

# Finer Grounds

## Judges and Ruth Lesson 1: Seeking God's Will (Judges 1)

Today we begin our journey through the books of Judges and Ruth; I will start with a warning: this study isn't for the faint of heart. While Ruth is a refreshingly beautiful love story, Judges stands in stark contrast as one of the most gruesome books in all of scripture. We must keep in mind though, the events described in Judges serve as more than captivating stories of murders, spies and assassins; they will illustrate the blessings that come from truly seeking God's will and the consequences that come from following our own path.

In some early manuscripts Ruth was considered an appendix to Judges; this is the order in which they appear in the Septuagint (Spence-Jones xiii). Ruth 1:1 also links these books together in their time period. For these reasons we will look at Judges and Ruth as two different pieces of the same puzzle. Closing with Ruth allows us to come up for a breath of fresh air after all of the corruption and death that occurs at the end of Judges.

As always, when we are studying through a specific text, it is helpful to read the book through completely. I am going to challenge you to read the entire text (Judges and Ruth) each week during this study. It may seem like a lot, but I promise, if you do this you will know these books inside and out and more fully understand how the events we discuss fit into the context. It does take a while to get through these passages and I know you are all busy women so I'll share a helpful tip with you. I play the audio Bible and listen to it while I do chores. It makes time pass more

quickly because I'm engulfed in the story and I'm getting my Bible reading completed faster than I would have trying to sit down and read it while my sweet daughters come in and out asking questions and climbing on my head. As a bonus, when I play the audio Bible on the stereo, they hear it too and begin to write God's word on their little hearts.

Let's jump right in and start examining our text, beginning with the author and time of writing. We are not told directly in the text who wrote these books nor the date of writing, but we are given some clues.

**Read Judges 21:25. Based on this statement what observation can we probably make about the time period in which the author was writing?**

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If someone makes it a point to say "in those days there was no king," that means most likely they are writing to people who are currently under a king. Tuck that away as clue number 1.

**Read Ruth 4:22. What prominent Israelite do we see mentioned in this verse and what title is left off of his name?**

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Here is another clue to our time period, we see David's name mentioned. This would fit in nicely with our first clue since we know that

# Finer Grounds

David was alive during the time of the kings. Another thing to notice is that he is not referred to as King David. This is clue number 2.

**Read 1 Chronicles 29:29. Who were the writing prophets during this time period?**

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This gives us an idea of who may have written Judges and Ruth. We can also see that they were most likely written during King Saul's reign. As we go through our study, these clues will help us discover a possible secondary purpose of these writings.

**Read 1 Samuel 9:21. What was Saul's tribe?**

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**Read 1 Samuel 17:12. What was David's tribe? What town?**

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**Bible Marking: (I will be giving instructions for marking in your Bible throughout this series, if you don't want to mark in your Bible simply print the chapter from an online Bible to mark or write in a notebook.) As we go through our study, mark each place where the tribe of Benjamin is mentioned. In a different way, mark each occurrence of Judah or Bethlehem. We will look back at this list later.**

I would wager that most of us have some level of familiarity with Judges. We know the characters like Sampson, Gideon and Jephthah because we either grew up learning about them in

Bible class or now teach them to our children. We will spend time examining these familiar accounts, but don't spend so much effort focusing on the characters that you miss the underlying message and the patterns that are being established through these people. One of the main purposes in Judges is to contrast following God's will with following our own will. We will see very vivid illustrations of those on both sides of this coin.

**Bible Marking: Mark each time God or "the Angel of the Lord" is speaking or acting. Also mark in a different way when Israel speaks or acts toward God. This will help you see the direct relationship in the people's treatment of God and His response.**

Let's take a minute and explore what the title "judge" entailed. Why did this position exist? What was their job? How did their roles change in the absence of one central leader (i.e. Moses and Joshua)?

**Read Exodus 18:13-27.**

**Why were judges originally appointed?**

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**What were their duties according to this passage?**

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**Read Deuteronomy 25:1-2 and describe the role of a judge according to these verses.**

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# Finer Grounds

**Read Judges 2:16. What additional duty do we see appointed to the judges that God called?**

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While the job of an Old Testament judge was somewhat similar to a modern day judge, they wielded more power. Once Joshua died, they became the nation’s primary civil leaders. Judges still listened to disputes and made decisions for the people, but now some of them had an even greater responsibility; they were the military leaders that God would use to deliver His people from their enemies.

**Read Judges 1:1-10**

This phrase at the beginning of Judges 1:1, “Now it came about after the death of Joshua...,” is considered to be a heading for the entire book (Brensinger 28). This makes sense when you examine the first two chapters; they act as a summary of the events leading up to and directly following Joshua’s death. Many of the events that occur in Judges 1 are paralleled in the book of Joshua. The purpose of this chapter is to set up the pattern for Israel’s downward spiral. Pay close attention and you will see exactly why this descent occurred.

