

THE WHOLE BIBLE

JUDGES

This Bible study, one of 66 studies covering the entire Bible, is made up of one-page lessons covering short sections of the book. The electronic format (student's and leader's guides) allows adaptation to individual needs.

Benefits of one-page lessons:

- Hand out only what you need, relative to the length of the class session and how much content you wish to cover. Taken at a steady pace, a page can be covered in about 20 minutes.
- See at a glance all the material that pertains to the section being covered. Use the discussion questions as your basic outline and draw in material from the "Look" and "Apply" sections as you wish.

Suggestions for using these lessons:

- Teach an entire book, or teach just part of a book.
- Use a single lesson sheet for a "19 Minute" style Bible study.
- Use a single lesson sheet as a meeting opener, either as a devotion or a short Bible study.
- Build your own Bible studies. The possibilities are endless. For example:
 - Assemble all the lessons on the penitential psalms, psalms of praise, or David's early years.
 - Assemble sections that deal with predestination, and teach the pertinent passages in their context.
 - Study all references to mountains, cities, nations, etc., pointing out their importance in the lives of God's people.

Note: The appropriate pages in The People's Bible commentary volumes are referenced. However, the authors were given the freedom to develop their own studies, so these lessons are not, in a strict sense, study guides to those volumes.

We pray these lessons will help God's people grow in faith and in service to his kingdom.

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Judges 1

Israel fails to take the land

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 25-34)

Look

The general conquest of Canaan had been completed under Joshua. Each tribe must now fight to occupy its allotted territory. It is difficult to determine how much work the tribes did before Joshua's death. From Joshua 18:3 it is clear that Israel was reluctant to go ahead with the occupation. In any case, after Joshua's death, Israel went to the Lord and asked for guidance.

Discuss

1. Find a map of Israel at the time of the Judges in order to familiarize yourself with the tribal allocations and the locations of the towns mentioned in this chapter.
2. Why did the Lord bless Caleb with a special inheritance?
3. At first Judah succeeded in taking the land. However, verse 19 tells us that the men of Judah were unable to drive the Canaanite people from the plain because they had iron chariots. Why does that statement seem odd? Can you explain it?
4. Read verses 19, 27, 29, 31, and 33. What pattern soon established itself?
5. Verse 28 says that when the Israelites became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor. Why was this also an act of disobedience?

Apply

6. Discuss some of the ways that Christians today fail to fully carry out God's directives and the subsequent consequences of that. What does Judges chapter 1 teach us?

The Israelites failed to carry out the Lord's directives, which set the stage for serious spiritual and moral decay.

Judges 2:1–3:6

Consequences of Israel's disobedience

(*The People's Bible*, Judges, Ruth, pages 35-46)

Look

- 2:1 “*The angel of the Lord*”—This is God’s messenger, who is God himself.
- 2:1 “*Gilgal to Bokim*”—*Gilgal* means “rolled away.” This is where the Israelites circumcised themselves after they entered the Promised Land and “rolled away” the reproach of Egypt. They were now cleansed and ready for service to God. *Bokim* means “weeping,” referring to how the Israelites wept when they heard God’s judgment for their lack of zeal in driving out the Canaanites. “From Gilgal to Bokim” is shorthand for change, from a time of God’s complete blessing to a time when God withdrew some of his blessings.

Discuss

1. What was the angel’s (the Lord’s) message to Israel?
2. How could the next generation forget so quickly what the Lord had done for them?
3. Read verses 11-19. What pattern repeated itself again and again for the next three hundred years?
4. In verses 20-22 the Lord revealed his plan to keep his people aware of their relationship with him. What was that plan?

Apply

5. What are some warning signs that we may be forgetting what the Lord has done for us?
6. In what way(s) is the Lord testing us to see whether we will keep the way of the Lord?

The Lord revealed his “game plan” to keep the Israelites aware of their sin and drive them to seek his mercy.

Judges 3:7-31

Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 46-54)

Look

- Verse 8 *“Cushan-Rishathaim”*—This nickname, demonstrating a little Israelite humor, means something like “Double Trouble from Double Rivers.”
- Verse 10 *“The Spirit of the LORD”*—The Lord’s Spirit drove Othniel to action. He did not save Israel by his own zeal.

Discuss

1. The story of the first deliverer, Othniel, is stripped of details. There is little information about the man himself. Would you have liked to see more information about Othniel and how he defeated Cushan-Rishathaim?
2. How did Ehud, the second deliverer, save Israel?
3. In what sense was Ehud telling the truth when he told Eglon that he had a message for him from God?
4. Who was the third judge? How did he deliver Israel?

