

JUDGES

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY



10 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



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MARK BADDELEY



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The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

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» HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God's word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of 'interaction'—interaction with the Bible, with the things we've written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

Each study contains five main components:

- short sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- a set of numbered study questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- side-bars that provide extra bits of background or optional extra study ideas, especially regarding other relevant parts of the Bible
- an ‘Implications’ section that helps you think about what this passage means for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage, and exploring the side-bars as you have time.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learnt.

4. How to use these studies in a small group

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.

- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of the Bible, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

5. Bible translation

Previous studies in our Interactive Bible Study series have assumed that most readers would be using the New International Version of the Bible. However, since the release of the English Standard Version in 2001, many have switched to the ESV for study purposes. For this reason, we have decided to quote from and refer to the ESV text, which we recommend.

» STUDY 1

STARTING WELL

[JUDGES 1:1-2:5]

BETH WAS IN DESPAIR. EVERYTHING had started so well. Becoming a Christian in her late teens had been so exciting. She had joined a Bible study group and had enjoyed learning about Christ and the Bible. There she met Richard, a young Christian man. Friendship between them blossomed and grew into something more.

Then Richard began to pressure Beth to sleep with him. Confused, and scared to lose him, Beth agreed. “After all,” she consoled herself, “we do love each other and we are both Christians.”

Over time, guilt grew. Beth hated going to church, felt cold when she prayed, and stopped reading the Bible. She felt like a hypocrite, and God seemed unreal. Then Richard broke off the relationship.

For Beth, it felt as though she had lost everything. “Things weren’t supposed to turn out like this”, she thought. “Why did God let this happen?”

Stories such as this are disturbing. We prefer ‘happily-ever-after endings’, where the challenges and threats are overcome and everything turns out well at the end. This is how we want life to be.

Israel’s story in the Old Testament is the exact opposite. Things started with enormous potential. There were amazing promises given to Abraham that God would bless Israel and, through Israel, the world. Israel experienced a mighty redemption from slavery, with great signs and miracles under Moses. The initial entry into the Promised Land under Joshua went from strength to strength. By the time of Joshua’s

death, Israel was established in the Land. Yet, from this point on, things go sour. Israel's conquest stalls during the time of the judges and is only completed centuries later under David. Yet even David's victory is temporary—under David's descendants, Israel first suffers division into two separate kingdoms and then Exile from the Promised Land. All hopes have apparently been dashed and God's promises are unfulfilled.

Why did such a great story turn so bad? The book of Judges shows us why, and provides us with powerful warnings along the way.

Yet it does more than that. It also points ahead to the way in which God would fulfil his promises in the future.

So buckle down, as through these ten studies we relive some of Israel's most exciting times.

Read Judges 1:1–20.

1. List all the successes Judah had in verses 1–20. What is your impression of how successful they have been?
2. Why was this campaign necessary (Gen 15:12–16; Deut 7:1–6, 9:4–5)?
3. How do Adoni-bezek's words in 1:7 help us to understand what is happening?

-
4. What is your impression of Othniel and Achsah (vv. 12-15)? How do they contribute to the flow of the story?
5. What reason is given for Judah's success (v. 19)? Why then do you think Judah couldn't succeed in the valleys?

RWANDA. BOSNIA. YUGOSLAVIA. East Timor. The words conjure pictures of violence and hatred, of genocide and ethnic cleansing. At first glance, Israel's conquest of Canaan might seem similar—just another tribal conflict.

Yet, this campaign was radically different. It was a holy war, started and directed by God. Justice and redemption were its goals. The elimination of the Canaanites was both God's judgement on them and a necessary action to keep Israel from being corrupted by their evil. This military operation would be like a

surgeon removing a cancerous growth. It would create a place where God's blessings promised in Genesis 12:1-3 could be enjoyed by Israel and, through Israel, the world.

Things start well; the picture is of total victory—with one exception. Although God is with them, Judah is unable to defeat the people of the plains with their iron chariots. It is unexplained, and the mystery is disturbing. But by it, we are prepared for the recounting of the other tribes' progress.

Read Judges 1:21-36.

