
PART 5

CONNECT GUIDE



THE BOOK OF
JUDGES

**WALLACE MEMORIAL
BAPTIST CHURCH**

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AS WE BEGIN A READING PLAN

WEEK 12

- Judges 17
- Judges 18
- Ruth 1-2
- Ruth 3-4
- Habakkuk 2:18-20

WEEK 14

- Judges 20-21
- 1 Samuel 7-8
- 1 Samuel 9-10
- 1 Samuel 11-12
- 1 Samuel 13

WEEK 13

- Judges 19
- 1 Samuel 1-2
- 1 Samuel 3-4
- 1 Samuel 5-6
- Proverbs 3:5-6
- Romans 10:9

WEEK TWELVE

DAY 1: JUDGES 17

It's been about a month and a half since we were last in the book of Judges. If you're anything like me, then the fast pace and high activity of the holiday season may have pushed some of your memories to the side. Luckily, Judges chapter 17 is a great place to jump back in. As a quick recap, Judges 1- 5 catch the reader up on the last days of Joshua and Israel's failure to drive idol worshiping tribes out of the land, and then it moves on to tell the reader about several faithful Judges who saved the land from invading oppressors. Why was Israel invaded by oppressors? Well, the early chapters of the book told us it was because Israel "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord." They didn't raise their children to follow the law or remember God's goodness, but instead decided to worship the idols of the Canaanites.

Judges 6-16 tell us the stories of Judges that were... less faithful. Some of them try to do the right thing, like Gideon who even has a moment where he fully trusts God enough to see a miraculous victory. However, by the time we get to Jephthah and Samson we're dealing with little more than egotistical, self centered, murdering idolaters. The cycle gets worse as it continues and Israel rejects God over and over and over. By the time we reach chapter 17 Israel is worshipping God as if He is just another Canaanite idol, making them indistinguishable from the people they refused to drive out of the land.

We see this clearly exemplified in Judges 17. A man named Micah steals from his mother (which should be a red flag) but decides to return the money after hearing her pronounce curses over whoever stole it. (Yeah, red flags on mom too...) Initially this looks like it will be a wholesome interaction of repentance and forgiveness until Micah's mother marks the occasion by using the silver to cast an idol. So we're right back to the problem. Israel is trying to worship God as if He's just another Canaanite idol.

One of the most often repeated themes of Judges is that God has no tolerance for being worshipped as an idol. We've seen silver statues, gold ephods, human sacrifice, and wholesale slaughter done in the name of the one true God. He could not be more clear that He detests these actions and yet Israel still carries them out in His name. This should make us stop and think; are we so quick to judge when we often do the same in our culture? 21st century western culture indulges in materialism while ignoring God's commands to care for the poor and the whole time we "thank Him for the blessings." We see people who insult, demean, and curse people on social media over politics and economics while claiming to be "defending truth."

We could go on for hours with examples, but at this point we should stop and simply repent. We should examine ourselves and see how we too have become like the Israelites. How we attempt to worship God in a way that He despises. Let's look at Judges and rightly condemn the self- centered brutality of Israel, but also examine ourselves in the same light.

- Why did Israel repeat the same mistakes when history showed them what would happen?
- Are there any ways you worship God that don't align with His character?

DAY 2: JUDGES 18

Sometimes, you and I can read an Old Testament story and walk away a little confused. I have to admit, Judges 18 was one of those moments for me. I was confused as to why the tribe of Dan was out conquering. I was confused as to who was in the right between the men of Dan, this mercenary priest, and Micah the idol casting thief. I was also a little confused as to what lesson we were supposed to learn from this narrative. I had this confusion because I failed to read the story like an ancient Hebrew. By accounting for a few cultural differences between us and the original audience we can better understand what Judges 18 is trying to tell us.

First, as 21st century westerners, we highly value chronology, punctuality, and precision in dates. Hebrew authors tended to care very little about this. This is important because Judges 17-21 are not in chronological succession to the previous 16 chapters. Those chapters are a Chronicle of each Judge as they are appointed, but (according to Tim Keller) these last chapters are an overview of "what it was like to live in Israel in those days." So this narrative takes place during an unspecified time when one or another of those judges were in power.

