



DAILY BIBLE READING

JOINING THE JUDGES

Tim Blagg

Read. Ask. Live. Love

Daily Bible Reading

What?

Sometimes we find it hard to read the Bible, don't we? At church we hear it all the time: "*read the Bible more.*" But how? Some of the devotionals on offer seem to have less Bible than story. Some of the Bible reading plans seem too big to take on all at once; what should I think about? How can I possibly know what questions to ask as I read through God's word?

It's in light of these questions that these daily bible readings have come into existence! The aim is to help you read God's word for yourself and ask some of the questions to comprehend what God is saying to you today through his living and active word, with the hope asking these sorts of questions for yourself as you read through the Bible in bigger doses that this has to offer. It's a tool, and hence it's only as valuable as our use of it.

My prayer for you as you use these - whether by yourself or with your family around the dinner table - is that God will work through his word to grow you into the fullness of Christ and bring you joy as you come to know him through his word.

How?

The way to approach it every day (as recommended) is:

- 1) Pray to God; it is his word we're reading, so ask him to help you understand it.
- 2) Read the passage once or twice.
- 3) Go through each question, looking back at the bible to think through them.
- 4) Pray about what you have learned, and live out the applications for today.

Want more?

If you want more studies like these ones, check out our online database at www.trinitycity.church/youth - just follow the links. Alternatively, if you're looking for more in depth bible reading plans, many can be found in study bibles or online. Chat to your bible study group leader or pastor for more information.

In Christ,

Tim

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Joining the Judges

Week 1

Monday

- Read Joshua 24:1-28

- Think through the following questions:

1. Write out in your own words how God brought Israel into the land of Canaan.

2. In verses 14-15, what does Joshua charge the people of Israel to do after he has died? How did they respond in v16-18?
3. What warning does Joshua give to the people of Israel? Does this leave you feeling optimistic about Israel's chances of obeying God? Why, or why not?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Before the events of Judges, we had Joshua. Through Joshua's leadership, God led Israel into the promised land and began to drive out all the Canaanites. Right here, at the start of their life without Moses or Joshua, Israel promises to follow God and to serve him always. For us today, we too make a commitment to follow God when we are baptised (if we are adults when we're baptised) or confirmed/ publicly declare our faith (if we were babies when baptised). And like the stone in v26-27, our commitment is symbolised in baptism. So, have you been baptised/ publicly declared your faith? If you have, write out today what your baptism means for you in terms of following God. If you haven't why not? Send an email to one of your youth leaders or talk to a parent about it.

Tuesday

- Read Judges 1:1-18

- Think through the following questions:

1. What happens after Joshua is dead?
2. How does Judah go in driving out the people from the land as God commanded?
3. What do we find out about Othniel in this part of Judges?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- In today's passage, we see God's people, Israel, wiping out many Canaanite nations. Chances are, we might feel a bit ashamed of God at this point. "How could a loving God command his people to commit genocide?" It's a big question. Check out appendix 2 and read it. Then spend some time praying to God, asking him to help you to trust him, even when we can't understand some of his commands or judgements.

Wednesday

- Read Judges 1:19-36

- Think through the following questions:

1. Why was Caleb given Hebron? (Check Deuteronomy 1:36 and Joshua 14:14-15)
2. What did God command the Israelites to do originally to the Canaanites? (Check Deuteronomy 20:16-18)
3. How did the tribes of Israel go in driving out the rest of the Canaanites?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- When it comes to the Judges, we see that even though Judah started so promisingly, they finished failing to do what God had commanded them to do. By the time we read about Dan, they completely fail. The big question everyone in Israel should be left asking is "has God failed?" God promised them that he would give them the land and drive out the inhabitants. Does this mean that God isn't powerful? Does this mean that God doesn't keep his promises? What do you think has gone wrong? Write it out: _____

_____.

Thursday

- Read Judges 2:1-5

- Think through the following questions:

1. Gilgal was a small town near Jericho, and during Joshua it was where the Tabernacle was - God's special presence among Israel. Bokim we're not too sure about, but it could be another name for Bethel. Check the map in Appendix 1 - where are these places?
2. According to God, why have Israel failed to drive out the Canaanites from the land?
3. How did Israel react when God told them about his judgement on them?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- As we see hints of in Judges 1, Israel has not obeyed God's commands for them to drive out the nations wholly. In some cases, they made treaties with them. They lived among them. This isn't just living next door to a neighbour though; it's living next door to a live radioactive source. Israel are poisoned. They are so influenced by the nations that they share the gods of the other nations. Similarly, for us today, in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, God calls for Christians to not be partnered to non-believers. Not in a "withdraw from the world and live in a bubble on the moon with Christians only allowed" kind of way. In a "be very careful who influences you, because you will be influenced" way. This is one of the big reasons why Christians shouldn't date or marry non-Christians; because we will be influenced. Take some time today and ask God to help you see who influences you. Who's voices do you listen to?

Friday

- Read Judges 2:6-19

- Think through the following questions:

1. While Joshua and his generation were alive, how well did Israel follow God?
2. What changed after Joshua's generation died?
3. In Judges, we see a cycle that repeats (and gets worse!) which is introduced here in Judges 2. Fill in which verses show us each step of the cycle:

Step 1: Israel rebels against God and does evil. v _____

Step 2: God is angry and hands Israel over to oppressors. v _____

Step 3: Israel are in distress and cry out to God. v _____

Step 4: God raises up a judge who delivers Israel. v _____

Step 5: The judge leads and Israel has peace in the land, until... v _____

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- In v10, we read that the next generation did not know God nor what he has done for Israel. Isn't that scary? Their parents knew Joshua and Moses. Their grandparents had been saved out of Egypt by God! How could they not know God? One part of the reason is that their parents and grandparents failed to pass it on and teach them. But another part of the reason is that the next generation didn't want to know God. They rebelled against him. So what about us today? You are both a younger generation and an older generation. Who are you learning about God from? Are you getting to know God better, or not really? If not, why not? And

you are an older generation. What could you do to make sure that God's message doesn't stop in your generation, but keeps going on?