Apply

5. We sometimes think that God uses only the best and the greatest, the smartest and the bravest in the work of his church. How do these accounts show us that such thoughts are incorrect?
6. How is God using you? What is the most important resource you have in your service to him?

The Lord delights in delivering his people. He saved Israel through three judges and gave Israel 120 years of rest.

Judges 4

Barak and Deborah

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 55-66)

Look

- Verse 4 *“Prophetess”*—Deborah was a prophetess. God gave her insight into his will. She was given revelations so that she could render judgments from God to those who came to her. There are several other prophetesses named in the Scriptures: Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), and Anna (Luke 2:36). All spoke the Word of the Lord.
- Verse 6 *“Barak”*—Barak was the leader of Israel at this time. He is also listed among the judges. See 1 Samuel 12:11 and Hebrews 11:32.

Discuss

1. After Ehud died, the Israelites again rejected God. What did the Lord do to chasten them?
2. How did the Lord help Israel?
3. How did Barak handle God's command to him?
4. Some say that God's use of Deborah shows that there is no such thing as the roles of men and women. How is the biblical teaching of the roles of men and women maintained throughout this account by Deborah? by the Lord?

Apply

5. What can the relationship between Deborah and Barak teach us about the God-pleasing roles of men and women in our world today?

The Lord used Deborah to reveal his will to Israel and especially to Barak, who was God's instrument to deliver his people.

Judges 5

The song of Deborah and Barak

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 67-77)

Look

Verse 1 “*Deborah and Barak*”—This is often called the song of Deborah. Deborah probably was the principle writer. However, the song is also attributed to Barak, whose faith must have been strengthened through this whole episode.

Discuss

1. Examine each of the following sections of this song. What is the main point of each?
 - verses 3-5
 - verses 6-8
 - verses 9-12
 - verses 13-18
 - verses 19-23
 - verses 24-27
 - verses 28-31

Apply

2. This song contains some of the most beautiful and powerful poetry in the Bible. How does good poetry help us worship the Lord? What are your favorite poems in the Bible? in the liturgy you use in your church?

Deborah and Barak praised the Lord for delivering his people from their enemies.

Judges 6

God calls a hesitant hero into service

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 78-87)

Look

Verses 1-6 The Israelites fell into sin, and once again, God punished them. This time he gave them into the hands of the Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern peoples. These people lived in the desert. Israel was a handy source of food for them.

Verse 12 *"The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."* It is clear from what follows that God appeared to Gideon as a fellow human being.

Discuss

1. God sent a prophet to Israel. What was the prophet's message? In what way was this prophet like John the Baptist?

2. When the Lord came to Gideon, he was reluctant to accept this call. We find Gideon making objections. How did God answer his objections?
 - verse 13 Is the Lord really with us?

 - verse 15 But my clan is the weakest in Israel.

 - verse 17 Give me a sign that it is really you, Lord.

3. The Lord wanted Gideon to "clean up" his own house before he set out to deliver Israel. How was Gideon to do this?

4. How did Gideon's father show a renewed faith fostered by his son's fearlessness?

5. Even after the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon and led him to muster Israel's troops, Gideon still had reservations. How did the Lord help Gideon overcome them?

Apply

6. Why is it important to destroy the idols in our hearts if we are to be successful in carrying out the Lord's work?

The Lord patiently prepared Gideon to fight and defeat the Midianites.

Judges 7:1-22

Gideon leads 300 men against 135,000 Midianites

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 87-95)

Look

Verse 20 *“Blew the trumpets and smashed the jars”*—Normally a troop of soldiers would have a leader who guided his men with a torch and blew a trumpet, telling them what to do. The Israelites came to the outskirts of the camp with their torches covered. When they smashed the jars, the lights appeared. When the trumpets sounded, the Midianites could only conclude that a large number of Israelites had sneaked up on them undetected.

Discuss

1. Why did God not want Israel to go into battle with a large number of soldiers?
2. Through a two-step process, the Lord whittled down the number of Israelite soldiers. Describe the process.
3. When we are called to do a difficult task, the Lord is not stingy with encouragement. He knows we are only flesh and blood. So he helps us. How did he help Gideon?
4. How many Midianites did each Israelite soldier kill?

Apply

5. In 2 Corinthians 12:10, Paul said, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” How does this summarize Israel’s battle with the Midianites? How does this summarize our own lives?