Second, we often fail to read thematically. Especially when those themes are found in allusions to other books of the Bible. We are told in the beginning of this passage that the tribe of Dan had not taken possession of any land. We could read this as a mere detail of the setting, but to a Hebrew audience it would signify that they had yet to end the wandering in the wilderness that all of Israel experienced as a punishment from God. If we go back to Joshua, we see that the tribe of Dan failed to be obedient to God, and it's because of this that they were not given a place in the land. When they do so in this chapter we also see that they still have no intention of obedience. They take their place by threatening their own countrymen, by installing idols, by killing the helpless, and by paying off corrupt priests.

Which also answers one of my other confusions. There are no good guys here. God doesn't appoint, direct, or bless anyone even though a corrupt priest falsely offers a blessing in God's name. As someone raised on Marvel Comics and Lord of the Rings, I always want to know who to cheer for as the good guy, but the Bible teaches us there are no heroes but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So what lesson do we learn? The same as always. We don't need the land. We don't need the wealth. We don't need the victory of another army or another person. The tribe of Dan got what they wanted, but they never found obedience to God. The lesson is to flee from a world that teaches us to strive for these things and run to a God who will offer us salvation through Jesus.

- Have you ever felt unsettled like the tribe of Dan? How can you find rest in God?
- Why do we always want a human hero in our stories?

DAY 3: RUTH 1-2

Hang on, there's still more chapters of Judges... why are we reading Ruth instead? Well remember yesterday, when we learned that the events of Judges 17-21 are happening at the same time as chapters 1-16? The same can be said for the book of Ruth. Once again, Hebrew writers are not as concerned with exact times and dates as we are, but the events of Judges and Ruth are all happening around 3000 years ago within the same century or so. "Ok history nerd, are you really going to bore us with all these little factoids?" As much as I would love to dive into history and methodology, there is actually a very important spiritual point to be made here.

Judges can be a very disheartening book. It begins with a list of failures after the time of Joshua, and even though a few faithful people try their best, it's really a chronicle of terrible failure and disobedience. With story after story of people who should know better, but still reject God for powerless idols and selfish whims it can start to feel very hopeless. The book of Ruth becomes a welcome contrast. Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz are all still sinful people who desperately need to be rescued by God, but in contrast to characters like Abimelech, Sismon, and Jephthah we see them trying their best to trust God and

be obedient to what He commanded them to do. Where Judges is a cautionary tale of brutality and apathy, the book of Ruth is one of commitment, love, sacrifice, and faithful obedience.

The book of Ruth also helps us reject the ethnic and racial lines that so many false interpreters have imposed on Old Testament narratives. With so many narratives about driving the people out of the land, commands not to intermarry, and judgments on the Canaanites it's easy to fall into the mindset that God loved Israel and hated the other nations. That God came to save Israel and Judge everyone else. This is not the case at all. Israel was chosen, not as the only culture to be loved or saved, but as the people responsible for sharing the greatness of God with the world so that ALL the nations could be saved. The book of Ruth reminds us of this because she was a Moabite. Yes, she was from the same Moab that invaded and oppressed Israel in chapter 3 of Judges. The scandal is that Ruth seems to understand who God is while Israel rejects Him for their own desires.

- So enjoy these four chapters of Ruth and be comforted by God's faithful love for all people that call upon His name.
- Do you find it difficult that Bible stories aren't in Chronological order? Why or why not?
- What can the Holy Spirit teach us about faithfulness from the book of Ruth?

DAY 4: RUTH 3-4

The book of Judges is often a sad tale of "what not to do" where most of the leaders are bad examples. In chapters 17 and 18 we see that Micah, the Tribe of Dan and the Levite for hire treat God as if He's a Canaanite idol as well as speaking and acting on His behalf without consulting His law or hearing a command from Him. The fancy academic word for this practice is "syncretism." That means the people of Israel and especially their corrupt leaders took some pieces of God's law and combined it with the other religions of the land. This is exactly what God wanted to avoid by having Israel drive the Canaanites out of the land. God is not interested in compromising because His ways and His character are already perfect and any compromise would be sin.

Ruth and Boaz become a welcome break from this parade of idolatry. Their faithfulness to God reminds us that our lives and our circumstances don't dictate our choices or our responsibilities in terms of obedience. Ruth and Naomi both endured tragedy and hardship. They could have given up and become bitter towards God, but instead they remained faithful. Boaz had enough wealth and station to do whatever he pleased (like Samson or Gideon), but instead he chose to have integrity in every decision he made.