Saturday

- Read Judges 2:20-3:6

- Think through the following questions:

1. Why was God angry with Israel?
2. What other reasons do we see in Judges 2:20-3:6 for God leaving the Canaanites in Israel, alongside their disobedience?
3. In 3:5-6, we see that Israel lived among the Canaanites and intermarried with them. Read Deuteronomy 7:1-11 today. Why was intermarriage so bad?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- The last line of Judges 3:6 is short, but very serious. "... (they) served their gods." Israel - the people who belonged to God alone - served other gods! They bowed to many other gods, thinking that these other gods could give them what they wanted. They thought that statues could give them family, and wealth, and life itself. They looked to Baal for success. And what about us? We don't have many statues we bow down to today. But what about expecting a relationship or friends to complete us or make us feel whole? What about studying hard, hoping that becoming a lawyer/doctor/engineer will fulfil us? Do we place expectations on God's good gifts and expect them to give us what only God can? Today, pray. Ask God to expose the idols in your life. Ask him to help you to repent quickly for treating stuff as gods.

Sunday

- Church - Passage covered: _____

- What was the sermon about?: _____

_____.

- What do I need to change? _____

_____.

Week 2

Monday

- Read Judges 3:7-11

- Think through the following questions:

1. How do we see the cycle play out here? Fill in the table in Appendix 3 for Othniel.
2. How long was Israel subject to Cushan-Rishathaim before they cried out?
3. How did God work through Othniel?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- As we'll see in the coming weeks, Othniel is the model judge. He is the best of the best. He alone of all the judges has no described flaws. When we read through the Bible, there aren't too many characters who are like this. Which means we need to pay attention. Because, like Othniel, years later another leader of God's people would come. A leader who was also from the tribe of Judah. A leader who would bring salvation to a people who needed to be saved. A leader who never sinned. A leader who was always faithful to God's commands. But unlike Othniel, the peace this leader offers will never end, because unlike Othniel, he can't die anymore. Jesus is our leader. Take time today to thank God for Jesus, the ultimate judge.

Tuesday

- Read Judges 3:12-30

- Think through the following questions:

1. How do we see the cycle play out here? Fill in the table in Appendix 3 for Ehud.
2. Does Ehud act openly and honestly? Is this good or bad?
3. What are the stone images?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Ehud is through and through an unexpected saviour because he is a southpaw (lefty), which was a big deal in those times. God can and does work through the big mighty heroes, like Othniel. But he also - and very often - works through the weak people. The ones who society looks down on. In 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, we see that God choses what is weak in the world to bring shame to the strong "...so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." (v29) Maybe you are one of the strong and mighty heroes. You are only that because God has made you that way, and he will work through you. And maybe you're one of the weak - one of the 'losers' - in the eyes of the world. You are only that because God has made

you that way, and he will work through you. Ask God to help you see how he wants to work through you today.

Wednesday

- Read Judges 3:31

- Think through the following questions:

1. Shamgar is one of the judges who doesn't get much air-time. Who is he?
2. What does he use to strike down the Philistines? What does this tell us about what weapons Israel had access to? (Check out Judges 5:6-8 for a bit more info)
3. What did Shamgar achieve?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Just like Ehud, Shamgar wasn't quite as impressive as Othniel. Othniel led Israel's armies as empowered by God's Spirit, whereas Shamgar kills six hundred Philistines on his own (as far as we can tell). While this is pretty cool, we see that he isn't a super inspiring leader. But in spite of this, God uses Shamgar to save Israel. What about you? One of the big claims made in the world today is that you can be famous. You can be important. You can change the world. And yet, the aim of Christians is for Jesus to be famous. For Jesus to get all the air time, and for us to be just one of his tools for being famous. Do you believe that? Read John 3:25-30 to see how John the Baptist reacted to Jesus being more famous than him. Ask God to help you have the same attitude today.

Thursday

- Read Judges 4:1-16

- Think through the following questions:

1. Who did God sell Israel into the hands of?
2. What is different about Deborah compared to the other judges so far?
3. Is Barak willing to serve God, or reluctant? Why do you think so?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- In this whole story, we see that God is in charge the whole way through. It is God who gives Israel into the hands of the Canaanites. It is God who raises up Deborah (we assume) and who commands Barak to lead Israel into war (through Deborah). And it is God who gives Sisera and his armies into Barak's (and Israel's) hands. All the way through, God is in control. And the same is true today. God is in control. God is in charge. Even when life doesn't work out the way we want it to. Do you

trust that God is in control? Talk to him about it today. Ask him to help you trust him more.

Friday

- Read Judges 4:17-24

- Think through the following questions:

1. What does Sisera do when his army is losing?
2. Who is Jael? What do we know about her?
3. How does God fulfil his promise through Deborah from verse 9, "...the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman."?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- God uses Jael to achieve his purposes in judging Jabin (and Sisera). But she isn't exactly a role model; she kills someone who trusted her in secrecy, kind of like Ehud killing Eglon in private. Even though the end result is what God wanted, God doesn't necessarily approve of the methods to get there. This is important to remember: just because our sin means we need God to save us, that doesn't make sin good! Read Romans 6 today. Here, Paul deals with this question in even more depth. God is so good that he can use evil actions and plans to achieve his plans anyway. And he will judge people for doing evil.

