

Judges *There was no King in Israel*

1. After Joshua *Judges 2.6-23 and 3.12-30*

Aim: To introduce people to the world at the time of Judges, think about the state that Israel was in, what is revealed about God and how we might apply those things to our own lives.

Introduction:

Judges begins with Israel's failure to follow God's plan for them to inherit the land of Canaan - promised to Abraham. By choosing not to destroy fully the Canaanite culture around them the Israelites began to mix in with those nations, with disastrous results. They turned away from Yahweh and towards Canaanite gods, worshipping in some of the nastiest and most dehumanising ways. What follows is a book of God clearing up the mess that they made, over and over again, using normal people, often in spectacular fashion!

To start with:

In your opinion what are the (a) funniest/weirdest and (b) most disturbing stories in the Bible?

Engaging with the text:

Read Judges 2.6-23 round the group.

1.
 - a. How would you summarise the state that Israel was in? How do you think they had ended up like this?
 - b. What does it tell us about Israel? How far do you think this is typical of human nature in general?

- c. What does this passage tell us about God's character? How do you respond to those qualities?

One of the first examples of a Judge is Ehud in Judges 3.12-30. *Pick volunteers in your group to be each of the following: Narrator, Ehud, Eglon, Eglon's Servants, Israelite Army (lots of shouting and cheering!) and read his story getting them to read their parts - the narrator will do most of the work but it helps bring the story to life! (N.B. You might like to give people the background information first.)*

Background information:

Left handed people were often considered 'wrong' or 'cursed' in the Ancient world - it was essentially a disability, something to be despised.

Fatness would have been considered a sign of divine blessing (being wealthy with ample food), at least on the Moabites' part.

Paying tribute to the king who had power over you would be a normal, annual event - like paying taxes, essentially a sign of submission to their authority and control.

2.
 - a. What are your first reactions to this story?
 - b. Scholars debate whether this is the historical account of an actual event, a morality tale (like Aesop's Fables), or a sort of Old Testament Parable. What do you think and why? How far does that make a difference to how we read these ancient stories? *(Feel free to engage with this question if it will help your cell, or not if it will just be a distraction.)*
 - c. What do you think this story is intended to teach God's people as they recount it? (Why is it included in the Bible?)
3. What principles might we be able to draw from it that would apply to us today? *(You could make a list as there are a number of principles.)* In what ways are those things encouraging for situations you are facing right now?

4.
 - a. 'The Old Testament is full of blood, guts, and gore, and shows God to be a vengeful, impatient divinity'. How far would you say this story supports this quote? What can you learn (positively) about God's character from this story in light of the information in Judges 2.6-23?
 - b. 'God was moved to pity' (2.18). How much of a common theme is this in the Old Testament? What do you think it says about why these stories are included in the Bible?
 - c. What do you think the main message that Judges is trying to give us is?