It's great to see faithfulness and a happy ending, but it's even better to see what God does in return. The genealogy at the end of the book shows us that Ruth and Boaz became the grandparents of King David. Which also means that Jesus himself came from their line! Ruth and Boaz trusted God. Their faithfulness was the evidence of this trust. Genesis tells us that trusting God in this way is what He declares to be righteous. Yes, they were sinful people who made mistakes and needed redemption, but God wants our trust and Jesus supplies that perfection.

In a time where most of Israel did “what was right in their own eyes,” Naomi showed the nations that God’s ways mattered. In a time of idolatrous syncretism, Ruth showed the nations that God will redeem anyone who trusts Him. In a time of self seeking brutality from leaders, Boaz decided to show love, gentleness, integrity, and redemption. When we look at this story alongside the book of Judges we are faced with a choice of our own. Will we choose idolatrous syncretism, or will we choose faithful integrity?

- How do you see syncretism happening in 21st century American culture?
- If we know God rewards faithfulness, why is it so tempting to choose half truths and loyalty to corrupt leaders?

DAY 5: HABAKKUK 2:18-20

One of the main focuses in Judges 17 and 18 is that Israel is worshiping God through carved idols, thereby treating Him as one of the Canaanite gods. Micah and his mother cast an idol to worship God. Micah’s priest condoned this idol worship through his selfish apathy. The tribe of Dan stole the idols and installed them in their temple where they claimed to be worshipping God. God was pretty clear in the second commandment that He wasn’t ok with this. He even commanded Moses to kill all those who continued to worship Him as a golden calf in Exodus. Those commandments and those stories were readily available to the people of Israel. They weren’t confused. They were actively choosing to reject God.

The biggest difference between the one true God and these cast idols is that God is real, personal, all powerful and all knowing while the idols are nothing more than weird little statues. Just blasphemous little paperweights sitting there

with no power. This is essentially God's message to Habakkuk in our reading today. Statues are useless and God is real.

So often we think of ourselves as enlightened intellectuals while we laugh at the Israelites for trusting in these silly trinkets, but are we really any better? We don't worship statues of Baal or Molech, but how often do we put our trust in the silly little things of this world. How often do we make ethical compromises for political power or the pursuit of wealth? How often do we follow corrupt leaders who convince us that our friends and neighbors are enemies if they disagree with us? How often do we bow at the altars of comfort, luxury, and apathy? How often do we reject the Bible because we want what is "right in our own eyes?" It's difficult and uncomfortable to look inside and address our own idolatry, but it's also worth it. Today, take a few minutes, reread our verse in Habakkuk and ask the Holy Spirit to show you the idols in your heart. Let's make our repentance and submission to God the greatest testimony in our lives and a light to all the nations. Let's abandon anything that draws us away from Jesus.

Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to show you the idols of your heart.

How can you combat the temptation of falling into idolatry?

- What are Generational sins that you often see repeated?
- What are some bad, but common justifications for moral compromises?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: JANUARY 4, 2026

WEEK TWELVE: JUDGES 17 & 18

This week we learned about the events of Judges 17 and 18. We learned more about how to read thematically, and we also discovered that these final chapters aren't in chronological order with the rest of the book. Even still we saw that Israel continued to make the same mistakes over and over again. Today your campus pastor will explain how the lessons from Micah, the corrupt priest, and the tribe of Dan can drive us further into our need for Jesus.

ACTION STEP

How will I live out the action step this week?

SERMON NOTES

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 12

- This narrative opens up with several Israelites diving into idolatry and worshipping God in ways He never intended or desired. As a class, walk through these two chapters and find each time someone worships God as if He was an idol.
- The priest in chapter 17 seems to be more interested in what he's being paid than what he's supposed to do. In our culture the "prosperity gospel" of preachers like Joel Osteen, Creflo Dollar, and Kenneth Copeland embody similar outlooks. How does the prosperity Gospel of our time twist the message of God? How can we help people understand the difference?
- In chapter 18 the tribe of Dan is still wandering because they refuse to be obedient to God. How can our trust in God help us to settle down and be content even in tumultuous times?
- In these chapters we see everyone embracing sin because they have forgotten God. As a class, how can you hold each other accountable this year for worshiping God, and living our His mission the correct way?
- This is the first week, and the first year of our 2030 vision. How can your class be part of helping us reach the goals that God has given to our pastor?