**In Judges 1:1-4 there is a very important chain of events that take place. List those events; I have given you the verse and the person performing the action:**

- **Judges 1:1→Israel:**

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- **Judges 1:2→God:**

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- **Judges 1:3-4→Israel/Judah:**

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- **Judges 1:4→God:**

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We can see a precedent being set in these first few verses that will be continued throughout the book: When one seeks and obeys God’s will He is always on their side.

**Do we still see this today? How does God reward those who seek and obey His will?**

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**What request is made in Judges 1:3 and what is the response?**

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At first this might seem like a detail that isn’t really crucial, but if you have read through the entire book, you will see that while the tribes cooperate and help each other now, later they will be vetted against one another. In fact, there will even be bloodshed and some scars that will never completely heal because of tribes abandoning one another when they were needed most.

# Finer Grounds

In the same way the Israelites initially worked with one another, we are expected to be there for our brothers and sisters in Christ even when it isn't convenient or easy. We must be willing to sacrifice for one another; if we are not, divisions will creep up in the church, just as they did in Israel.

**List the ways the church should help one another according to these verses:**

- **Acts 2:44-47:**

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- **James 5:16:**

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- **1 Peter 4:8-9:**

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- **Romans 12:13:**

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- **Hebrews 10:24-25:**

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**Which one of these is the biggest struggle for you? What is one thing you can do this week to improve in that area?**

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In verses 5-7 we are given our first of three breaks in the battle narrative. Why is this odd little

story here? If we think in terms of the book's theme, this account provides an example of justice being served according to one's actions. Unfortunately for Adoni-bezek, he is being repaid in kind for all of the brutality he showed to the other kings he conquered. This again reinforces the pattern: our actions, good and bad, have consequences. We will be held accountable for what we do.

## **Read Judges 1:11-15**

Here we have the second diversion from our main battle narrative. Do you see a familiar name? Often we forget about Caleb once Joshua takes the spotlight, but remember; Caleb and Joshua were the only people over 40 years old allowed to enter Canaan. They were the only two men brave enough to stand up for God, convinced that if He was on their side no one could stand against them (Read Numbers 13-14 if you are unfamiliar with this account).

## **How is Caleb described in Numbers 14:24?**

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## **How does Caleb deal with his family in the first chapter of Judges?**

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This is one of the few accounts in Judges where a family is portrayed in a positive light. Caleb has obviously raised his daughter to be respectful and yet he still loves her and grants her wishes. He is also careful to choose a good husband for his daughter. Keep this interaction in your mind; we will revisit Caleb in a few verses.

# Finer Grounds

## Read Judges 1:16-36

In these verses we witness what caused the downfall of the Israelites. But before we go there, let's get back to Caleb. In Judges 1:20, tucked in between acts of disobedience by the Israelites, we see strong, faithful Caleb. He finally gets the reward that he has so patiently waited 40 years to receive and still is obedient as he drives out the people of the land.

**How does the picture painted of Caleb in Judges 1 fit in with our theme of God repaying people for their actions?**

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God always rewards those who seek Him. Even though it had been many years, The Lord did not forget Caleb and the way he wholeheartedly served and obeyed Him. God is always faithful to those who seek and obey His will. In the same way, even if we do not see physical blessings here on earth, God will reward those who are obedient to His will with a home in heaven.

**Read Deuteronomy 7:1-6. What were the Israelites commanded to do when they went into Canaan?**

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**What major mistake did the Israelites continually make in Judges 1:16-36?**

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It all started with those iron chariots in Judges 1:19. Even though the Lord was with them, Judah was afraid. The Israelites trembled before their enemy just like they had when they sent the spies into Canaan in Numbers 13-14. If they had only trusted that God would always emerge victorious they would have avoided all of the trouble that was about to come their way.

We all have "iron chariots." There are things in our lives that we know without a doubt God wants us to do; however, the thought of following through seems terrifying. Our fears cause inaction and inaction in an area that God has specifically called us to act is sin (James 4:17).

**What is your "iron chariot?" How can you work to overcome your fear this week?**

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The pattern has been set forth; the Israelites' disobedience will come at a high cost. Because they left these people in their land their hearts will be compromised. God knew what was best for His people; He knew that if they lived among them His people would start adopting Canaanite customs and worshipping Canaanite "gods." We will see in the following weeks just how much trouble this seemingly simple oversight will cause for the entire nation.

This week continually remind yourself that God rewards those who seek and obey His will. Keep an eye out for "iron chariots" in your life and always remember that God is on your side; the same God who destroyed an army with hailstones, rescued His people from the Egyptians and toppled the massive walls of Jericho. He is our God!