Saturday

- Read Judges 5

- Think through the following questions:

1. Now that you've read all the story of Deborah, fill out the table in Appendix 3 with Deborah as judge.
2. Why do Deborah and Barak praise God in this song?
3. How united is Israel in Judges 5? What does this tell us about the state of Israel?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- The right response to God's salvation is praise. God is good. God is worthy of our praise. Which isn't necessarily just confined to singing. But songs are very important - God uses songs to teach his truth to the hearts of his people. What songs do you sing to God to praise him for him saving you? Find a clip of one of these songs today on Youtube and sing it along with the music (or go acapella if you're up for it!). Then pray to God based on what you've sung.

Sunday

- Church - Passage covered: _____

- What was the sermon about?: _____

_____.

- What do I need to change? _____

_____.

Week 3

Monday

- Read Judges 6:1-10

- Think through the following questions:

1. Who oppresses Israel this time? How do they oppress Israel?
2. Instead of a judge, who does God send to the people of Israel when they cry out?
3. What does God say to the people of Israel through this person?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- By now, we know the cycle pretty well. Israel act as if God doesn't exist. They get on with their lives and worship whatever idols they feel like. God doesn't take that well, and judges them. Israel cries out for God to save them. But this time, instead of God saving them immediately, God has some important words for them. He calls them out on their failure to obey him and to relate to him rightly. And what about us? What kinds of patterns of prayer do we have? Do we not really pray to God when everything is going okay, but then pray really extra hard when things look tough? What can you do to pray to God more regularly? To have an ongoing relationship with him? Write it down, and tell your parent or one of your leaders.

Tuesday

- Read Judges 6:11-24

- Think through the following questions:

1. What is ironic about Gideon being called "mighty warrior?"
2. Do you think Gideon trusts God and knows who he is in these verses? Why, or why not?
3. Why is Gideon afraid he will die?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Gideon shows us just how quickly we can forget God's good works and God's commands if we don't continue to remember what he has done for us. For us today, it means reading God's word and meeting together with other Christians to talk about who God is and what he has done for us. So here's a challenge for us: memorise Psalm 100. Read it aloud. Repeat it. Cover it up and try it from memory. One of the best ways to remember who God is and what he has done for us is to memorise scripture and repeat it. So memorise Psalm 100. Pray it. Test yourself! Tell a leader to test you at youth or church.

1 Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

2 Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.

3 Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.

5 For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Wednesday

- Read Judges 6:25-32

- Think through the following questions:

1. What does God command Gideon to do?
2. Why does Gideon obey God, but only at night?
3. How does Gideon's father defend Gideon?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- We've seen quite a bit about idols already in Judges. They are powerless. Baal and Asherah were unable to defend themselves. Idols can't do anything for anyone. Which is part of the reason they are mocked in all of the Bible. But, as we've already seen, we can all too easily worship idols. So here's a little exercise to do today: think critically about what idols promise, and why what God promises is better. I'll start you off:

Idol	What it promises	Why God is better
Acceptance	You will belong, and never feel lonely, and will be with people who genuinely love you.	God loves you despite of your sinfulness - he see's the whole you, and loves you.
Success		
Sex outside marriage		
Being attractive		

Thursday

- Read Judges 6:33-40

- Think through the following questions:

1. Who teamed up to fight against Israel?
2. How did God empower Gideon?
3. What signs does Gideon ask God for as proof that God will save Israel by his hand?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Gideon's decision to ask God for signs is a worry. God is gracious enough to answer Gideon both times, which shows how patient God is with us. But Gideon already had God's Spirit on him (v34). He had already been told by God that God would use Gideon to strike down all the Midianites (v16). The armies of Israel (some of them) have come to Gideon's aid. He had 32,000 people fighting on his side! For us today, there are some people who say that they need a special sign from God before they know whether he's legit. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. But we can't overlook signs God has already given us! When it comes to trusting God, he raised Jesus from the dead. That's his proof that he's legit. That's his proof that he keeps his promises. When it comes to making decisions as Christians today, sometimes we find it hard to know how to best serve God. We have God's Spirit in us, who guides us. So how does God lead us today? Through his Spirit, through his word, and through his people. Write for yourself today a plan for when you need guidance from God. What will you do?

Friday

- Read Judges 7

- Think through the following questions:

1. Why does God want Gideon to reduce the size of the army?
2. What does Gideon overhear in the Midianite camp?
3. Who is responsible for the victory against Midian - Israel and Gideon, or God, or both?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- The Ephraimites have been bad news for a while in Judges. Back in Judges 5:14, we read that some of the Ephraimites who helped Barak and Deborah had their roots in Amalek (a violent people, who attacked the Israelites when they were coming from Egypt to Canaan (Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:18, see also Numbers

14:39-45)). In other words, some Ephraimites were pretty violent and wanted to fight. When we get to Judges 7, we see that they came out to war and, in Judges 8, were grumpy that Gideon didn't invite them to fight earlier. This gets so bad that in Judges 12 they start actually attacking other tribes in Israel because they weren't invited to fight! As for us today, the Bible makes it pretty clear that even though the church should be united (as Israel should have been), there are some within the church who don't necessarily love God or his people. Pray for your church today, that God will protect it from people who don't love God or his people.