WEEK THIRTEEN

DAY 1: JUDGES 19

Like many passages in the book of Judges, this one opens by saying "In those days there was no king in Israel." Yes, it is a simple statement of fact, but the author is also attaching some disturbing implications. God Himself was supposed to rule over Israel. Like any good king He cared for His people. He gave them the law. He rescued them in conflict. He heard their pleas. Yet, for some reason Israel rejected God as their king to pursue lawless anarchy. The statement "there was no king in Israel" is also a clear designation that they have rejected God's authority because they believe they have a better way.

This passage also continues the downward spiral. Chapters 17 and 18 represented a certain type of obtuse and absurd immorality. Their practices were completely incongruent with their actions and devoid of any faithful obedience. The tone in chapter 19 however, is significantly darker. This shows us that when a culture rejects God's law the very fabric of society and decency starts to unravel. The fact that a Levite even has a concubine should tell us that something has gone seriously astray. Yes the text refers to him as "husband" but make no mistake, this is an abused woman who is being abused and held against her will.

When we reach verse 16 the story becomes eerily familiar. It matches the events of Genesis that happen in Sodom almost line for line. This is no accident or plagiarism on the part of the author. What happens to the concubine is brutal and

horrific. The author doesn't hold back because he needs us to understand what happens when sin is allowed to run free. When our evil nature is allowed to take hold, then humans become little more than beasts, driven by our sinful urges and corrupt desires. The author's message is clear. Israel was supposed to be set apart. They were supposed to be a light to the nation, but they have become worse than those they were supposed to drive out. Israel's evil, at this point, has eclipsed even Sodom and Gomorrah.

Small compromises end up in more compromises. Bad thoughts become evil deeds. It's tempting to put the book down and walk away from the Story at this point, but we simply can't. We need to look at the horror of this story and realize that if we don't repent and submit to Jesus then the same fate awaits us. Yes, this story should disgust you, but it should also drive you to pray desperately for our culture and for our world. We live in a culture that excuses and even normalizes sexual assault. We live in a world where people are treated as property and tools. Our world is not so different from that of Judges 19. In those days there was no king in Israel, because they were desperately in need of Jesus. He's the only hope for our time and our world as well.

- Take some time today and pray that our world will repent from violence and exploitation.
- How can you be a light that shines in the middle of such darkness?

DAY 2: 1 SAMUEL 1 & 2

When we started this study, we had to read through the book of Joshua. We had to understand Israel's failure as they entered the land so we could understand why they had so much trouble during their time in the land. We had to understand Joshua's faithful leadership, so we could then understand the corruption of the Judges in comparison. As we near the end of Judges we must apply the same type of contiguous knowledge to how we understand Samuel.

The early events in the book of 1 Samuel are just like Ruth. They happen in the same time period as the book of Judges. So when Hannah is desperate and praying for a child, selfish Judges are seeking their own power. When the corrupt priests were selling themselves, installing idols, and mutilating concubines, Eli was the high priest of Israel. It's also likely that Eli and Samson lived around the same time.

Yeah, I love history and learning about all these overlapping interactions is fascinating to me. There is also a lesson to be learned. Samson's mother, Hannah, Boaz, Ruth, Naomi, and Samuel were faithful people in the middle of dark times. They were surrounded by people who chose corruption, but they trusted God and followed Him.

It takes about 5 seconds of watching the news or scrolling the internet to pick up on the fact that we also live in dark times.

That's why it's important for us to read these stories. We need to know that even in difficulty we can still be faithful to God. We can still respond to His call. We don't have to let the darkness swallow our hope. Instead we can reflect Jesus and his light to show the way in the middle of difficult circumstances.

- How can you be a light, reflecting Jesus, in the middle of difficult situations?
- How can you encourage others to do the same?

DAY 3: 1 SAMUEL 3 & 4

What's the most troubling part about Judges 17-21? At first glance we might say it's the brutality and violence that happens over and over. Upon further examination we might determine that it's the callous apathy toward that violence and brutality. Yet as we consider further we have to realize that the worst part of these chapters is that God is just not speaking to anyone. Israel abandoned God and He left them to their own devices. The violence, the destruction, the pettiness, and the evil are all symptoms of spiritual death.

