

# The Good, the Bad & the Ugly

**Judges**



**10 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR  
SMALL GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS**

# The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

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Judges

*by Mark Baddeley*



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*The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*

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*For the general approach of these studies, and for many insights on particular passages, the author would like to acknowledge his debt to Barry Webb's book, The book of Judges: an integrated reading (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987). Many thanks are due to Barry, not only for his book, but for personal encouragement and comments in the preparation of this manuscript.*

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# *How to make the most of these studies*

## **1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?**

These ‘interactive’ Bible studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. The studies will take you through Judges, pointing out things along the way, filling in background details, and suggesting avenues for further exploration. But there is also time for you to do some sight-seeing of your own—to wander off, have a good look for yourself, and form your own conclusions.

In other words, we have designed these studies to fall half-way between a sermon and a set of unadorned Bible study questions. We want to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do a lot of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of ‘interaction’—interaction with the Bible, with the things we’ve written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

## **2. The format**

Each study contains sections of text to introduce, summarize, suggest and provoke. We’ve left plenty of room in the margins for you to jot comments and questions as you read. Interspersed throughout the text are three types of ‘interaction’, each with their own symbol:



### **For starters**

Questions to break the ice and get you thinking.



### **Investigate**

Questions to help you investigate key parts of the Bible.



### **Think it through**

Questions to help you think through the implications of your discoveries and write down your own thoughts and reactions.

When you come to one of these symbols, you'll know that it's time to do some work of your own.

## **3. Suggestions for Individual Study**

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in Judges and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it. You may be spurred to pray again at the end of the study.
- Work through the study, following the directions as you go. Write in the spaces provided.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the *Think it through* sections. It is important to think about the sections of text (rather than just accepting them as true) and to ponder the implications for your life. Writing these things down is a very valuable way to get your thoughts working.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you've learnt.

## 4. Suggestions for Group Study

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and threesomes. Get together with a friend/s and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don't need the formal structure of a 'group' to gain maximum benefit.
- It is *vital* that group members work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how side-tracked you get!), but only if all the members have done the work and are familiar with the material.
- Spend most of the group time discussing the 'interactive' sections—*Investigate* and *Think it through*. Reading all the text together will take too long and should be unnecessary if the group members have done their preparation. You may wish to underline and read aloud particular paragraphs or sections of text that you think are important.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining important sections of text to emphasize, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of Judges, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

## **Before you begin**

We recommend that before you start on Study 1, you take the time to read right through Judges in one sitting. This will give you a feel for the direction and purpose of the whole book and help you greatly in looking at each passage in its context.

# *Starting well*

Beth was in despair. Everything had started so well. Becoming a Christian in her late teens had been so exciting. She had joined a Bible Study Group and had enjoyed learning about Christ and the Bible. There she met Richard, a young Christian man. Friendship between them blossomed and grew into something more.

Then Richard began to pressure Beth to sleep with him. Confused, and scared to lose him, Beth agreed. “After all”, she consoled herself, “we do love each other and we are both Christians.”

Over time, guilt grew. Beth hated going to church, felt cold when she prayed, and stopped reading the Bible. She felt like a hypocrite, and God seemed unreal. Then Richard broke off the relationship.

For Beth, it felt as though she had lost everything. “Things weren’t supposed to turn out like this”, she thought. “Why did God let this happen?”

Stories such as this are disturbing. We prefer “happily-ever-after endings”, where the challenges and threats are overcome and everything turns out well at the end. This is how we want life to be.

Israel’s story in the Old Testament is the exact opposite. Things started with enormous potential. There were amazing promises given to Abraham that God would bless Israel and, through Israel, the world. Israel experienced a mighty redemption from slavery, with great signs and miracles under Moses. The initial entry into the Promised Land under Joshua went from strength to strength. By the time of Joshua’s death, Israel was established in the Land. Yet, from this point on, things go sour. Israel’s conquest stalls during the time of the judges and is only completed centuries later under David. Yet even David’s victory is temporary—under David’s descendants, Israel first suffers division into two separate



4. What is your impression of Othniel and Acsah (1:12-15)? How do they contribute to the flow of the story?

5. What reason is given for Judah's success (1:19)? Why then do you think Judah couldn't succeed in the valleys?

Rwanda. Bosnia. Yugoslavia. East Timor. The words conjure pictures of violence and hatred, of genocide and ethnic cleansing. At first glance Israel's conquest of Canaan might seem similar—just another tribal conflict.

Yet, this campaign was radically different. It was a holy war, started and directed by God. Justice and redemption were its goals. The elimination of the Canaanites was both God's judgement on them and a necessary action to keep Israel from being corrupted by their evil. This military operation would be like a surgeon removing a cancerous growth. It would create a place where God's blessings promised in Genesis 12:1-3 could be enjoyed by Israel and, through Israel, the world.

Things start well; the picture is of total victory—with one exception. Although God is with them, Judah is unable to defeat the people of the plains with their iron chariots. It is unexplained, and the mystery is disturbing. But by it, we are prepared for the recounting of the other tribes' progress.



Although Israel had started well with the account of Judah's conquests, the news turns increasingly sour as the different tribes are listed.

None of the other tribes enjoy successes approaching that of Judah. Two things are particularly disturbing.

First is the account of the conquest of the city of Luz in verses 23-26. This passage reminds us of the conquest of Jericho in Joshua 2-6. In both cases Israel makes a covenant with a Canaanite to preserve the life of the Canaanite. However, in the Jericho episode the initiative was with the Canaanite (Rahab) who threw her lot in with Israel and joined God's people. In Luz, it is the Israelites who initiate the covenant. The Canaanite, far from joining Israel, moves away a distance and rebuilds Luz. This preserves Canaanite idolatry in the middle of the Promised Land! The contrast between Luz and Jericho shows us that Israel's actions are no longer directed towards the elimination of Canaanite idolatry. Their goals are no longer God's goals.

The second disturbing note is struck in verses 27-34. The reports are increasingly bleak in these verses. First, we are told that the Canaanites continued to live among the Israelites. Then we are told that the Israelites lived among the Canaanites. Finally, we are told that the tribe of Dan is forced back into the hills out of their allotment of land. The initial good start has first slowed and then turned into a rout! Israel has not fulfilled the charge God gave her in the Law to clear the Promised Land of its inhabitants. The stage is set to hear God's word on this.



### **Investigate**

Read Judges 2:1-5.

1. What was Israel's obligation (2:2)?