Saturday

- Read Judges 8:1-21

- Think through the following questions:

1. How do the people of Succoth respond to Gideon's request for help?
2. How do the people Peniel respond?
3. What kind of leader does Gideon seem to be in Judges 8?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- When Gideon was uncertain that God could save by using him, God graciously gave him two signs (Judges 6:36-40). And yet, when Israelites in Succoth and Peniel are uncertain that God would save them by using Gideon, Gideon was brutal and harsh with them. We should feel the anger at the injustice of this, shouldn't we? Check out Matthew 18:21-35, where Jesus tells a similar story. As followers of Jesus, we aren't called to get revenge or to get even. We are called to forgive, just as God has forgiven us. We are called to be gracious, just as God has been gracious to us. Talk to God about how you feel when thinking about this.

Sunday

- Church - Passage covered: _____

- What was the sermon about?: _____

_____.

- What do I need to change? _____

_____.

Week 4

Monday

- Read Judges 8:22-35

- Think through the following questions:

1. What do Israel ask Gideon to do? How does he respond to this request?
2. How does Gideon's life as a judge end - well or badly? Why?
3. Now that you've finished reading Gideon's story, go to Appendix 3 and fill out the table for Gideon.

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Gideon speaks better than he acts when he says in v23 "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you." He refuses the request to be a king. And yet, he asks them for tribute (something only a king has a right to do). He names one of his sons Abimelek, which literally means "My father is king." God is the only one who should be king, and even though Gideon confesses this, he doesn't live like it. What about us? Being a Christian means saying "Jesus is my king." Are there any areas of your life where you live as if you are king/queen? Jesus commands his followers to obey him. Do you have any areas of life in which you are disobeying Jesus, your king? Confess these to him. And get active in stopping these sins. For some ideas, check out Matthew 5-7 to see some of Jesus' instructions for his followers.

Tuesday

- Read Judges 9:1-6

- Think through the following questions:

1. Where is Shechem? Check out the map in Appendix 1.
2. What did Abimelek want the people of Shechem (and Israel) to do for him?
3. What kind of leader is Abimelek?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- In 2 Timothy 4:3-4, Paul warns Timothy that "...the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." Here with Abimelek, we see that this is already true! God's people - Israel - choose to follow him and crown him as a king with no reference to God and despite the horrific consequences. We need to be careful in who we follow. Ask God to help you discern between the voices of

leaders and teachers you hear today, and to follow those who repeat what God says.

Wednesday

- Read Judges 9:7-21

- Think through the following questions:

1. Who is Jotham?
2. What parable does he tell?
3. Grab a scrap piece of paper and recreate this parable by drawing it.

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Jotham's parable is a strange story in the midst of Judges (as is the whole Abimelek story!). Back in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, God had promised Israel that there would be a day when they would have a king (it's worthwhile reading that passage). But Jotham calls the people of Shechem out for their rebellion against God by supporting the murder of Gideon's family, and points out that Abimelek is a terrible choice of king whose leadership, like the thornbush, is not good for being ruler and will hurt those who seek refuge in it. This raises important questions about leadership in a country like Australia, where we are privileged enough to be able to choose our leaders by voting. Who do we choose to lead us? Whether or not you're able to vote yet, have you spent any time exploring what kind of leaders we have? Today, do two things: 1/ Pray for our political leaders - at Federal Government, State Government and Local Councils. 2/ Investigate who they are and what they stand for. Check out their webpage. Write an email or letter to a local council member. Think about who you vote for carefully, and not just "I vote for this party because my family does."

Thursday

- Read Judges 9:22-57

- Think through the following questions:

1. Why did God judge Abimelek?
2. Who is Gaal? What does he say about Abimelek?
3. How does Abimelek treat Shechem and Thebez?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Abimelek ruled over Israel for three years before God judged him for his actions. It must have seemed to people like Jotham during that time that God had overlooked his injustice or didn't mind. But, as we see in the end, God *always*

judges sin and wrongdoing, even if it isn't immediately after someone has sinned. God will judge all sin and wrongdoing. Option one is that he judges our sin in Jesus' death. Option two is that he judges us personally for our sin. And the same goes for those around us. Today, why not start a conversation with a friend or family member. Ask them, "Do you think God judges sin?" See where God takes the conversation.

Friday

- Read Judges 10:1-5

- Think through the following questions:

1. Where did Tola judge Israel from?
2. Jair judged Israel from Gilead (Gad). Check out the map in Appendix 1 - where is that?
3. What weird fact are we told about Jair?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- We don't find out anything about Tola's or Jair's leadership. We don't know about the nations they are against, or the nature of Israel's sin which came before them rising to lead, or even whether they were better than Gideon. But we do see that they led for a combined total of 55 years. Given Abimelek was struck down after 3 years of leadership, this probably means that they were good judges and good leaders for Israel (but not necessarily). Take some time today to thank God for his provision of good leaders in your church. Thank him for your pastor/s, for your youth/Bible study leaders, for elders/leadership teams, etc.

Saturday

- Read Judges 10:6-11:11

- Think through the following questions:

1. What parts of the cycle of Judges do we see in this passage?
2. How does Israel respond when God condemns their rebellion?
3. Is Jephthah a good character, or ambiguous? Why?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Unlike the other judges we've seen so far, God doesn't initiate contact with Jephthah. Jephthah is chosen by the leaders of Gilead because he looks strong and looks like he might be able to defeat the Ammonites. This is important to keep in mind; we don't know a great deal about Jephthah's personal relationship with God at this stage. Which, for us, raises the important question: what do we want in our

church leaders? Take some time now to write out a list of things you think are character requirements for Christian leaders. Then check them against 1 Timothy 3:2-7. Any surprises or differences?

Sunday

- Church - Passage covered: _____

- What was the sermon about?: _____

_____.

- What do I need to change? _____

_____.

How are you going at memorising Psalm 100? Recite it today.