6. What is your overall impression of Israel's success in these verses?

7. What do you think of the house of Joseph's actions in verses 22-26? Why?

8. Why do you think that some of the tribes used Canaanites for forced labour instead of driving them out?

9. What is the effect of leaving the Danites' situation until last (vv. 34-36)?

ALTHOUGH ISRAEL HAD STARTED well with the account of Judah's conquests, the news turns increasingly sour as the different tribes are listed.

None of the other tribes enjoy successes approaching that of Judah. Two things are particularly disturbing.

First is the account of the conquest of the city of Luz in verses 23-26. This passage reminds us of the conquest of Jericho in Joshua 2-6. In both cases Israel makes a covenant with a Canaanite to preserve the life of the Canaanite. However, in the Jericho

episode the initiative was with the Canaanite (Rahab) who threw her lot in with Israel and joined God's people. In Luz, it is the Israelites who initiate the covenant. The Canaanite, far from joining Israel, moves away a distance and rebuilds Luz. This preserves Canaanite idolatry in the middle of the Promised Land! The contrast between Luz and Jericho shows us that Israel's actions are no longer directed towards the elimination of Canaanite idolatry. Their goals are no longer God's goals.

The second disturbing note is struck

in verses 27-34. The reports are increasingly bleak in these verses. First, we are told that the Canaanites continue to live among the Israelites. Then we are told that the Israelites live among the Canaanites. Finally, we are told that the tribe of Dan is forced back into the hills

out of their allotment of land. The initial good start has first slowed and then turned into a rout! Israel has not fulfilled the charge God gave her in the Law to clear the Promised Land of its inhabitants. The stage is set to hear God's word on this.

Read Judges 2:1-5.

10. What was Israel's obligation (v. 2)?

11. Compare God's commitment in verse 1 to God's action in verse 3. How would you reconcile these two statements?

12. Given what you have seen so far, how much of a difference do you think Israel's actions in verses 4-5 will make to the situation?

13. In your own words, describe Israel's position by the end of verse 5.

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD SPELLS out the problem. God has promised never to break the covenant—he has committed himself to bless Israel. Yet the covenant *also* obligates Israel to keep God’s commands. Israel has not done this. Israel’s disobedience means that she can no longer be a recipient of the promised blessings. God will not bless because Israel was not faithful to the covenant.

Israel’s grief at the news does not

remove the core problem. Obedience is necessary to receive the promised blessing. Yet Israel is proving to be incapable of the needed obedience. The final outcome of this is unclear, but what is clear is that it will create a change in Israel’s environment. In 2:3, God declares that he will stop driving out the Canaanites from before Israel. Their presence will become a permanent feature, and they and their gods will continue to create trouble for Israel.

» Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

- How does the fact that God was behind a holy war against the Canaanites make you feel? How does it fit with your understanding of what God is like?

- What would you need to change to bring your understanding of God in line with the message of this passage? What does a holy war tell us about God’s character and purposes?

-
- Rather than obey God's command, Israel chose to make deals with the Canaanites to allow them to continue to live. Why do you think they acted this way?

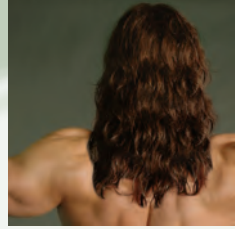
- Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-14.
 - In general, how does Israel's history serve as an example and lesson for us?

- Look back at your answer to the question at the top of this page. In what way are you tempted to act like Israel?

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God that he is faithful and has fulfilled his promises throughout history.
- Pray that God would continue to change and shape us to be obedient to his will as we read his word in Judges.

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY



"It was a time of heroes, of daring rescues and mighty warriors, of merciless enemies and epic battles; a time of fear, a time of revenge, a time when every man did what was right in his own eyes ..."

If the book of Judges were a modern motion picture, that might be how the advertising would go. To modern readers, it is certainly a dark and gruesome part of the Bible, in which Israel lurches from sin to judgement to salvation and back again with grim regularity.

Yet like all the books of the Old Testament, Judges contains strong warnings and encouragements for us as Christians. In these ten insightful studies, Mark Baddeley skilfully guides us through the often disturbing events of this period of Israel's history and points us to the lessons we can learn—about God, about holiness and sin and judgement, and about the Christ who fulfils all of God's promises.

