18

In v 5-15 we get two 'snapshots' which give us an insight into the kind of things that happened with Joshua's campaign that the tribe of Judah is continuing on.

1. The first snapshot talks about Adoni Bezek (v 5-7). What happens to him?
2. Did Adoni-Bezek get what he deserved?
3. As a representative picture, what does this gory little snapshot tell us about Judah's campaign?

In v 12-15 we meet the first of a number of prominent women who feature in the book of Judges

4. What kind of character is Achsah?
5. Would God approve of her request? Why/Why not?

GRINDING TO A HALT...

Read Judges 1:19

6. Would Joshua have been surprised to read verse 19? Why?

At first Judah has lots of success. With Adoni Bezek we see that they are God's instruments of justice, giving the Canaanites the kind of treatment they deserved. Achsah shows her resourcefulness and determination in taking the land. But they can't handle the iron chariots. This may seem reasonable at first glance, but coming straight after a reminder that God himself is with them, it makes you wonder. Can't God handle chariots? From what Joshua said before he died, it didn't sound like anything was going to stop God giving Israel the land.

ENDING WITH A WHIMPER...

Read Judges 1:20-36

7. How does the campaign go for the rest of the tribes?

8. Does the story about Joseph capturing Luz remind you of any other OT story?

The well known story of Rahab helping the Israelites to conquer Jericho has lots of similarities with the conquest of Luz (if you want the details, check Joshua 2:1-14). But there are also differences. Look at the end of the Rahab story in Joshua 6:25:

²⁵But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho--and she lives among the Israelites to this day.

9. Compare the response of Rahab and the man from Luz. What do you notice?

Apart from Judah, the Israelite campaign is dismal. Their attempt to destroy Luz is typical. It's not destroyed, just relocated. Unlike Rahab, who genuinely wanted to join the Israelite cause and serve their God, the man from Luz just wants to preserving his pagan culture and religion. As we'll see, it's this surviving Canaanite religion that causes big problems for Israel.

WHO IS TO BLAME?

Read Judges 2:1-5

10. What promise are we reminded about in verse 1?

11. In the light of God's promise, why is it surprising that the Israelite campaign is so ineffective?

12. What is the real cause of Israel's failure to drive out the Caananites (v2)?

God doesn't completely fulfil his promise because Israel doesn't keep their side of the agreement and obey him. So how and when will God finish fulfilling his promise...

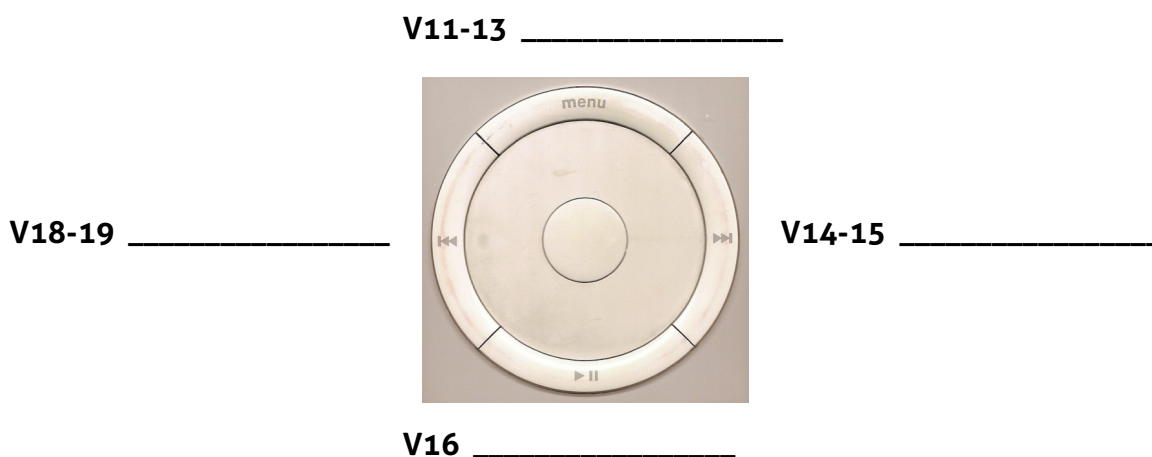
Read Judges 2: 6-19

In v 6-19 we leave the story of Israel's campaign against the Canaanites and get a summary of the whole period of the judges starting at the time of Joshua.

13. How do the Israelites start out their lives in the promise land (v7)?

14. When do things start to go wrong (v10)?

Certain things go around and around. This goes for Ipod dials, washing machine loads, tax time, and....the way Israel behaved during the time of the Judges. Using v11-19, fill in the spaces below to show the round and around cycle they kept going through:



15. According to these verses, what is a judge ?

16. How effective are the Judges? Are they the final fulfilment of God's promise to give the people the land?

The Judges clearly aren't the final fulfilment of God's promises to Israel. They do call the Israelites to serve God and deliver them from their enemies. But as the same old cycle of rebellion and punishment happens time after time, it becomes clear that God's promises are no closer to fulfilment at the end of the book than at the start. This leaves us with the important question, will God ever be able to fulfil his promises to such a wayward people?

17. Thinking through the rest of the Old Testament, do you think Israel ever gets their act together? And does God ever finish fulfilling his promises to Israel?

18. Has God fulfilled his promises now? Can you think of any New Testament passages which might suggest that he has?