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Discover Your Bible Series

Discover JUDGES



STUDY GUIDE

STUDY GUIDE

Discover **JUDGES**



by
Marilyn A. McGinnis


**FAITH
ALIVE.**
Christian Resources

Grand Rapids, Michigan

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How to Study

The questions in this study booklet will help you discover for yourself what the Bible says. This is inductive Bible study—in which you will discover the message for yourself.

Questions are the key to inductive Bible study. Through questions you search for the writers' thoughts and ideas. The questions in this booklet are designed to help you in your quest for answers. You can and should ask your own questions too. The Bible comes alive with meaning for many people as they discover the exciting truths it contains. Our hope and prayer is that this booklet will help the Bible come alive for you.

The questions in this study are designed to be used with Today's New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Step 1. Read each Bible passage several times. Allow the ideas to sink in. Think about their meaning. Ask questions about the passage.

Step 2. Answer the questions, drawing your answers from the passage. Remember that the purpose of the study is to discover what the Bible says. Write your answers in your own words. If you use Bible study aids such as commentaries or Bible handbooks, do so only after completing your own personal study.

Step 3. Apply the Bible's message to your own life. Ask,

- What is this passage saying to me?
- How does it challenge me? Comfort me? Encourage me?
- Is there a promise I should claim? A warning I should heed?
- For what can I give thanks?

If you sense God speaking to you in some way, respond to God in a personal prayer.

Step 4. Share your thoughts with someone else if possible. This will be easiest if you are part of a Bible study group that meets regularly to share discoveries and discuss questions.

If you would like to learn of a study group in your area or would like information on training to start a small group Bible study,

- call toll-free 1-888-644-0814, e-mail smallgroups@crcna.org, or visit www.smallgroupministries.org
- call toll-free 1-800-333-8300 or visit www.FaithAliveResources.org (to order materials)

Introduction

The book of Judges picks up the story of Israel where the book of Joshua left off. Joshua became the people's leader after Moses had died (Josh. 1:1-6), and in obedience to God Joshua led the people into the promised land. At the Lord's leading, they fought many battles and captured many cities, and each of the twelve tribes of Israel was now assigned an inheritance of land. Though many of the Canaanites were conquered, some still remained, so there was still work to be done.

Joshua promised the people, "The LORD . . . will push [the Canaanites] out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as . . . God promised" (Josh. 23:5). God had first made this promise to Abraham about 700 years earlier, saying that his descendants (Israel) would receive the land from God when the sin of the peoples living there had reached "its full measure" (Gen. 15:16-20).

Joshua also reminded the people that they had made promises to God. Israel had promised not to worship the gods of the Canaanites or mix with the foreign powers around them. "The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations," Joshua said, "but if you turn away and ally yourselves with . . . these nations . . . the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you" (Josh. 23:9, 12-13).

Near the end of his life Joshua challenged the people, saying, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve," and he set this example for them: "As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." And the people said, "We too will serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:15, 18).

But did the people mean what they said? Or was this a fair-weather response during a time of peace?

The book of Judges records a period of about 300 years between the death of Joshua and the beginning of the monarchy (era of kings) in Israel. During this time God appointed judges to rule over the people and to lead them through times when they needed deliverance from enemies.

The main theme of Judges is that God is faithful despite the unfaithfulness of his people. Though some of the stories in Judges pose shocking twists and puzzling turns, we discover that human nature isn't much different than it was a few thousand years ago. As a result, this study will often challenge us with issues that apply to our lives today.

God bless you as you study this book of the Bible together.

Note: Because of the narrative (storytelling) nature of this book, some accounts covered in the lessons of this study are lengthy, spanning two or more chapters of Scripture. This may call for more reading than your group is used to, so you may wish to read ahead in your Bibles at home before doing some of the lessons together.

Land of the Twelve Tribes



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Glossary of Terms

altar—a stone or heap of stones on which people laid animals or grain as sacrifices.

Amalekites—descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:12, 16).

Ammonites—descendants of Lot through his younger daughter (Gen. 19:36-38).

angel of the Lord—This figure appears at times to God’s people (often as a man) and makes announcements or judgments in God’s name (see Gen. 16:7; 22:11-18; Josh. 5:13-15; Judg. 6:11-12; 13:2-23). Sometimes this angel is also referred to as “the LORD” (for example, see Gen. 16:13; Judg. 6:14), and the *TNIV Study Bible* explains that “as the LORD’s personal messenger who represented him and bore his credentials, the angel could speak on behalf of (and so be identified with) the One who sent him.” (See also Ex. 23:20-23; Josh. 5:13-15.)

ark of the covenant—a wooden chest overlaid with gold that was placed in the innermost room (Most Holy Place) of the tabernacle (tent of meeting) or, later, in the temple (1 Kings 8). It symbolized the presence of God among his people (see Ex. 25:10-22). In Judges 20:27 we learn that sometimes the ark was moved to other places, even though the tabernacle was set up in a designated town (Shiloh—see 18:31).

Bethel—Bethel means “house of God” and is a significant location in Bible history. Abraham built an altar there after entering the promised land (Gen. 12:7-8; 13:3-4). Jacob had a vision of God at Bethel (Gen. 28:10-19). In Judges 20:27 we find that the ark of the covenant was temporarily at Bethel, with Phinehas the priest “ministering before it.”

Baal and Ashtoreth (Asherah)—Canaanite god and goddess of fertility and war.

burnt offering—a sacrifice laid on an altar and completely burned.

