

FAILING
PEOPLE

FAITHFUL
GOD

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Failing People, Faithful God • Judges & Ruth
Adult Bible Study Leader's Guide

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How to Use *Truth for Living*

Truth for Living:

A comprehensive, trustworthy curriculum that presents the truth of God's Word without compromise. The curriculum plan includes through-the-Bible courses as well as topical courses. Perfect for adults who want a guide in using all of God's Word as God intended.

As you prepare to teach these lessons, keep these two factors in mind:

- The FOCUS of productive adult Bible learning is the learner. The intent of teaching is not teaching, but learning—the learner's learning.
- The GOAL of productive adult Bible learning is an appropriate life-response to Biblical truth. You do not teach simply to impart information; you teach so that the Holy Spirit of God can use the truths of the Word of God to change the child of God into the image of the Son of God.

The Lesson Plan

Each *Truth for Living* lesson has three distinct parts. GETTING STARTED is the attention-getter. The questions and activities “set the table,” as it were, for the study. SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES is the heart of the lesson. A series of study questions leads the teacher and learners through the Biblical text. MAKING IT PERSONAL applies the truth to life.

As is true of any teaching experience, you can adapt the parts of the lesson to fit your particular class. You may choose to alter the beginning activities or change the focus of the application. You will find more material in the study than you can probably cover in one class session.

The Study Book

This leader's guide is designed to accompany the Bible study book. We encourage you to distribute Bible study books to your learners. Urge them to complete the study before class. The more your learners have studied on their own, the better the class discussions will be. Most of the questions in the leader's guide are picked up from the Bible study book. You will notice the question numbers in parentheses after the questions. The answers to the questions are in italics following the questions.

Other Resources

The resource CD has PowerPoint presentations for every lesson. They incorporate the resource visuals and provide a good way for teachers and learners to track the lesson. The resource CD also has Prezi presentations for some of the lessons. Instructions for using the Prezi presentations are on the CD. Other resources include lesson outlines, case studies, and verse cards.

Preface

The story of Judges is one that is overwhelmingly dark. Israel failed God miserably by breaking their Covenant with Him. They neglected to possess the entire Promised Land and turned away from God to serve idols. In the end, they created their own religion based on bits of Judaism, lots of paganism, superstitions, and greed. If we weren't careful, we could study Judges and conclude that life is hopeless.

But throughout the book of Judges is sprinkled testimonies to God's faithfulness to His people. Those testimonies shine like bright stars in the night sky. They remind us that God will never stop being faithful.

Israel needed a king to direct their lives. Specifically, they needed the King of Kings. Eventually He did send His Son to die for the sins of the world. And at some point in the future, Jesus will return to set up His Kingdom in Israel. He will rule His people with righteous. They will be redeemed and will worship and serve Him with gladness.

The hope in the book of Judges translates to us today. We can rely on our faithful God to never change and to always keep His promises. Plus believers today can look forward to the day when Jesus returns to set up His Kingdom.

Encourage your learners to look to Jesus as they study Judges. He is also the King of Kings that we desperately needed for our lives.



Understanding Narratives



Topic

Interpreting narrative

Theme

The books of Judges and Ruth are written in narrative styles that help us understand the books.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will understand the narrative structures of Judges and Ruth and benefit more greatly from studying them as a result.

Materials

- Resources 1–3
- Products with important instructions

Scripture Focus

Judges and Ruth

Summary

This lesson presents some key aspects of Biblical narratives. The learner will gain confidence in studying the Judges and Ruth and making application from the texts. Overall, the story of Judges is a long and sad one during which there are several uncomfortable moments and really no happy ending. The Ruth story, on the other hand, opens in the darkness of famine and death but ends in the light of life and harvest. Ruth gives us the hope of a leader that the writer of Judges lamented was absent from dysfunctional Israel.

