



KEEPING UP WITH THE CANAANITES

FOLLOWING GOD IN A WORLD OF ALTERNATIVES

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

CONTENTS

TRAINING STUDY: BIBLE READING 102	6
<hr/>	
STUDY 1: AND SO IT BEGINS...	14
<hr/>	
STUDY 2: OTHNIEL & EHUD	18
<hr/>	
STUDY 3: DEBORAH & BARAK	22
<hr/>	
STUDY 4: GIDEON	26
<hr/>	
STUDY 5: JEPHTHAH	30
<hr/>	
STUDY 6: SAMSON	34
<hr/>	
STUDY 7: DOWN TO THE LEADERS?	38
<hr/>	
STUDY 8: WELCOME TO THE NEW SODOM	42
<hr/>	

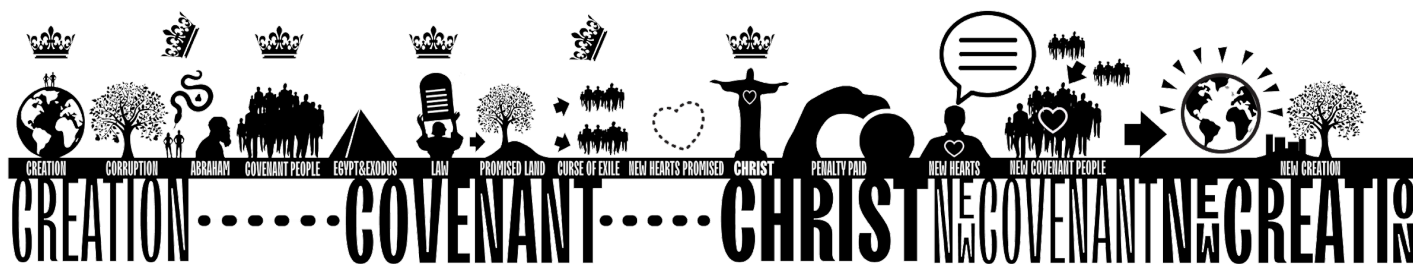
KEEPING UP WITH THE CANAANITES

FOLLOWING GOD IN A WORLD OF ALTERNATIVES

You can't get far into Judges before seeing it's a dark book. It might be the darkest book in the Bible. Like much of the Old Testament, it tells the tragic story of Israel's failure to be the people God chose them to be. But much more than most other books, Judges tells it in graphic detail. There's idol worship, child sacrifice, mass murder, civil war, prostitution, rape and abuse of women generally. So then why is this book in the Bible?

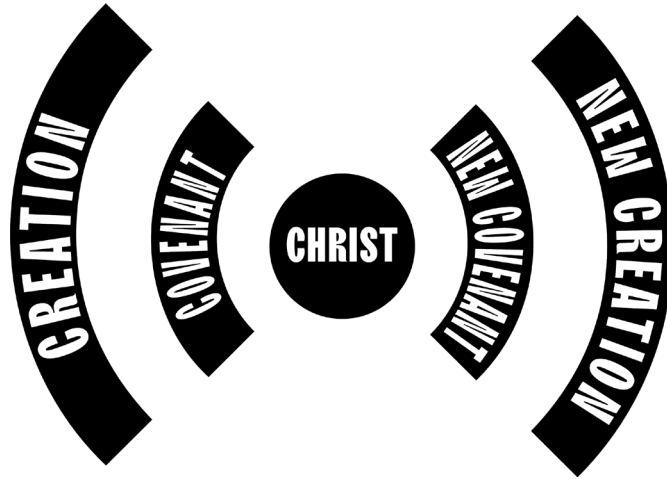
You might think it's because, along with such graphic scenes, Judges also has some of the best stories. Ehud and Eglon. Jael and Sisera. Gideon and the fleece. Samson and Delilah. They're all here in Judges. You should brace yourself for the horror which Judges depicts. But don't miss the humour and excitement that's in many of these stories too!

However, gripping stories aren't the only reason God wants us to read this book. These stories were put together with a purpose in mind: they show that the moral failures which ultimately led to Israel's exile from the promised land were actually right there from the beginning, as Israel first entered the promised land. As verses like 18:30 make clear, Judges was put together after that exile. The book effectively explains that exile by tracing it back to its roots.



These are the roots Judges exposes. God gave Israel the promised land to be kind of a 'display home'. It was meant to be the place where all the other nations could come and see what it was like to live in relationship with the true God (Deuteronomy 4). So when Israel first takes the promised land from the Canaanites, God commands Israel to destroy all the Canaanite idols and altars, lest Israel themselves be drawn to worship false gods (Deuteronomy 7). But Judges tells that Israel refused to remove the idols and altars. God therefore refuses to remove all the Canaanites. Israel then lives *among* the Canaanites. As a result, over and over we see *Israel learning from the Canaanites to worship other things instead of God*. Of course, the influence was meant to run exactly the other way! This is what keeps happening until ultimately Israel is removed from the land themselves (2 Kings). It's against this dark background of failure leading to exile that the light of Christ then shines so brightly in the New Testament.

We start the series with a training session. It's designed to help us to read and apply Old Testament narrative in general, making use of the 5-episode framework introduced earlier this year in the series God's Story (mpc.org.au/gods-story). That framework, centred on Christ, will prove helpful throughout the series as we apply the message of Judges to our own lives today.



The application of Judges for modern Christians won't simply be what it was for ancient Israelites. Judges is from episode 2 of God's Story. We're now living in episode 4. We can still learn so much from Judges, especially about what we'd be like *without* Christ and his Spirit giving us new hearts. As we see Israel influenced by their surrounding culture to put other things above God, that should alert us to the same danger. We'll have to ask ourselves: How are *we* being influenced by *Australian* culture like Israel was influenced by Canaanite culture? But because we have Christ and his Spirit, we can take heart: we aren't doomed to repeat Israel's mistakes; we can learn from them and change.