Canaanites—occupants of the promised land of Canaan. This land was named after a grandson of Noah (Gen. 9:18). The peoples who lived in Canaan before Israel came had various tribal or regional names (such as Hittites, Amorites, Midianites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, Philistines, and Sidonians) and were also generally called Canaanites.

clean—God allowed people to eat certain kinds of animals and to use them for sacrifices. These were referred to as “clean”; all other animals were considered “unclean” (see Lev. 11).

concubine—a secondary wife who might also be a slave.

covenant—a mutually binding agreement between two parties; usually both parties agree to accept certain responsibilities.

ephah—a measure equaling about three-fifths of a bushel (22 liters).

ephod—a special garment worn by the high priest (Ex. 28:6-14). It could also refer to an object associated with idol worship (Judg. 17:5; 18:14).

Gibeah—a city within the tribe of Benjamin where the gang rape of a concubine took place. It and its inhabitants were destroyed by the rest of the tribes of Israel.

Israel—see **twelve tribes of Israel**.

judges—men or women chosen to arbitrate judicial matters, but also to lead the Israelites in battle against the Canaanites and other foreign powers.

lot casting—Casting lots or drawing lots can be done in many ways—by flipping a coin, throwing dice or other small objects with marks on them, drawing sticks of different lengths, pulling marked or different-colored pieces out of a hat, and so on. The lots approved by God for use in Israel were the Urim and Thummim, to be placed in the breastpiece of the sacred ephod worn by the priest of God (Ex. 28:30). See Numbers 27:18-21 for the Lord's instructions on lot casting in Joshua's day. Note as well that the land divisions in Canaan were determined by lot (Num. 26:55-56; 33:54; 34:13-17).

Midianites—descendants of Abraham's son Midian through his second wife, Keturah (Gen. 25:1-2).

Moabites—descendants of Lot through his older daughter (Gen. 19:36-38).

Molek—a god worshiped by the Canaanites; sometimes this worship involved the sacrifice of children by fire.

Moses—the leader of the Israelites when God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and as they lived in the wilderness before entering the promised land (Palestine). Moses received the law from God and taught it to the Israelites.

Nazirite—a person who took a vow to be set apart to God. The vow included restrictions such as not drinking wine and not cutting one's hair and could be temporary or long-term. Samson was dedicated to be a Nazirite from birth and throughout his whole life (Judg. 13:2-7; see also 1 Sam. 1:10-11; Luke 1:11-17).

oath—a binding promise that often involved swearing by something or someone greater than oneself.

ox goad—a long stick with a sharp point for prodding oxen.

Perizzites—a people who lived in Canaan from before the time of Abraham (Gen. 13:7). Their origin is obscure and unknown.

Philistines—descendants of a grandson of Noah’s son Ham who, in the time of the judges, occupied a strip of land along the Mediterranean Sea from Gaza to Egypt.

prophecy—a message from someone who speaks God’s Word to the people. The person who spoke a prophecy was a prophet.

sacrifice—the act of offering something precious to God. Unbelievers also made sacrifices to false gods. In the Old Testament this was usually an animal (the best of the flock) or the firstfruits of a harvest.

Shechem—a town known as the place where Abraham built an altar to God when he first arrived in Canaan. It was one of the six cities of refuge set up by Joshua, and the place where he delivered his farewell address. In the time of the judges it was a center of pagan Canaanite worship.

shekel—a unit of weight used to weigh silver and gold. In the time of the judges, ten shekels of silver was considered a decent yearly wage (Judg. 17:10).

sign—a miraculous event sought by Gideon to confirm that he should do what God told him to do.

sin—going against God’s will; disobeying God’s commands.

Spirit of the Lord—In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit came upon certain individuals to empower them to accomplish certain things.

threshing—In ancient times, farmers usually threshed their grain in an open area by having cattle walk on it to loosen the grain from the stalks or by drawing toothed sledges through it. In Judges 6 we read of Gideon threshing his grain in a winepress to keep the Midianites from stealing or destroying it.

twelve tribes of Israel—Jacob (whose name was changed by God to Israel) had twelve sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, and Benjamin (Gen. 49). Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, are half-tribes but are sometimes referred to as separate tribes, making it appear (erroneously) as though there were thirteen tribes in all.

worship—reverence and respect given to God; acknowledging God’s worthiness to be praised and served.

2. *Judges 1:21-36*

- a. Describe the successes and/or failures of the Israelite tribes mentioned in these verses. List the tribes, if you like, and assign each one a success rate.

- b. What pattern do you see emerging here?

3. *Judges 2:1-5*

- a. What does God announce through the angel of the Lord?

- b. How should we interpret the people's sorrow?

4. *Judges 2:6-3:6*

- a. Judges 2:6-9 mentions the death of Joshua again (see Judges 1:1). Compare this with Joshua 24:28-30.

- b. Describe how far the people fell away from the Lord after the generation under Joshua’s leadership died.

- c. How did the Lord respond to the people’s disobedience and then to their cries of distress?

- d. What did the Lord conclude because of the people’s longstanding disobedience and stubbornness?

- e. What would be the significance of teaching warfare to later generations of Israel?

Questions for Reflection

What characteristics of God have you (re)discovered in the Scriptures for this lesson? How does God demonstrate these characteristics?

Why was the Israelites’ obedience to God so important? What were the results if they obeyed? If they did not obey? Why do we sometimes find it hard to obey God?