Outline

I. Setting

- Physical setting
- Cultural setting
- Temporal setting

II. Plot

III. Characters

IV. Point of view

V. Rhetorical devices

- Repetition
- Chiasm

Memory Verse

*“Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God”
(Joshua 23:11).*

GETTING STARTED

Instructions

Bring to class several products. Make sure the products have important instructions about how to use the products properly (e.g., a board game, a power tool, a bottle of cleaner, and a package of art supplies). Organize your learners into groups. Give each group one of the products, and have them come up with at least one bad consequence that could come as a result of not reading the directions for their product. Give the learners a few minutes to work before they share their ideas.

ASK: Do you read directions, or do you tend to dive right into using a new product? (Q1)

ASK: When have you experienced bad consequences from not reading the directions that come with a product? (Q2)

ASK: What might be some consequences of diving right into a study of Judges and Ruth without getting some direction on how to read and interpret the books? (Q3) *The learner might misunderstand and misapply the books, putting into practice something that God never intended.*

This lesson will give us a frame of reference for understanding Judges and Ruth so we can apply them properly.

What Is This about?

How many times have you said or mumbled to yourself, *What is this all about?* Perhaps you've said it or thought it when you were in a conversation with a friend or co-worker. Or perhaps you asked this question when reading a book or an article. Knowing an author's perspective and themes makes reading and listening more enjoyable.

ASK: What is the perspective or the themes of your favorite book of the Bible?

ASK: How has that perspective helped you read the book more profitably?

ASK: Ask your learners to share their thoughts regarding the perspective of Judges and Ruth.

This lesson will give us a frame of reference for understanding Judges and Ruth so we can apply them properly.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Narratives convey historical events in the form of stories. Some might think that the word "story" should not be used to describe a Biblical account. That's

because they associate the word “story” with fictional writing. But the word can also be used to describe a creative telling of true events. Judges and Ruth are true stories written in this fashion. So learning more about narratives is necessary to properly understand Judges and Ruth.

Narratives include setting, plot, characters, and rhetorical devices. Each of those common elements help us follow and understand the story, but they are not an end in themselves. They are tools to convey a point. We should ultimately focus on the point of a narrative rather than getting bogged down in the minute details of a particular scene.

I. Setting

A. Physical setting

A narrative’s setting is three-pronged. The first prong is the physical setting. The reader should consider the physical places and landmarks mentioned in the story as well as the objects or physical activities that are important to the story.

B. Cultural setting

Second, a narrative’s setting includes cultural elements. The reader must be aware of the cultural customs as well as any of the underlying values and beliefs that influence the story. This helps the reader separate a cultural norm from a Biblically prescribed practice.

READ: Ruth 3:1–7. **ASK:** What cultural custom did Ruth perform in this passage? (Q4) *After Boaz went to sleep, she uncovered his feet and laid down next to them*

Obviously a woman seeking a husband should not follow Naomi’s directions. Ruth’s actions help us understand the bigger point of the book of Ruth, but they are not a prescription for today.

C. Temporal setting

Third, a narrative’s setting involves the temporal setting, or what is happening in the world in which the story takes place. The political situation is important to know on a local, national, and even international level. During the period of the judges, Israel was living under God’s rule. They didn’t have a human king to lead them. God determined their pattern for living. He carried out His rule according to the Covenants He made with them at different times prior to their entrance into the Promised Land. The Covenants influenced and defined Israel’s relationship with God. Being aware of them is important to interpreting Judges correctly.

RESOURCE: Display resource 2 to summarize God’s Covenants with Israel.

A covenant is an ancient Near East tool for legally regulating relationships between individuals and nations. The Covenants God established, or *cut*, were similar to those between a king and his people. A key factor in the such Covenants is determining with whom rests the responsibility to fulfill the terms of the covenant. In the Abrahamic Covenant, God took sole responsibility for fulfilling the Covenant (Gen.



15:7–17). He personally guaranteed Abraham land (12:1, 2; 15:18), a blessing on all the nations (12:3), and descendants (15:1–6). All these were eternal promises (17:7, 8, 13, 19). Nothing Abraham or anyone after him could do would nullify the Abrahamic Covenant. In the days of the judges, Israel could look to the Abrahamic Covenant with confidence and as a reason to trust God and serve Him exclusively.

