

Living the Story

A Study through Scripture

Introduction:

The book of Judges follows a consistent pattern of the people turning from God, crying out to God, God saving them, then them falling away once again. If you were going to outline this pattern, it would be:

1. The people of Israel forget the Lord (or the person who is God's leader and example);
2. The people do evil;
3. The Lord gives them over to their enemies, who defeats or in some way oppresses the Israelites;
4. The people call out to God due to their suffering;
5. God raises up a new judge (leader); and
6. The people of Israel, specifically their land, have peace, that is, there are no more wars against the people.

Not every judge has every component of this pattern, but many have at least some part of it.

Judges 2.6-3.6 gives an outline and description of this pattern in narrative form, although in a slightly different order than listed above and it would be helpful for you to read through it in preparation for this lesson. However, judges 3.7-11 summarizes nicely the cycle and will be the text we use to describe the cycle the Israelites go through.

There are six judges who are briefly described in the book of Judges and six whom we are told about in greater detail. While the stories of the major judges are interesting (the story of Samson, for instance) they all still serve to show the same pattern and so I am choosing to focus less on the stories of specific judges and more on the Israelites as a whole.

For the purpose of our group, we want to determine ways we forget about God and our life shows the results of moving away from God.

Summary of the Text:

Before we look at the text for today, it is interesting to note that we do not have any record of Joshua handing over the mantle of leadership to a specific person, in a similar to what we read between he and Moses. Part of this may be because the Israelites are now in the Promised Land and the land has been given rest, but I wonder if some of the troubles we see in the book of Judges may have been prevented if the people had a known, identified leader.

3.7 The fact that the Israelites forgot the Lord and served Baals and Asherahs is nothing new. The Lord had warned the people from the beginning of their travels into the land of Canaan not to take on the gods and idols of the people of the land they are entering. The thing that *is* different from what we have seen previously is the fact that when a leader or a judge dies, it is then that the people forget or simply choose to not follow God (see Judges 8.33, for instance). This seems to be more than just a simple matter of the people turning from God (although they certainly did that enough!), but a leader no longer pointing the people to God and reminding them of the covenant they had made. This is why I wonder if Joshua's manner of transferring leadership is so crucial to the well-being of the people of Israel.

3.8 God is said to have sold the people into the hands of their enemy, in other places he is said to have "turned the people over" to their enemies. We are told here, as in other examples throughout the book, of how long they are held captive. In our context, we might find this statement hard to understand, but it certainly not unique to the book of

LESSON #8

Date: 10/28/2012

Text: Judges 3.7-11

The Story: Chapter 8

The Big Picture: When you see all of the wonderful things God does for his people the Israelites, you begin to ask: How in the world can these people *forget* God?!

Materials Needed: none

Judges. All throughout the historical books of the Old Testament we are told of the enemies of the people of Israel being used as instruments of wrath in the hands of God.

3.9 The people also cried out to God when they were in bondage in Egypt and Moses was sent to help them be released. Anyone who says God had no grace in the Old Testament has not counted the number of times the people of Israel find themselves in a bind and they cry out to God, whereupon he sends a deliverer. This gives us some idea about the mercy and steadfast love of God for his people, including us.

3.10 While not a part of every judge story, we do have several examples of the Spirit of the Lord coming down on a judge: Othniel here, Gideon in 6.34, Jephthah in 11.29, and several references of the Spirit coming down on Samson (13.25; 14.6, 9; 15.14). One of the questions I have is: Does this mean that God is approving or directing the actions of this judge? Here, we discover that Othniel's enemies are given to him, so he at least recognizes some success.

At times, we are told exactly the actions a judge takes that result in the salvation of Israel.

3.11 "The land had peace" is a way for the writer to show that the people were no longer at war as a result of God, through the judge, saving his people. The fact that there was peace for forty years may be the writer's shorthand for "a generation." (For example, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years so that none of the adults of Israel who were a part of Israel's poor choice not to enter the Promised Land at Kadesh Barnea were still alive.) This would be significant because after a generation died, there would be no one who remembered the previous leader and subsequently, remembered God.

Once we have completed this cycle, we then discover that the Israelites again do evil in the eyes of the Lord (3.12, for instance).

You might take some time to survey through the stories of some of the other judges, just to find how this pattern repeats itself throughout the book.

Preparing for the Group Time:

One of the questions we will be asking the group and so I think you should also ask yourself is: What ways do you remind yourself about God and his working in your life? Obviously, we can say that we go to church, but if we are honest, we discover that even being faithful in our church attendance does not always equate to being aware of God's presence in our lives.

As someone attempting to encourage other followers of Jesus to do so better, you need to be sure to look for ways to center on God on a regular basis. Whether it be through study, quiet time, solitude and silence ... whatever the case, you need to know God in order to better be able to share God with others.

If you do not have a consistent time in your life to focus on God, can I encourage you to do so?

Living the Story

Lesson #8

Text: Judges 3.7-11

Lesson Outline:

If you asked your group to do something in the *Living the Story* section from last week, begin your time together sharing how that went for group members. Specifically, have them share ways they pointed people to God and served as a “Joshua” for someone.

As an icebreaker question, ask: Has there ever been a time you went to take an exam and had forgotten something you should have known? Or: Have you ever forgotten the name of someone with whom you were having a conversation? How did those moments end? Why did you forget those things? Was there anything you could have done to prevent this embarrassing moment?

Ask the discussion questions.

Spend some time going through the “Living the Story” exercise, looking for ways to help remind one another to not forget God’s presence and working in our lives. Try to come up with a specific action that everyone in the group agrees on and engages in this week to help everyone remember.

Close your time in prayer.

Discussion Questions:

In what ways have you personally or as a part of a collection of people who follow God forgotten him?

Why is it so easy for us to forget God?

What does it mean to forget God?

How does forgetting God impact our lives?

How can we ensure that we do not forget God? How can we help one another as a group not forget him?

For the Children:

The concept of “forgetting God” may be difficult for some of our younger children to grasp. While you may leave some of the older children in as a part of the discussion, perhaps this may be a week for the younger children to be a part of the/a prayer time and then dismissed for the adults to discuss the lesson.

Living the Story:

It seems to me that one of the primary reasons the people of Israel forgot God was because no one or nothing was there to keep pointing them to God. (This is, if you will recall, one of the main reasons for the stacking of the stones in the beginning of the book of Joshua: to serve as a reminder.) Your assignment this week is to come up with a way to continue to remind yourselves—either individually or through a group effort—to not forget God. While each individual may have a way that best works for them, I think there is great value in allowing the group to wrestle with a way that will affect the entire group together. If everyone in the group agrees on something then I think you may be on to something.

Prayer Time:

Spend time with one another praying that we will not forget God and the things that he has done.

What's Next:

Next week we will be looking at the story found in Ruth, which can also be found in *The Story* chapter 9.