That's why 1 Samuel 3 is important. We learned yesterday that the early events in 1 Samuel were happening in the time of the Judges. So we can rejoice and have hope because God calls people to himself even when His people choose to reject Him. Hannah dedicated Samuel to service in the temple. Samuel had been serving as an apprentice to Eli for some time, and

God audibly called him out. God spoke Samuel's name aloud so that He could reveal Himself to Samuel.

Do you remember what happened in the first chapter of Judges? The people of Israel failed to tell the next generation about God and that subsequent generation did not know Him. Wayward parents raised a lost generation that began the cycle of idolatry and oppression. Yet in a time of corrupt priests, a faithful mother dedicated her son to serving the Lord and God revealed Himself to that boy. The way the cycle begins is the way the cycle breaks. God calls people to Himself and in response they make His name and His character known to the world.

It's common in our time for each generation to complain about the next, while younger generations write off their predecessors. As the church we cannot afford to imitate the world in this behavior. We have to set aside our preferences and expectations to love every generation as our own family of faith. God shows us in this text that He wants us to be faithful messengers of His glory and His goodness. Passing that message down through the generations is the very method God has given us to spread the Gospel throughout the world.

- What are generational preferences we can set aside to have better relationships in the church?
- How will you support, mentor, and love each generation so that they will know the Lord?

DAY 4: 1 SAMUEL 5 & 6

Chapters 5 and 6 of 1 Samuel remind us that Israel, at this time, is still in the cycle of idolatry and oppression. Both Samson and Eli judged Israel while the Philistines raided and oppressed them. In chapter 4 we saw that the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and this led to Eli's death. Israel is still rejecting God, so the Philistines have not been defeated or driven out. It seems this cycle of Philistine oppression will continue for some time because even God's chosen leaders are refusing to obey Him.

Chapters 5 and 6 of first Samuel take an interesting turn though. The Philistines escape with the stolen Ark and they attempt to install it in the temple of Dagon, their false God. As we've seen now in multiple passages, God will not be treated as just another idol. The daily destruction of Dagon's statue becomes almost comedic as God repeatedly proves that He's superior to Dagon by virtue of actually being a real God and not a made up ghost story.

The Judges, the Priests, and the People have rejected God, but God Himself is still ready and able to fight the battle against the Philistines. God shows the Philistines His power by afflicting them with plagues and skin diseases wherever the Ark goes. God is proving that human weapons, false idols, man made strategies are no match for His glory and power. Eventually even the Philistine priests advise their leaders not

to end up like Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Which is somewhat ironic. Pagan priests remember what God has done even if Israel refuses.

Two cows return the Ark to Beth-Shemesh only to get sacrificed for their effort, but the people of Beth-Shemesh decide to look in the Ark and 70 of them are immediately struck down. Why? God is making it clear that He alone is Holy. Being from Israel does not exclude them from the need for obedience. Being Israeli is not a path to salvation. It does not matter whether someone is Israelite or Philistine, those who mock and disobey Him will receive judgment. Only those who trust Him, regardless of ethnicity, will be saved.

Even in this next book, the cycle continues, but this time God proves that He will fight the battle Himself.

- How do we sometimes treat God as just another Idol like the Philistines?
- As Believers, why are we often tempted to think we have different rules of obedience like the people of Beth-Shemesh falsely assumed?

DAY 5: PROVERBS 3:5-6, ROMANS 10:9

The problem with the Judges? Each man did what he saw fit in his own eyes. What was the problem with the Philistines?

Each man did what he saw fit in his own eyes. What was the problem with Israel? Each man did what he saw fit in his own eyes.

It's not a list of individual problems. It's one human problem. It's sin, and the sin that curses our very nature from the moment we're conceived causes us to believe that we know better than God. We read countless Bible stories about why this doesn't work, and still we persist. We see the state of the world, and still we persist. Wisdom, logic, even basic animal instinct should be screaming at us to stop, but our sin still urges us to the inborn arrogance.

Today's verses give us the answer. We need to acknowledge our sin, reject our own understanding of the world, and exclusively listen to God. Yes, it's an Old Testament proverb but it also lays out how we should repent and turn to Jesus. We need to confess our sin, reject our own understanding, and place all of our trust in Jesus to save us.

Judges didn't cut it. We needed Jesus. Our own wisdom falls short. We need Jesus. No technology, economy, expression, or individual freedom will save us. We need Jesus.