After the Exodus, God gave the Mosaic Covenant to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod. 15). The Covenant starts in Exodus 19 and runs through Deuteronomy 28. God gave the Children of Israel His commandments concerning how to live, worship, and relate to one another. The Covenant included laws related to the civil, moral, and legal matters. In contrast to the Abrahamic Covenant, the responsibility for keeping the Mosaic Covenant included Israel. The Covenant blessings were conditional on Israel's obedience. Throughout the period of the judges the Lord blessed the nation's obedience and disciplined the nation's disobedience in accordance with the Mosaic Covenant.

The books of Judges and Ruth are presented from the perspective of God's covenant relationship with Israel. Judges recounts the tension between the promise of the Lord to give land and the failure of the nation to obey the commands of the Lord so they could occupy and enjoy rest in the land.

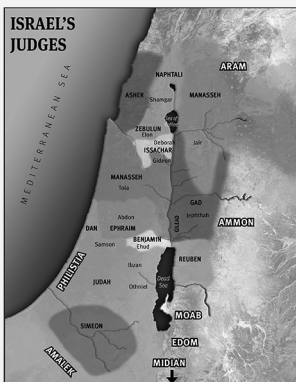
The Lord enlisted the oppressive nations living within the boundaries of the Promised Land to motivate His people (Judg. 3:1–5). Those nations included the Philistines, Canaanites, Sidonians, and Hivites.

READ: Judges 3:1. **ASK:** For what did God use the nations living inside Israel's borders? (Q5) *For testing Israel's loyalty to Him.*

God would drive the enemy from the Promised Land if Israel would put their faith in Him.

Surrounding Israel were sovereign nations who lived independent of any world power. Those people groups included the Amalekites, Edomites, Midianites, Moabites, Ammonites, Arameans (Syrians), Phoenicians, and Mesopotamians. All of those groups were hostile to Israel to some degree. We will see in the course of our study that several of them were involved in direct conflicts with Israel.

MAP: Display resource 3 to show the land of Israel at the time of the judges and the enemies that surrounded them.



II. Plot

Narratives also have plot. A plot is simply the sequence of events that either bring the conflict to a resolution or end with the conflict unresolved. A narrative's plot steers the reader's thinking to the book's major themes. We will learn in the coming lessons that the plot in Judges steers us to the theme that God is always faithful. He never fails to keep His promises and complete His word. He demonstrated that He is worthy of Israel's complete trust. The plot in Judges will also reveal there wasn't a permanent solution to the problem of sin and its consequences during the time of the judges. Each judge delivered Israel from an oppressor, but each time Israel subsequently sinned again and needed another deliverer. The book ends with the conflict between Israel and God unresolved.

Overall, Israel's failures in Judges prepare the reader for the introduction of a king in 1 Samuel, and more specifically, for the introduction of king David, Israel's second ruler. God made a covenant with king David (2 Samuel 7:10–16). It included God's promise that David's Seed will rule forever on David's throne. The promise gives hope and shines brightly against the dark days of the judges.

READ: 1 Samuel 7:15, 16. **ASK:** Why was it necessary for God to make the Davidic Covenant unconditional, meaning it was not dependent on anything anyone did? (Q6) *Because the Davidic Covenant was a measure of God's grace. No one, not even David, could merit the gracious benefits of the Davidic Covenant. The benefits of the Covenant would never be realized if they were dependent on people.*

The book of Judges showed that Israel needed a king. The history that followed, starting with 1 Samuel, showed they needed the King of Kings. God's Son was their only hope of ever fully realizing the promises in their Covenants with God.

The dark days of the judges ultimately points us ahead to the time when Christ came to be the once-for-all solution to sin. He is the only *judge*, or *deliverer*, Who offers a permanent solution to sin. He will give the Israelites a new heart in fulfillment of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–33). He will reign as king on the throne of David and will finally completely eradicate sin as He ushers in eternity. His Kingdom will be forever. The cycles of sin, like those in Judges, will be remembered no more.