Week 5

Monday

- Read Judges 11:12-28

- Think through the following questions:

1. Why does the king of the Ammonites say that he is attacking Israel?
2. Jephthah gives the king a history lesson (which is accurate) in vv15-22. Who does he say gave the land to Israel? Who originally had that land before Israel claimed it?
3. Jephthah says that Chemosh gave the Ammonites their land. Check out Deuteronomy 2:19. How is Jephthah wrong?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- One of the ways Jephthah is wrong in his speech (in vv23-27) is to say that the god of the Ammonites is Chemosh. In 1 Kings 11:33, we see that Chemosh was the god of the Moabites, and Milcom/Molech was the god of the Ammonites. Even though this is a minor point in the passage, here's a challenge for us when we talk to friends with different beliefs to us: don't assume you know what they believe. Today, ask a friend who has a different religious background, whether atheist, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, or a Muslim, what they believe and why they believe it. Pray that God will use your conversation to help introduce them to him, the one true God.

Tuesday

- Read Judges 11:29-40

- Think through the following questions:

1. What does Jephthah vow in vv30-31? Is this a good thing to do or a bad thing - to make a bargain/vow with God?
2. How is God involved in this story?
3. Do you think God approves of Jephthah's actions in sacrificing his daughter? Why, or why not?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Jephthah messed up. Badly. Did he need to make a vow to God? Given that God had already sent his Spirit on Jephthah, probably not. Not that a vow is a bad thing necessarily. But when we read Leviticus 27:1-8, we see how vows were to be paid if they involved humans. Read Leviticus 27:1-8. How much should Jephthah had paid to the LORD to fulfil his vow instead of sacrificing his daughter? Jephthah's story should leave us feeling disgusted in his actions. And it should

also be a warning to us to know God's word well. Jephthah didn't know God's word well, which led to him thinking God wanted him to sacrifice his daughter! And there are people today who think that God wants them to commit violence, or to bomb buildings, or to abuse women and children. We know very clearly that this is *not* what God's word calls for us to do. How are you going at memorising Psalm 100 as part of God's word? Recite it again today.

Wednesday

- Read Judges 12:1-7

- Think through the following questions:

1. How did the Ephraimites react to Jephthah's victory?
2. How does Jephthah respond to them?
3. Now that you've finished the story of Jephthah, fill in the table in Appendix 3 for Jephthah.

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- A large part of the Ephraimite's reaction is prompted by jealousy. Read James 3:14-4:4. What does James have to say about jealousy and envy for followers of Jesus? Importantly, the question is whose glory you seek. Are you seeking your glory in the eyes of the world - whether because you have the latest tech or the dankest meme - or are you seeking God's glory? Ask God to help you be content today in the good things he has given to you already. Pray that he will help you to strive for his glory, and to not be taken in by the glory of this world.

Thursday

- Read Judges 12:8-15

- Think through the following questions:

1. What do we find out about Ibzan?
2. What do we find out about Elon?
3. What do we find out about Abdon?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- In contrast to Tola and Jair, these three minor judges lead Israel for a grand total of 25 years - less than half the length these two judges led Israel for! Even though we don't find out about the enemies that they led Israel against, we do read that Abdon was buried in the hill country of the Amalekites - in their own promised land, and yet it was occupied by a foreign nation. There is a lot of mess in Israel. How about for Australia? Things might look alright from the outside - we might

not be directly under attack right now! - but are there signs that there is mess? What are they? Pray that God will give our leaders wisdom today in leading our country, and that we will repent for our roles in hurting people around us.

Friday

- Read Judges 13

- Think through the following questions:

1. What important step in the Judges cycle is missing in Judges 13? What does this tell us?
2. What will be special about Manoah and his wife's son?
3. How does Manoah react when he realises that God has spoken to them (via the angel)?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- In Judges, we've seen plenty of mention of the Holy Spirit - the Spirit of the LORD - coming onto God's chosen leaders. Of all of them, though, Samson has the most amazing potential. He is chosen before he is born to be God's representative and to save Israel. God's Spirit coming onto his people was evidence of God choosing them and working through them. For us today, God doesn't just send his Spirit down onto some leaders at certain points in history. He sends his Spirit down onto all who have accepted Jesus as Lord! This is a huge change. What does it mean for God's followers to have his Spirit? Check out John 14:15-17, 25-26 to see some of what it means. Thank God for sending the Holy Spirit into you as a follower of Jesus today in prayer.

Saturday

- Read Judges 14

- Think through the following questions:

1. Why does Samson want to marry a Philistine woman? (There's more than one reason!)
2. Samson ate honey from the carcass of the lion he killed. Back in Judges 13:4, he was never meant to eat anything unclean. Check out Leviticus 11:24-25,39 and Numbers 6:1-8. What was the problem with eating this honey?
3. How does Samson get the clothes for his thirty companions who explained his riddle?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- There's a saying about how God achieves his will: through or in spite of you. When it comes to Samson, we see that God achieves his purpose of judging the Philistines (in small part) through and in spite of Samson's willingness to live with and marry a Philistine woman. Jesus was the only leader of God's people to ever wholly serve God and through whom God achieved his will with no resistance or rebellion on Jesus' part. What about you? If you're a follower of Jesus, then God's plan is to make you, as part of the church, holy and pure (Ephesians 5:25-27). Are you working alongside God to see this happen? Or are you fighting back against God? Pray today that God will make you a willing accomplice in his work of making you pure and blameless.