By reducing the size of Israel’s army, the Lord once again proved that he is Israel’s one and only Savior.

Judges 8

The Israelites help Gideon mop up; Gideon's troubles

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 95-106)

Look

The fine maps in the People's Bible commentary on Judges (prepared by the author) will be of tremendous help in understanding the events of this chapter.

Verse 28 *"The land enjoyed peace."* This is the last time in the book of Judges we hear a phrase like this after a judge's deliverance. With each episode we see Israel spiraling downward more and more in its spiritual life. God will not be mocked. His judgment on the land became more and more severe. Yet the Lord in his mercy continued to send judges to deliver the land.

Discuss

1. The Midianites had been routed and were in flight. What was Gideon's strategy for pursuing them? What was the gist of Ephraim's gripe, and how did Gideon soothe the tribe's hurt feelings?
2. What kept Succoth and Peniel from providing rations for Gideon's troops?
3. Look at what happened after the victory. What events make it clear that Gideon's refusal to be made a king was not completely sincere?

Apply

4. What are some examples of how pride (Ephraim's sin) or the pursuit of security (Succoth's and Peniel's sin) on our part might weaken the church's ability to carry out its mission?

The Lord gave Israel a resounding victory. Yet lawlessness in the land showed through in Gideon's later weakness.

Judges 9

Abimelech, a treacherous king

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 107-117)

Look

Verse 1 *“Abimelech, son of Jerub-baal”*—Abimelech was the son of one of Gideon’s concubines. (See Judges 8:31.) He does not seem to have fit in very well with the rest of his siblings.

Discuss

1. Explain the parable of Jotham. What impression do the closing words of this parable make on you? How do you think they might explain why the Lord allowed this to happen?
2. How did the Lord begin the sequence of events that led to the fulfillment of Jotham’s prophecy? (verse 23)
3. Identify Gaal and Zebul, and discuss the role each of them played in this sad affair.
4. Amid all the dramatic details of this account we can easily lose sight of the main point. What was God doing here?

Apply

5. Which is worse, trouble that comes into a congregation from the outside or trouble that comes from the inside? Explain your answer.

God punished both Abimelech and the people of Shechem for the evil they did. In the process he continued to chasten Israel.

Judges 10:1–11:28

Judges Tola, Jair, and Jephthah

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 118-134)

Look

10:1-5 Tola, of the tribe of Issachar, and Jair, a Giliadite, of Manasseh—Tola lived in the hill country of Ephraim, east of the Jordan River. His 30 sons riding on 30 donkeys indicates high rank. We have no more information about these two judges. It is possible that their rules overlapped, one west and one east of the Jordan.

Discuss

1. After the Lord gave the Israelites peace and rest, they went back to their old ways. List the seven different gods they worshiped. How did the Lord punish them?
2. What advice did the Lord give the Israelites when they complained to him?
3. Why didn't the Israelites follow this advice?
4. Jephthah, since he was the son of a prostitute, had been driven from his home. Yet he was a fine warrior, and the Israelites asked him to lead them against the Ammonites. What was the first thing Jephthah did?
5. What were some of the reasons Jephthah gave the king of Moab for why Israel had a just claim on the land?

Apply

6. What comfort is there for us in verse 16?

Despite the fact that Israel's heart was growing harder and harder against the Lord, the Lord continued to reach out to his people and rescue them from their enemies.

Judges 11:29–12:15

Jephthah's vow; Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon take turns leading Israel

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 134-142)

Look

- 11:39 *"He did to her as he had vowed."* The Lord gave Jephthah victory. Taking the words at face value, we conclude that Jephthah fulfilled his promise and did what he vowed, which was to sacrifice as a burnt offering the first thing to come out of his house. Some have suggested that he fulfilled his vow by sacrificing his daughter to a life without marriage and children, but this would be the only instance where such an act is regarded as a whole burnt offering, which was the type of offering Jephthah vowed to make.
- 12:8-13 Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon—The view is generally held that these men served at the same time as Samson, ruling farther to the east and north of where Samson carried out his activities.

Discuss

1. What vow did Jephthah make before he began the battle against the Ammonites? What would move him to make such a vow?
2. Describe the details of the clash between Jephthah and Ephraim. What does it reveal about the tribe of Ephraim? the spiritual condition of Israel?

Apply

3. How do we maintain peace in our families?
4. Have you ever made a foolish vow? If you wish, share this with the class. Would you act differently today?