- Spend some time today praying and asking God for His wisdom.
- Why do we still think we know better even though everything proves us wrong?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: JANUARY 11, 2026

WEEK THIRTEEN: JUDGES 19

This week we were all horrified at the events of Judges 19. The violence and brutality are shocking each time. We learned that this was intentional on the part of the author, as this narrative shows how Israel has eclipsed the evil of even Sodom and Gomorrah. We also learned in our devotions that the book of 1 Samuel is a continuation of this time period that reveals more of God's character and how He interacts with His people. Today your campus pastor will help us understand the dire warnings of Judges 19 and how we can repent from the sin that leads people to that point.

ACTION STEP

How will I live out the action step this week?

SERMON NOTES

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 13

- Were the violent descriptions in Judges 19 difficult for you? Why is this narrative even more disturbing than the other chapters where tens of thousands of people die?
- Read Genesis 19 and compare it to Judges 19? How are the stories similar? How are they different? Why do you think the author of Judges arranged his story in such a similar way
- One of the main problems in Israel during the period of the Judges seems to be that people were dehumanized and treated as property. How does this happen in our culture today? What can we do about it as a church?
- In the midst of all the darkness in Judges, the people needed someone to show them the light. What can you do this week to influence someone toward Christianity and show them the light?

WEEK FOURTEEN

DAY 1: JUDGES 20 & 21

With those two chapters, we begin our last week in the book of Judges. Chapters 20 and 21 contain several different events and it's easy to lose the implications in all the activity. After the horrific events of chapter 19, the Levite calls all of Israel together for vengeance over the incident in Gibeah. It's at first hard to gauge exactly why this Levite is so passionate about vindication for a woman that he so callously abused and sent to her death, but then we realize he's not even seeking justice for her, but recompense for "his property." The author is making it very clear in this chapter that there are no heroes left in Israel. It is simply a conflict of immorality.

The situation devolves into a type of civil war where thousands of people die, and then numerous women are kidnapped as brides. In this final chapter of Judges we see all the tribes united for the first time since chapter 3, but in this case Israel is being oppressed by... Israel. They are raiding their own cities. They are killing their own people. They are kidnapping their own women. Israel's rejection of God has caused them to spiral into their own instrument of judgment. Not only are they worshiping like the Canaanites, they are dishing out violence and oppression just like them as well.

Who are they united under as their leader? A righteous Judge like Othneil or Ehud? No, this time they are united under a

corrupt and abusive Levite who treats people as little more than property. In some ways this priest himself represents the entire state of Israel at that moment. He claims to know God, but denies his ways. He treats God like a mere statue and just does what's right in "his own eyes." Israel has done the worst thing possible, they got exactly what they wanted. They achieved self direction with no interference from God. Everyone got to do what was "right in their own eyes."

- Why do you think Israel continued to reject God even after they felt the consequences?
- Have you ever gotten exactly what you wanted only to realize it wasn't a good thing at all?

DAY 2: 1 SAMUEL 7 & 8

Yesterday we saw that Israel, at the end of Judges, became their own instrument of oppression under the banner of a corrupt priest. In our passage today, we see a faithful (if sometimes kinda grumpy) priest call Israel back to repentance. Samuel's statement in chapter 7 is simple, yet it's been the message Israel needed since the very beginning of Judges. "Put the idols away and only worship God!" It's the first and second commandment all wrapped up into one. In a shocking twist of events, the people actually listen to Samuel and they destroy their idols and exclusively worship the Lord. This results in a very quick response from God as He delivers them from several foreign oppressors. God proves over and over

again that He will always stay true to His word.

Samuel's story is told like one of the faithful Judges who oversees a time of peace in Israel. The cycle threatens to begin anew though as Samuel's sons once again bring corruption into the priesthood. Israel can't trust Samuel's son as leader so they decide to ask for a king. After all, the book of Judges told us the problem was "in those days there was no king in Israel." This however is just further proof that humanity will continue to reject God to look like the world. God was supposed to be the king of Israel Himself, but Israel wasn't asking for leadership, they were asking to become like the nations surrounding them. Samuel warns them, but they insist so God once again gives Israel what they... not as a blessing this time, but as a lesson.

It's tempting and all too common for us to be like Israel in our lives too. We know that God is supposed to be our authority. We know that Jesus is supposed to be our King. Yet, all too often we see the powers and luxuries of this world and we want to look like them. So we reject God for the foreign power structures and selfish leaders of this world. Let's listen to the warnings of 1 Samuel and not trade our perfect King Jesus for some petty tyrant of this world.