The book of Ruth is a strong complement to the book of Judges. Ruth's plot steers the reader toward the themes of love and redemption. The book presents a touching picture of Christ's love for and redemption of humanity as the plot moves along to a triumphant resolution. The light and hope that is missing in Judges is illustrated in Ruth. It is a refreshing book to study on the heels of Judges.

III. Characters

All narratives include characters. One of the characters is always God, though sometimes God is represented either by a prophet or another character. As we interpret narratives, it is important to remember that they are primarily about God. That does not mean we cannot benefit from the characters' examples. Their lives do offer illustrations of what happens when people put their faith in God.

READ: 1 Corinthians 10:11. **ASK:** What does this verse say about the value of some Old Testament characters? (Q7) *Their decisions were recorded as examples for us and as a means of admonishing us to do what is right.*

READ: Romans 15:4. **ASK:** What value comes from Old Testament Scriptures? (Q8) *They teach us to live out our faith and give us hope (firm expectations) concerning their promises.*

We need to exercise caution when making an application from an Old Testament character's life. If we focus too much on what the human character is doing or not doing, then we might miss the narrative's primary purpose of revealing God's character and ways. We might also miss the more general truths the narrative reveals about humanity. Furthermore, the Old Testament characters in particular often

made their decisions in settings and times that are quite different from our own; therefore, drawing direct applications from their lives is sometimes impossible.

What a character's story reveals about God and His relationship with humanity should be our primary focus. For example, when we study Samson's life, concentrating on what his stories teach us about God will yield a clearer application than trying to sort out which of his actions were moral. Hebrews 11 takes this approach to Samson's life.

READ: Hebrews 11:32–34. **ASK:** How were Samson and the other judges able to do great things for God? (Q9) *Through faith.*

Samson and other judges pleased God and did great things for Him when they acted by faith. So their major contribution to our lives is an encouragement to live by faith in God.

Overall, any application we make from a character's life should not violate Scriptures that speak directly and clearly on the matter. The Epistles in the New Testament are particularly helpful in guiding our applications of all Old Testament Scriptures.

IV. Point of view

Every narrative also has a point of view. A point of view is simply the vantage point from which a story is told. Most often the point of view in a narrative is a narrator who is aware of the characters' actions, thoughts, and sometimes even their motives.

The narrator usually makes use of the characters' dialogue to make the primary point in a narrative. Often the characters' key statements come at or near the narrative's climax. Sometimes the characters will sing a reflective song or recite poetry to capture the key point of the narrative. Remember to study those poems and songs carefully. They are not something added to the narrative. Often they contain the lesson the narrative is meant to convey.

READ: Judges 5:31. **ASK:** What key point did Deborah capture in the final section of her song of praise to God? (Q10) *God will honor those who love Him, giving them strength to accomplish His will.*

Paying attention to a narrative's point of view helps us steer clear of making applications based on surface issues in the narrative. It also keeps us from laying claim to blessings or promises that are forced into the narrative.

V. Rhetorical devices

Narratives also make use of rhetorical devices. Rhetorical devices serve to highlight what the writer wanted the reader to notice. Repetition and chiasm, two of the devices important to Judges, are covered in this lesson.

A. Repetition

Repetition is easy to miss if we aren't looking for it. Any repeated words, phrases, images, or themes in a narrative should grab our attention. In Judges there are three repeated phrases that help us understand the point of the book: *In those days there was no king in Israel* (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), *the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord* (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), and *every man did that which was right in his own eyes* (17:6; 21:25). For the original readers of Judges,

these phrases jumped off the page. They looked for repetition in narratives.

This course will examine the repeated phrases more closely. But for now we should know that the phrases reveal Israel's need for the Deliverer Who is better than the judges God raised up to help Israel. Jesus Christ is the better deliverer. He came to earth to die for the sins of the world. When He returns someday to set up His Kingdom, He will rule by His righteousness. He won't have any character flaws, and it will be impossible for Him to make a poor decision.