Sunday

- Church - Passage covered: _____

- What was the sermon about?: _____

_____.

- What do I need to change? _____

_____.

Week 6

Monday

- Read Judges 15

- Think through the following questions:

1. Why does Samson say he has a right to get even with the Philistines? How does he get even?
2. How did the Philistines retaliate to Samson's actions?
3. How did the people of Judah think of the Philistines? How did they think of Samson?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Once again, we see God working through and in spite of Samson's desires and attitudes. Samson wants to strike down the Philistines, not because they are oppressing Israel, or opposing God, but because they have personally offended him. He makes his decisions based on what he wants to achieve, rather than what God has commanded. Similarly for us, we are in a world which challenges us to live "authentically;" to live for our "true self." We need to counter this message with the truth of God's word. So, once again, how are you going in memorising Psalm 100? Recite it again today. Turn it into a prayer to God.

Tuesday

- Read Judges 16:1-3

- Think through the following questions:

1. What does Samson do in Gaza?
2. Check out Exodus 20:14, Leviticus 19:29 and Numbers 25:1-9. What was wrong with sex outside of marriage/sex with prostitutes?
3. As impressive as Samson moving the gates is, is he acting to protect himself, or to serve God and Israel?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Samson willingly abandons his role in serving God by following his own selfish interests, whether honey, or self-protection, or sex. In Judges 16 in particular, we see just how willing Samson was to abandon faithfully following God to have sex. What about us today? In Matthew 5:27-30, Jesus makes the choice very clear: would you prefer lust and sex outside of God's law, only to be thrown into hell, or to avoid lust at all costs and to be with Christ for eternity? Would you prefer porn, whether hardcore online or softer in that TV series, or would you prefer to be with Christ for eternity? The stakes are very high. Not because sexual sin is an

especially heinous sin. But it is a sin which we need to address. If you use pornography, stop. Ask God for forgiveness. And get help - talk to a leader or a parent and ask their help in quitting porn. Sex is God's good gift, and he gets to call the shots on how it is used. Ask God to help you to see sex as he sees it today.

Wednesday

- Read Judges 16:4-22

- Think through the following questions:

1. What do the Philistine rulers offer Delilah for the secret of Samson's strength?
2. Why does Samson tell her the truth?
3. What is the real secret of Samson's strength?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- With his hair being shaved off, the last outward appearance of Samson's Nazarite status disappeared too (check out Judges 13:5). Samson was only a Nazarite and servant of God in name, not in any other way. On the other hand, Jesus always lived up to his status as a true Israelite. He was circumcised, he was taught the law, he observed the festivals commanded for Israel, he was even baptised (!). And the inner life matched the outer life. Jesus, unlike Samson, always lived for God. He is our representative. He is our leader. Thank God for his perfect leader, Jesus, today, and ask God to help you look more like Jesus, that is, to have integrity as his child.

Thursday

- Read Judges 16:23-31

- Think through the following questions:

1. Who do the leaders of the Philistines offer sacrifices to?
2. Why did Samson want to kill the Philistines?
3. Now that you've finished reading Samson's story, fill out the last section of Appendix 3.

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Samson's sacrificial act, on one hand, is a good act. He strikes down many of the Philistine leaders. But on the other hand, it's kind of fruitless. In 1 Samuel, we see that the Philistines are still oppressing Israel. Samson may have gotten some personal revenge, but he failed as a leader to save Israel. On the other hand, Jesus' sacrifice had no elements of revenge. He prayed for God to forgive those who were his enemies. And his death brought salvation, not just for Israel, but for all the

world from the consequences of sin. Praise God! Today, pick a song about Jesus' sacrifice, e.g. The Glories of Calvary, and sing it in response to God's good King, Jesus.

Friday

- Read Judges 17

- Think through the following questions:

1. What does Micah do with the silver which he stole, returned, and then was given, from his mother?
2. What does v6 mean?
3. What does Micah think means God is pleased with him and will bless him?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Let's face it: Israel is a mess. Micah's life is a mess. Micah's understanding of God is a mess. And this is just one story in one household in Israel during the time of the judges. It's pretty rotten! We'll spend much more time talking about this over the coming days. But today we'll focus in on one sign of the mess in Israel: the Levite. Levites shouldn't ever need to look for a place to stay if Israel obeys God's laws. In fact, he says he's from Bethlehem in Judah, which wasn't even meant to be one of the towns where this Levite's family served! He's hunting around for employment, food and shelter. Why? Because Israel was meant to provide for them (Deuteronomy 18:1-8). This is no excuse for this Levite approving of Micah's idolatry. But he is tempted to go wherever he will be paid. Today, as in the Old Testament times, God sets aside certain people to minister as their full-time jobs. They have the responsibility to serve God faithfully and not chase money, which the New Testament makes clear. And the New Testament makes it equally clear that Christians who are members of churches have a responsibility to share their money so that these leaders can serve God and his people full time. So, are you giving money to your church family? To support Christian workers around the world? Talk to your family and/or small group leader about this today. How is the priority to support Christian work reflected in your budget?

Saturday

- Read Judges 18

- Think through the following questions:

1. In vv1-2, we read a bit about Dan. Look back at Judges 1:34-36. What went wrong for Dan?

2. How do the Danites treat the Levite? How do they treat Micah?
3. Where is Dan's allotted territory? Where is the city of Dan? Check the map in Appendix 1.

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- We see that the Levite's name is Jonathan, son of Gershom, the son of Moses. Moses' grandson has departed very far away from God's way. This is meant to shock us. And yet, this is no different from what we saw in Judges 2:10: the first generation (i.e. Moses) taught the second generation (i.e. Joshua), but the second generation failed to teach the third generation (e.g. Jonathan). This Levite is an opportunist, following where success and money are offered. And worse yet, God seems to let the Danites and Jonathan get away with it! They look like they are very successful in establishing Dan. This serves as a warning for us today: just because God doesn't stop someone doesn't mean he approves of their actions. Pause today. Ask God to show you any areas in your life where you aren't living in a way that pleases him. Ask him to forgive you, and to help you to live in a way that honours him.