- Why did Israel think things would be better with a king?
- Why is it so tempting to fit in and imitate the world instead of submitting to Jesus?

DAY 3: 1 SAMUEL 9 & 10

In our passage today we finally get to meet a king. Saul, the son of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin, seems to be everything Israel could want in a king. He's tall, strong, handsome, and he's willing to rescue the donkeys. So God tells Samuel to anoint him. There's a huge problem here though... According to the prophecy at the end of Genesis kings are supposed to come from the line of Judah, and Saul is a Benjamite. It's very important to note here that God was choosing a king that the people wanted. They never asked God who He wanted to rule them. They never even asked God what He wanted their ruler to be like. They said "Get us a king like the other nations." So God, in an act of simultaneous mercy and judgment, gives them exactly what they wanted.

It's no accident either that Saul is sent to the Philistine garrison at Gibeah. If you'll remember, Gibeah is the same city that His own clan committed atrocities in Judges 19. It's the same town that Israel turned on and destroyed in chapter 20. God is foreshadowing the trouble that Saul will once again bring to the land. Even though God is actively revealing Himself to Saul, He knows that Saul won't stay faithful, and like many Israelite leaders before him, he'll end up giving into his sin.

Samuel doesn't mince his words or soften the situation at Saul's public proclamation. He makes sure that Israel understands that they are receiving a king because they have rejected God.

He reminds them of all God has done for them, and all the times He's saved them, just so they'll understand what they're losing by choosing a king. In many ways I wish we all had a Samuel that would warn us of the consequences every time we made a bad choice. Yes, Samuel is very blunt and his tone comes off a bit harsh, but the truth he speaks is simple and direct. I am too often tempted to make a choice that pleases me rather than God. You and I are in need of someone who will remind us of God when we start to focus on ourselves. That's why Jesus gave us the church. We might not have an ill-tempered priest reminding us, but we do have fellow church members who can hold us accountable and remind us to seek the Lord instead of temporary distractions. Yeah, it can be uncomfortable at first, but Samuel, Saul, and all of Israel teach us that unpleasant truth is always better than our favorite sins.

- Why do you think it's so difficult to be held accountable by others?
- Do you have someone in your life that holds you accountable?

DAY 4: 1 SAMUEL 11 & 12

There may have been a point in this study where you, as the reader, wondered why we were moving into 1 Samuel instead of simply ending with Judges 21. Today's reading shows why we treat these books, along with Ruth, as a single narrative. 1 Samuel chapters 11 and 12 seem like they could easily be added

into the book of Judges. Israel is invaded and oppressed by a foreign army. A pagan ruler demands tribute and submission. God's Spirit empowers a military leader to deliver the people. It reads just like a story from Judges because God is proving the same point in Samuel's time that He was in the time of Ehud, Gideon, and Samson. God can empower any leader to change a circumstance, but it won't change the sinful hearts of the people.

If chapter 11 being structured just like a Judges narrative wasn't enough to convince you of this, well then Samuel is going to be nice enough to spell it out clearly in chapter 12. After God empowers Saul to defeat and expel the enemies, the people finally agree to accept him as the chosen king, so Samuel finally gets to step down as leader (He will still be priest, just not Judge). To mark this occasion he gives one of the grumpiest retirement speeches ever recorded. Samuel first challenges all of Israel at once to speak up if anyone has a problem with him, which if you think about it is a pretty gutsy move for an elderly priest who is staring down a host of military leaders. Next, and more importantly, Samuel makes sure everyone understands the patterns that led them here. For centuries now, since the time they left Egypt, they've created their own problems through disobedience, and then cried out to God to save them when they start to feel the consequences. In many ways Samuel has done my job for me by giving a perfect summary of the book of Judges and the themes it presents.

In the end he tells them the same thing Joshua said all those years ago. If you obey God and follow His chosen leaders then He'll protect and bless you. If you worship idols this whole thing will start again. If you reject God then this entire thing will start again. If you tolerate and even celebrate moral corruption in your leaders then this whole thing will start again, and you will suffer. From our perspective this seems like an obvious pattern, but time will prove that without a changed heart, the actions will always be the same. The people didn't just need to be delivered. They didn't just need a leader. They needed new hearts that were free of sinful desires and corrupt urges. Every cycle proves over and over how badly we need Jesus.