Jephthah's deliverance from the Ammonite oppression was marred by his own impetuosity in making a vow and by Ephraim's pride.

Judges 13

The Lord sets Samson apart as the next leader of Israel

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 143-151)

Look

- Verse 1 *"Philistines"*—The Philistines lived along the Mediterranean Sea, southwest of Israel. They appear to have been very proficient warriors and were a constant thorn in Israel's side. They especially threatened Israel up to and during the time of David, who finally suppressed them completely.
- Verse 7 *"Nazirite"*—See Numbers 6:1-8 for a description of what it meant to be a Nazirite. There were three requirements.
- Verse 25 *"The Spirit of the LORD began to stir him."* The Holy Spirit gave Samson power to perform amazing deeds of heroic strength.

Discuss

1. Manoah's wife was sterile and remained childless. Think of other barren women who were used by the Lord. Why do you think the Lord used barren women in his plan of salvation?
2. The Lord appeared to Manoah and his wife in much the same way as he had appeared to Gideon. The Angel of the Lord (God himself, coming as a messenger of good news) appeared first to Manoah's wife and then to both of them. What was his message?
3. In what special way did the man reveal himself to be the Angel of the Lord, the Lord himself?

Apply

4. What does it mean for us that God's name is beyond understanding?
5. Manoah wanted to honor the man who announced to him the birth of his son. Why is it wrong to honor a human being for a gift like this? What lesson is there for us?

God used unusual and wonderful means to raise up Israel's judge. He revealed that Samson was to be a Nazirite, set apart for God from birth.

Judges 14

God gives Samson his first opportunity to weaken the Philistines

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 151-158)

Look

- Verses 1-4 *"A young Philistine woman"*—Samson's desire to marry a Philistine woman was against God's law. (See Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3,4; and Joshua 23:12.)
- Verse 5 *"A young lion"*—Samson killed the lion. An Israelite who touched a dead body was unclean. It was wrong for Samson to take the honey and especially wrong for him to give some to his father and mother. Yet it becomes clear that God used this minor event to destroy the Philistines. (Note that touching a dead body was a direct violation of the Nazirite code.)

Discuss

- Samson was an immature and impetuous man. He believed in the true God but was ruled by his desires. He found a woman among the Philistines whom he wanted to marry. This was wrong, and his parents told him so. Yet the writer of Judges puts the whole thing in perspective and tells us that this was according to the Lord's will, "who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines" (verse 4).
- Samson's desires set up a series of events that weakened the Philistines. Trace that series of events using the following questions.
 - How did the episode with the lion and honey play into God's plans?
 - How did Samson's wedding companions play into God's plans?
 - How did the immaturity of Samson's new wife play into God's plans?

Apply

- How did Samson's parents deal with their son's request to marry a Philistine woman? What would you do if your son or daughter wanted to marry an unbeliever?

The Lord began to use Samson to weaken the Philistines.

Judges 15

Samson continues to get revenge on the Philistines

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 158-164)

Look

Verse 17 *"Ramath Lehi"*—The word means "Jawbone Hill."

Discuss

1. The string of events started in connection with Samson's wife continues. Pick up where we left off in the previous lesson, question 2.
 - How did the fact that Samson's wife had been given to another man play into God's plan?
 - How did the Philistines' revenge play into God's plan?
 - How did Samson's act of revenge play into God's plans?
2. How did the Israelites react to their leader? (verses 11,12)
3. Evaluate this whole sad affair. What was bad about it?
4. Evaluate this affair from the standpoint of the Lord's plan for his people. Note especially verses 18-20.

Apply

5. Even though Samson was not the most spiritual of men, the Lord used him in a very powerful way. What comfort is there in this for us?

Samson's heroics freed the land from the Philistine threat.

Judges 16

Samson meets his match in Delilah

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 165-175)

Look

- Verse 1 *"Gaza"*—Gaza is the southernmost of the five great Philistine cities. By going to Gaza, Samson seems to be purposely taking a risk. In any case, he was surrounded by the Philistines, but he humiliated them by ripping out their city gate by its doorposts and hauling it away.
- Verse 5 *"Eleven hundred shekels of silver"*—Perhaps as much as 15 years' wages.
- Verse 22 *"The hair on his head began to grow."* This is an ominous statement. It lets us know that although Samson, along with God and his people, seems to be defeated, there is still more to the story.

Discuss

1. How did Samson repeatedly humiliate the Philistines and Delilah?
2. What do you think Samson was thinking when he gave away the secret of his strength?
3. What do you think was on God's mind when he let Samson go down this path?
4. What do you think was in Samson's heart as he entered the temple?