As believers we will take part in Christ's Kingdom. So while the repeated phrases are a rather dark commentary on times of the judges, they should create in us an anticipation of Christ's future earthly Kingdom.

B. Chiasm

The second rhetorical device is Chiasm. This device is named after the Greek letter *chi*, which looks like an *X*. In chiasm there is a crossing, or inversion, of related elements. Chiasm helps the reader identify the focal point of a narrative. See the example below of a common chiastic structure. A and A' are similar scenes as are B and B'. C is the focal point of the narrative.

A - Scene

B - Scene

C - Focal scene

B' - Scene

A' - Scene

Unfortunately, there isn't a notation in the Biblical manuscripts that announce the beginning, middle, and end of a chiasm. Thus we have to read carefully to identify them and be cautious not to force them into a narrative.

Scholars have identified chiasm in Judges. Many put the pivot of the book at the story of Gideon. The beginning of Gideon's story reveals his lack of faith to take God at His word. When God called Gideon to attack the mighty Midianites, Gideon's first reaction was to doubt and fear. He tried to deal with his doubt and fear by having God give him signs (6:11–40). God indulged Gideon with the signs but then yanked the rug out from under him by reducing his army down to three hundred men (7:1–8). It wasn't until Gideon heard God's promise of victory from the mouth of his enemy that he finally trusted God. Gideon's faith forms the pinnacle and pivot point of the book.

READ: Judges 7:15–18. **ASK:** What evidence is there of Gideon's belief in God? (Q11) *He told his army to arise because the Lord was going to deliver the camp of Midian into their hands. He then gave them the battle plan.*

The problem with Israel in the period of the judges was their lack of faith in the promises of God and their subsequent turning from Him to worship false gods. Having judges did not ultimately change or curb their unbelief. Gideon's sinful post-victory decisions make that clear as do the lessening quality of the judges that followed him.

What Israel needed was a king. But not just any king. Abimelech, Gideon's son, tried to be king (Judg. 9). His ultimate failure demonstrated the problems that would come with a corrupt man on Israel's throne. Israel eventually demanded that the prophet Samuel give them a king. By doing so, they rejected God's timing

and His right to institute a king of His choosing (1 Samuel 8:7, 8). David, God's man for the job, was not even born at that point in history. In addition, Israel's motive for having a king was to replace God. They thought a strong man would lead them to military dominance and prosperity. So God gave them Saul, a man who looked like a king and who fulfilled Israel's craving for a warrior to do their fighting for them. But Saul's reign was a disaster in the end. It wasn't until God gave His people David, a king after His own heart, that Israel began to realize more fully the benefits of the Covenants God made with them. But even David had his faults. Israel won't experience the full benefits of God's promises to them until Jesus, the Son of David, sits on Israel's throne.

ASK: How much have you paid attention to the aspects of narratives as you've read Scripture? (Q12)

ASK: Why is it important to be aware of the aspects of Biblical narratives? (Q13)

MAKING IT PERSONAL

New Perspective

ASK: What new perspective on the book of Judges do you have as a result of this lesson? (Q14)

ASK: How has this lesson affected your desire to study Judges and Ruth? (Q15)

Careful Thought

READ: Romans 15:4.

The Old Testament Scriptures are profitable to us, but only as we are willing to persevere in our study. We need perseverance to know the Scriptures, but even more so, we need it to live them out. The more we study and know the Scriptures, the more we will realize just how short we fall of God's will for us as believers. God will provide the strength and grace to grow spiritually.

ASK: What have you learned from this lesson about the need to read books of the Bible carefully? (Q16)

ASK: How will this lesson affect your approach to this study? (Q17)

Encourage your learners to always be careful as they study God's Word. But also assure them that the ministry of the Holy Spirit to illumine God's Word means that reading and studying it is always beneficial. They don't have to be Bible scholars to be transformed by God's Word.

Review Resource

Use resource 1 to record the response for this lesson: Persevere in studying Scripture.