Why do we so often believe that better circumstances will fix all of our problems?

How can we help people in difficult circumstances while still encouraging them to let Jesus also change their hearts?

warnings of 1 Samuel and not trade our perfect King Jesus for some petty tyrant of this world.

- Why did Israel think things would be better with a king?
- Why is it so tempting to fit in and imitate the world instead of submitting to Jesus?

DAY 5: 1 SAMUEL 13

Our last day in this study is an exercise in proving the same point once again. God deserves our obedience, but our sinful corruption chooses what's "right in our own eyes." This has been the root problem with Israel and their leaders since the very beginning. King Saul makes it almost an entire chapter before he starts failing as a leader. While waiting on Samuel to perform the offering and the rituals necessary to honor God before battle, Saul becomes impatient. So he breaks God's commandment and makes the offering Himself. For this, God will strip him of his kingship and choose another who is more aligned with the heart of God.

Now, if you've read Judges this might seem a bit incongruent. Gideon murdered entire towns out of spiteful revenge. Jephthah treated God like Molech, worshipping Him through human sacrifice. Samson abandoned his responsibilities to visit prostitutes, sulk in caves, and abuse animals. Now God is going to dethrone Saul for something as trivial as procedural error? He's being ousted for making an offering to God? It seems incongruent to us, because we're still deciding what's right in our own eyes. The Hebrew separation of authority was clear. Only a priest does the offering. No one can be priest and King at the same time. Practically this would be a slippery slope to corruption, but more importantly that separation is a prophecy that reserves the right to be priest and king for Jesus. By disobeying God, Saul is skewing the people's vision

of the coming Messiah. God cannot allow corruption of His revelation. God cannot allow compromise in the way He's worshiped so we see yet another leader begin reaping the consequences of their sin.

In Judges we heard "there was no king in Israel." Now in 1 Samuel we see that even the king's heart is corrupt. This didn't surprise God. He always knew this would happen, and He had it miraculously recorded and preserved for us so we could understand that sin and not circumstance is the root problem for all humanity. Throughout our Judges study we've been entertained, shocked, disturbed, and at times even confused. We've seen faithful leaders do difficult things, and we've seen haunting violence that shows us the depth of human nature. The lesson is the same throughout. We need to be obedient. We need good leaders. We need to learn from the consequences of our corruption and turn to God. Yet because of our sinful hearts we can't. We need a leader who can do more than deliver us from an army. We need a leader who can defeat sin and change our hearts.

The message of Judges is the same as every other page of the Bible. WE NEED JESUS!

- What are some lessons you learned from this study?
- How can you use this study to tell someone else about Jesus?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: JANUARY 18, 2026

WEEK FOURTEEN: JUDGES 20 & 21

This week we covered the final two chapters of Judges. We saw that Israel has come full circle. Because of their disobedience, corrupt leadership, and rejection of God, Israel has now become their own oppressor united under idolatrous priests. In our devotions we also looked further into first Samuel to see how the same problems progressed even when Israel found a king. At the end of our study, we learned that our sin will always lead us astray if we follow human leadership and impulse. We are in desperate need of Jesus to change our hearts. Today your campus pastor will conclude our study in Judges and explain to you how these ancient narratives drive us further toward our need for Jesus.

ACTION STEP

How will I live out the action step this week?

SERMON NOTES

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 14

- This marks the end of 14 weeks we've spent studying the book of Judges. Which passages were difficult for you? Where did you learn the most? Was there anything that surprised or shocked you about these books?
- Chapter 21 concludes by saying "In those days there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes?" Why does it cause problems when each person individually decides what's right and wrong in their own eyes? How does this happen in our culture today?
- One of the main themes of Judges is that people are driven to sin by tolerating corrupt leaders. How can we hold leaders in our churches and our world to a higher standard? How can we do this while also being obedient to Romans 13?
- Another prevalent theme in Judges, especially in these last few chapters, is that God refuses to be worshiped like a common idol. How can we use the Bible to make sure our worship practices are correct? How can we make sure our worship isn't corrupted by preference, tradition, or cultural pressure?
- In the end we learned that all human leaders fall short, and we need something better. We need a savior. We need Jesus. How can you share this lesson with someone this week?