Apply

5. What do we learn from this chapter about God's judgment?
6. What do we learn from this chapter about God's faithfulness?

The Lord in his mercy restored Samson and allowed him one final heroic act.

Judges 17,18

Illegitimate priests and illegitimate inheritances

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 177-189)

Look

- 17:4 *"The image and the idol"*—The Hebrew uses the word *teraphim*. They were images in the shape of a human form, most likely some of Micah's ancestors. Although the use of these "teraphim" could be quite innocent, in Micah's house it is clear that they were objects of idolatrous worship.
- 17:5 *"Ephod"*—An ephod is a religious garment. In God's tabernacle, the high priest wore an ephod when he led worship. This ephod and its use in Micah's home were not sanctioned by the Lord. In general, his shrine was used for idolatry.
- 18:1 *"The tribe of the Danites was seeking a place of their own."* The context for this statement is found in Joshua 20:40-48. Dan had indeed received an inheritance. It was in the coastal plain along the Mediterranean Sea. However, they could not (or did not want to) drive out the inhabitants. So they looked for an easier place to inhabit.

Discuss

1. The final chapters of Judges give us a picture of life in Israel. What is your overall impression of the religious state of Israel? Make a list of the sins you find in these two chapters.
2. What is the point of the author's comment in 17:6, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit"?

Apply

3. Who is our King? What happens when we do not accept him as our King?

Israel became steeped in idolatry. The tribe of Dan rejected God's inheritance and settled in a place of their own choosing. They practiced idolatry there until the captivity.

Judges 19

A city in Benjamin and a Levite sink into depravity

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 190-196)

Look

Verse 11 *"Jebus"* —This city would later be conquered by David and renamed Jerusalem. It was still held by the Canaanites at this time. Considering the outcome of the story, it is ironic that the man was afraid to spend the night in a non-Israelite city.

Discuss

1. The beginning of the story sets the stage for the rest of it. Explain.
2. After retrieving his concubine, the group set out for home. They decided to spend the night at Gibeah. Review the account of Sodom and Gomorrah. How does this account parallel that account? What does this obvious parallel make clear?
3. The men of Gibeah go a step further than the people of Sodom. Explain.
4. How does the callousness of the man continue?
5. What would be the next logical step for the Israelites to take?

Apply

6. It's easy to hear an account like this and feel self-righteous: "These people were really evil!" What was the root of their evil? Are we by nature any different?

Having forsaken the Lord and his covenant, the Benjamites at Gibeah brought Israel to an all-time moral low.

Judges 20

Civil war: the tribe of Benjamin fights its Israelite brothers

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 197-209)

Look

Verse 1 *"Before the LORD in Mizpah"* —Israel clearly wanted to do the Lord's will.

Discuss

1. Notice how the Levite relates the story of Gibeah's sins to his own advantage. In what way is he responsible for the tragic events to follow?
2. Why, after the Lord had directed Israel to go up against Benjamin, did Israel lose the first two battles and suffer so many casualties? (Hint: Compare this account with Joshua chapters 7 and 8, the account of Ai.)
3. Follow up on the last question by looking at the method Israel used to defeat Gibeah. How is this similar to how Israel defeated Ai?

Apply

4. Why do you think the Benjamites defended the men who committed such obvious crimes? What lesson is there for us in this?
5. At what point did the Lord begin blessing Israel? What lesson is there for us in this?

The clash between Benjamin and the rest of Israel escalated into a civil war. The Lord used this war to chasten both the Benjamites and the rest of the tribes.

Judges 21

Wives are procured to preserve the tribe of Benjamin

(The People's Bible, Judges, Ruth, pages 210-215)

Look

Verse 1 Israel had intended to completely annihilate the tribe of Benjamin. Therefore they made an oath not to give any of their daughters in marriage to the Benjamites.

Discuss

1. This chapter records an incredible change of heart among the Israelites. Why were the Israelites suddenly so downcast after finally winning the victory?
2. What was the plan Israel came up with to keep the tribe of Benjamin from becoming extinct?
3. The last verse of Judges says, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." How does this chapter underline this truth?
4. Evaluate: The greatest miracle in this chapter is the grace God showed Benjamin and Israel.

Apply

5. We must admit we are often as spiritually fickle as the individuals we read about here in the book of Judges. What's the most important application from this book of the Bible for us as God's people?

The Lord rescued the tribe of Benjamin from extinction.