

A STUDY OF JUDGES & RUTH

THE RESCUER

In 2018, 12 boys from a youth soccer team and their coach went to explore a tourist cave in Thailand. Without their knowledge, heavy rain poured down and began filling the cave trapping the soccer team. The recent movie, *13 Lives*, tells the story of the harrowing effort to save these boys. Ultimately, the team was rescued based on the skill of hobbyist cave divers that scuba dive flooded caves for fun.

This semester we will explore the books of *Judges* and *Ruth*. In *Judges*, we'll see the steady descent into chaos. Much like the soccer team that walked further and further from the light of the sun as they went deeper into the Tham Luang cave, we'll see the nation of Israel walk further and further from the leadership of Moses and Joshua as well as the commands of God. Both situations ended in utter darkness. Both situations left people hopeless and helpless on their own. But, in both situations, help was on the way. The story of *Ruth* is very different. Whereas *Judges* had people inventing ways to sin, *Ruth* provides glorious examples of faithful obedience.

As we study *Judges* and *Ruth*, we'll be discussing leadership lessons, developing a profile of godly leadership. We'll learn from both the negative and positive examples we'll see. Ultimately, we'll see the heart of the Great Leader who, despite the sin of his people, loved them (and us) enough to send help when they needed it most.

JUDGES 1:1-7

¹ After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?"

² The Lord said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand." ³ And Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, that we may fight against the Canaanites. And I likewise will go with you into the territory allotted to you." So Simeon went with him. ⁴ Then Judah went up and the Lord gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand, and they defeated 10,000 of them at Bezek. ⁵ They found Adoni-bezek at Bezek and fought against him and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. ⁶ Adoni-bezek fled, but they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes. ⁷ And Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me." And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Every Week, this section will include bonus material—articles, videos, or other resources to aid you in your understanding or to encourage you in your worship. For example, scan the QR code for a great intro to the book of *Judges*.

Also, be aware that each Week's passage will be relatively short, but we encourage you to read the remaining sections. For example, although we're just studying seven verses, this Week covers all of chapter 1.



DISCUSSION

What are you most looking forward to in this study?
Is there anyone you can invite to join you?

ICEBREAKER

1. Who did the Lord command to fight against the Canaanites and what promise did he make? (2)

OBSERVATION

2. Who went to fight? (3)

3. What did they do to Adoni-bezek? (6-7)

4. How did Judah's actions line up with what God had commanded them to do?

INTERPRETATION

5. What are some of the compromises or justifications you've heard people make for their sin?

APPLICATION

6. What's one area of your life you need to surrender to the Lord?

Each Week, we use this section to ask a question or make a point that didn't fit in the material. However, the main point is to remind you of your best resource for this study—your Coach!

GODLY LEADERSHIP

ZERO WEEK

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STUDY NOTES MISSING THE BAG

It's hard to imagine a professional base-baller making such a simple mistake—but it happens. YouTube has many examples exist of batters cranking a ball to the outfield and hurrying to make a double or triple, they fail to tag the base. They've played ball their whole lives. They know the rules. It's a simple mistake, but they're out all the same. In fact, in every case I saw on YouTube, the runner's foot was so close to the bag, it was hard to tell that they didn't touch the base. However, when viewed from the correct angle, they missed the bag.

In Judges 1:1–7, God's people missed the bag. Israel's great leader, **Joshua**, had died. Joshua took over leading after Moses died. We studied *Joshua* in the Fall of 2021. If you were in that study, you may remember that Israel had been given the Promised Land, but they had to take it by force. The current residents had committed such great sins that Israel was to carry out God's justice on their wicked sins that included rape, killing babies and children, murder, and much more. Joshua led many battles, but (although the timeline resets a little in chapter 2) he is gone. **Israel inquired of the LORD and the LORD said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand."**

After receiving instructions, we see how they missed the bag. First, God commanded the tribe of Judah to go—not Judah *and* the tribe of **Simeon**. Second, God commanded them to fight. Instead, they took the ruler, **Adoni-bezek** captive. Not only that, they maimed him. They **cut off his thumbs and his big toes**.

WHY STUDY JUDGES AND RUTH

Looking at these two examples we might ask, "What's the big deal?" God didn't say *not* to invite Simeon. Also, **Adoni-bezek** confessed that he had maimed other kings, **"Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me."** We might say that he got what he deserved. The big deal is that God didn't command either of these things.

Judges opens with a story showing Israel just barely off course from what God had told them to do. It's no big deal, it's just a little bit off.

Studying *Judges* and *Ruth* shows the compounding effect of disobedience. By the time we finish studying *Judges*, we'll have seen murder, deceit, and even civil war. *Judges* illustrates three important spiritual principles that we will discuss throughout the study:

(1) When people disobey God, they should blame their own sin, not God, for the negative consequences. (2) Assimilating pagan culture is destructive. (3) A decline in quality leadership brings widespread negative consequences.

Judges descends to the lowest point in Israel's history, then we turn to *Ruth*. When *Ruth* starts, it appears as though we're getting the same wickedness and chaos. However, we see something entirely different: (1) We see faithfulness and obedience to the Lord. (2) We see God's concern for the needs of people and how he preserved his people in a time when so many had turned away. (3) We see one of the great love stories of Scripture—the uniting of King David's

great-grandparents, the ancestors from which the world would receive Jesus Christ.

GODLY LEADERS MUST OBEY (PART I)

Famed leadership teacher, John Maxwell, famously says, "Everything rises and falls on leadership." Throughout our study, we'll be looking at the leaders that God used called "judges." These "judges" aren't judges in the modern sense. They were military leaders God used to deliver Israel from her enemies in particular regions at particular times. We'll see their success, and more often than not, their failure.

Judges 1 & 2 serve as a prelude to the book of *Judges*. It's sets up the circumstances in which Israel finds herself after the conquest of the Promised Land. In the first seven verses, we've already seen compromise. In the rest of chapter 1, you'll see where that compromise leads. First, they did not clear the Land of *all* the inhabitants as the Lord commanded (1:19–21, 25, 27–36). Second, Israel took some of those they captured as slaves (1:28, 30, 33, 35). So, not only did Israel fail to trust the Lord, but they sinned greatly by oppressing others.

Like the ripped soccer ball in the banner, our surrounding shouldn't define our play. The degeneration of a ball (or culture), doesn't mean rules can be ignored. Godly leaders must obey.

READING PLAN FOR JUDGES AND RUTH

STUDY WEEK	PASSAGE
ZERO WEEK	JUDGES 1
WEEK 1	JUDGES 2
WEEK 2	JUDGES 3
WEEK 3	JUDGES 4–5
WEEK 4	JUDGES 6–8:21
WEEK 5	JUDGES 8:22–9
WEEK 6	JUDGES 10–12
WEEK 7	JUDGES 13–16
WEEK 8	JUDGES 17–18
WEEK 9	JUDGES 19–21
WEEK 10	RUTH 1
WEEK 11	RUTH 2–3
WEEK 12	RUTH 4