Sunday

- Church - Passage covered: _____

- What was the sermon about?: _____

_____.

- What do I need to change? _____

_____.

Week 7

Monday

- Read Judges 19:1-15

- Think through the following questions:

1. In v1, we see a refrain appear again. Where else does this come up so far in Judges 17-21?
2. A concubine was something like a second wife, except it seems like concubines didn't have many legal rights in Canaan. Does God approve of polygamy (i.e. one person marrying lots of different people)?
3. Why doesn't the Levite want to stay in Jerusalem/Jebus? (Remember, Judges 1:21 tells us that the Benjaminites didn't drive out the Canaanites who lived in Jerusalem) What do you think he was afraid of?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- The Levite hopes that, by spending the night in Gibeah - an Israelite town - his family would be received and shown hospitality. But we read in v15, "They went and sat in the city square, but no one took them in for the night." For Israelites, this was more than just a person hoping for a room in a backpackers lodge. This is a public shame on the whole town and city, for someone to visit and be shown no hospitality! On the other hand, Jesus is the ultimate host in hospitality! He came to live with us. He has gone on ahead into heaven to prepare a place for us to live forever. And as his disciples, we too are to show hospitality. In Romans 12:13, Paul commands for Christians to give financially to those who are needy and to seek to show hospitality. Similarly, in Hebrews 13:2, Christians are commanded to show hospitality to strangers. And Peter, in 1 Peter 4:9, commands Christians to show hospitality without grumbling. What does hospitality look like today? Maybe it means inviting people to your party when you wouldn't normally invite them. Maybe it means making a meal/cake for someone and giving it to them. Maybe it means offering to buy others food without expecting to be repaid. Today, put a plan in your diary to show hospitality to a friend, someone else in your church and for a stranger (e.g. buy goods for Westcare).

Tuesday

- Read Judges 19:16-30

- Think through the following questions:

1. How does the old man from Ephraim show hospitality to the Levite's family?

2. What did the men of Gibeah want to do the Levite? What did they do to his concubine?
3. What did the Levite do when he got back home?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- None of what happens in Judges 19:22-30 is good. If you're feeling disgusted with Israel and how they have become, you are feeling how you ought to feel in response to this bleak part of Israel's history. This abuse and victimisation of the unnamed concubine is horrific. The Levite was able to sleep through it all. Reading this passage, we see a very similar picture of the Benjaminites compared with the men of Sodom in Genesis 19:1-14, and God judged the men of Sodom very definitively. As a culture, Israel is so morally corrupt that it takes the extreme action of the Levite to wake up Israel's conscience. What about us? Are there practices happening in our culture which we are dead to? Which we don't even notice? How passionately do we fight for the powerless: those on Nauru, children who are aborted, people who have been victims of abuse or neglect? Pray to God and ask him to sharpen your conscience in light of evil happening around you. Write a letter or email to your local MP about an important social issue.

Wednesday

- Read Judges 20:1-17

- Think through the following questions:

1. How many people of Israel gathered together after receiving the Levite's summons?
2. How do they react when hearing the Levite's story?
3. How does Benjamin react to Israel's command to purge the evil from within them?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- Israel is now on the brink of civil war, with Benjamin allying itself with Gibeah, whereas the rest of the tribes line up their soldiers. And yet, the call from the rest of Israel was for Benjamin to purge the evil city from within themselves (see also Deuteronomy 13:5; 17:7,12; 21:21; 22:21,22,24). It is very clear how discipline is meant to work inside the community of God's people: our aim is to live holy and godly lives, and if someone/a group of people refuses to honour God, they are to be confronted. If they still refuse, then they need to be cast out of the community. In the time of Israel, that meant death. Today, in the church, it means sending out

those who refuse to repent of evil from the church community (see 1 Corinthians 5:9-13). How would you feel if you had to confront someone who was living without repenting of sin? Are you prepared to confront willing sinfulness? Talk to God about this today, and ask him to help you be ready to confront sinfulness in the lives of those around you at church (not in a witch-hunt kind of way though!).

Thursday

- Read Judges 20:18-48

- Think through the following questions:

1. What similarities are there between Judges 20:18-48 and Judges 1:1-8? What does this tell us about how Benjamin have become in the eyes of God and Israel?
2. Where is the ark of the LORD located at this time?
3. What happens in the battle between Israel and Benjamin?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- This bleak civil war shows just how far fallen Israel is. In v35, we see that it is God judging the people of Benjamin for their willing sinfulness, but by now we must realise that all of Israel is just as sinful and guilty. All of Israel is just as wicked in God's eyes and just as deserving of death as Benjamin. It is only by God's sheer grace and faithfulness to Israel that he hasn't wiped them all out. Remember God's goodness. Recite Psalm 100 again today. Use it to pray, thanking God for his goodness.

Friday

- Read Judges 21:1-14

- Think through the following questions:

1. Why was Israel grieving?
2. Why can't the Israelites give any of their daughters in marriage to Benjamin?
3. What is their solution to their problem?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- There is something right in Israel's grieving over the wiping out of the Benjaminites. There is no room for gloating when God judges those who once belonged to the community of believers. Instead, we should mourn and pray that God will return them to himself, as Israel could have done. But instead, they take matters into their own hands. Like Jephthah, they have made an unnecessary vow, and like Jephthah, they have taken horrific action to fulfil their vow. The right

response would have been to grieve over Benjamin's fall, but to recognise that it was the right response to purge evil from within Israel. For us today, it may feel mean or cruel to not associate with people who have rebelled against Jesus through persistent sinfulness. This doesn't mean you can't say hi. But it does mean that you don't act as if they are a Christian. It means you let them know that it breaks your heart that they have rejected Jesus as lord. This isn't easy to do. Ask God today to prepare you to love others enough to confront them when they live in a self-serving manner.

Saturday

- Read Judges 21:15-25

- Think through the following questions:

1. Why do the people of Israel still grieve for Benjamin?
2. What solution do they come up with to get the Benjaminites more women for wives?
3. When did they tell the Benjaminites to do this?

- Joining the Judges for Today:

- The problem for Israel at the start of Judges was that Canaanites still lived in the land, and Israel didn't get rid of them. And yet here, at the very end of Judges, the problem isn't with another race of people. The problem is that Israel's hearts are Canaanite. They live as if God isn't there, as if God isn't king. Everyone does as they see fit. The solution isn't going to be found in new laws or rules. The solution needs to be a change of heart for all of Israel. And for us today, we can only be pleasing to God through the same change of heart. We can only please God with a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26-27). God achieves this for us by his Holy Spirit, who transforms us to live lives pleasing to God. Thank God today for the Holy Spirit who lives in you and will make you more and more like Christ every day, until he returns again.

Sunday

- Church - Passage covered: _____

- What was the sermon about?: _____

- What do I need to change? _____

Appendix 1: A Map of Israel (Judges)



Appendix 2: War, Genocide and God's Command?

Yahweh War can make us feel uncomfortable when we read the Old Testament. Some people use it to say that God is evil, or that the God of the Old Testament is angry and has a personality change before the New Testament when Jesus comes on the scene! For us to understand Yahweh War, we need to understand how God thinks about the sinful nations.

God's promises to Abraham way back in Genesis 15 include promising Abraham that his descendants will live in the land of Canaan. But there's a problem with this: Canaan already has occupants! In verse 16, God says to Abraham **"In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."** God's attitude about Canaan is that their people deserve to be destroyed for their rebellion against him, but out of his mercy, he will let them survive until he can stand their sin no more.

Because of this, God commanded Israel before they came into Canaan:

"However, in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the Lord your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God." (Deuteronomy 20:16–18)

When at last in Joshua, God brought Abraham's descendants back into Canaan, he wanted to use Israel to judge the wickedness of Canaan. God's command to wipe out Canaan's inhabitants was for a particular time, for the people of Israel, for the purpose of judging evildoers in Canaan and keeping Israel - his people - holy and separate from their evil. To protect them from worshipping evil idols and rebelling against God.

What Yahweh War shows us is just how seriously God takes sin. What is shocking is not that God judges the Canaanites by using Israel. God judges Israel later for their sins, using the Assyrian Empire to judge Israel (the northern ten tribes) and the Babylonian Empire to judge Judah (the southern tribes) for their sin! What is shocking is that God doesn't judge everyone immediately for our sins. Romans 6:23 reminds us that the wages of sin is death.

Our sin - our rebellion against God - means we deserve death. How God dealt out death, whether by a 'natural disaster' (e.g. Numbers 16:28-34) or by using an army from another nation (e.g. Habakkuk 1:1-11) is entirely his choice. And God will deal with sin and wrongdoing, because he is just! He cares about evil and hurt in this world, and will judge all who perpetrate it.

If God chooses not to judge us (or anyone) immediately for their sins by smiting them, this doesn't mean God doesn't care. A day is coming when God will judge everyone, and the consequence for rebellion won't just be physical death. It will be eternal death (Revelation 20:11-15). 2 Peter 3:1-10 reminds us that God is being very patient right now, but there is a day coming when God will not be patient anymore. There is a day coming when God will judge all unrighteousness. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you know this already. The question is, who are you warning? Our sin is too serious to ignore.

Two things are Important for us today. First, there is no spiritual justification for Christians fighting a war against evildoers. We cannot lead a "country of Christians" to fight against a "non-Christian nation." Unlike Israel in Judges, we live in a time when God doesn't call his followers to judge the world, but rather to preach the gospel of God's grace to the world. The question of whether Christians can serve in the military of their country is a different question. But the purpose for Israel was to destroy the Canaanites and all their wicked practices, and then to share God's goodness with the rest of the world. There is no more Yahweh war for us to fight.

Second, we have a choice to make about how we understand God's justice. We could be offended, and claim that God is evil or unfair. We could be grumpy and decide that God isn't really like this. Or we could be humble, and recognise that God is God, and we are not. God is God, and the kind of love he has for the world is such that he is patient. God's love meant he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the wages of all our sin, so that instead of being rightly judged, we could be forgiven without God pretending that sin doesn't matter.

Appendix 3: The Judges Cycle Table

	Judges 3:7-11	Judges 3:12-31	Judges 4-5
Judge	Othniel	Ehud	Deborah (Barak)
Phase 1 And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served other gods.			
Phase 2 The anger of the LORD was kindled against his people and he 'sold' them into the hands of their enemies.			
Phase 3 The people cried out to the LORD			
Phase 4 The LORD raises up a deliverer for the people of Israel and triumphs (the spirit of the LORD comes upon the judge to enable the victory).			
Phase 5 The land enjoys rest for x years.			

	Judges 6-8	Judges 10:6-12:7	Judges 13-16
Judge	Gideon	Jephthah	Samson
Phase 1 And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served other gods.			
Phase 2 The anger of the LORD was kindled against his people and he 'sold' them into the hands of their enemies.			
Phase 3 The people cried out to the LORD			
Phase 4 The LORD raises up a deliverer for the people of Israel and triumphs (the spirit of the LORD comes upon the judge to enable the victory).			
Phase 5 The land enjoys rest for x years.			