As we read this dark part of Israel's history in the book of Judges, let's pray that the light of Christ will shine on us all the more brightly. Let's pray that we'll be shaped by Christ and his Spirit more than by the culture around us. That we wouldn't value most whatever others value most. That'd we cherish Christ himself above all else. Let's pray that, on the contrary, people around us will see the change in us that Christ makes and be drawn to him too.

Phil Campbell
 Pete Kutuzov
 Jeremy Wales
 Doug Wannenburg
 Dan Wilton
July 2020

READING THE BIBLE 102

READING THE OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE WITH NEW TESTAMENT EYES

This material is also provided in video format. The video is guaranteed to be more fun than just reading the material aloud in a group, and there are pauses for discussion. You can find the video at shorturl.at/qtHPW, or scan the QR code with your phone or ipad camera.

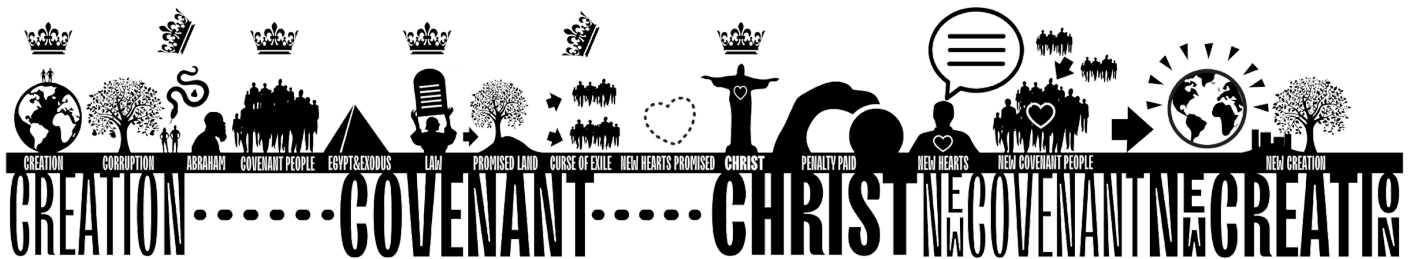


As 21st-Century Bible-Loving Christians, we have a problem – sometimes, we might feel kind of embarrassed by the Old Testament. It makes us an easy target for mockers; “You Christians are inconsistent – you happily eat prawns (unclean in Leviticus) but you’re against homosexuality (also unclean in Leviticus).” Or this one... “The Old Testament God is so cruel. He’s a God of judgment and war. I’d rather think about God as ‘loving everyone.’” Not only that, when you start to actually read the Old Testament, you find most of it is the history of ancient Israel. What does that have to do with 21st century Christians? Are those narratives meant to provide moral examples for us? If so, the so-called ‘heroes’ like Abraham, David and Samson aren’t exactly perfect examples!

This quick training session is going to give a simple starting point to help you when you read Old Testament narrative. We’ll be using the COMA (Context-Observation-Meaning-Application) method we learned last year, but adding a bit more detail to the Context and Application sections.

THE BIBLE'S BIG STORY – A RECAP

In technical terms it’s called a “meta-narrative”; movie makers call it the “story-arc.” The Bible is such a big book that most people just treat it like an encyclopedia of disconnected stories or theological ideas or rules. But there is indeed a big, connecting story. In the Old Testament, the original players are Adam and Eve – representing all of humanity (Episode 1: Covenant). But after things go wrong, the focus shifts to a narrow subset: the descendants of Abraham, the people of Israel (Episode 2: Covenant). It’s only after Christ, in Episode 3, that the focus shifts back to everyone, including people like us – the Gentiles – in Episode 4: New Covenant. Ultimately, the whole story promises to come together with a wonderful ending in Episode 5: New Creation.



Here’s an overall summary of the Bible’s big story, that becomes more detailed as that story unfolds...

God is calling together a (forgiven) people who delight to live under the righteous rule of his anointed King.

As you read the Old Testament with that project in mind, you’ll see all the ways things don’t go so well. But don’t lose hope! In Christ, the New Covenant and the New Creation, the plan comes together as the Spirit changes the hard hearts of humanity to serve God’s anointed one *from the heart*.

STARTING WITH THE END IN MIND

Have you ever seen the movie “The Sixth Sense”? Sorry to spoil the surprise, but it’s not until right at the end that you realise that the helpful psychologist played by Bruce Willis is actually dead, and only the kid who ‘sees dead people’ has been able to interact with him all the way through. When you go back and watch the movie a second time, it all makes sense. As New Testament Christians,

TEST CASE - EXODUS 12

Let's try it out together now! First, **read Exodus 12:1-39**

Now, use the COMA method, informed by the 5-episode big picture, to work through the passage together. For your reference, below are the kinds of questions you can ask for each part of COMA (adapted from David Helm's, *One to One*).

CONTEXT QUESTIONS

- What major characters, events and themes came before this narrative in the book?
e.g. if you're reading Exodus 12, then those in Exodus 1-11.
- What major characters, events and themes came before this book in the larger biblical story?
e.g. if you're reading Exodus, then those in Genesis.
- Which prior characters, events or themes does this narrative particularly relate to?
- To which of the 5 episodes of God's story does this narrative contribute?

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

- What do you learn about the main characters in this section?
- How does the author describe them? How do they describe themselves?
- What motivates the different characters' actions?
- How is time or place significant in the events that happen in the passage?
- Is there a conflict or high point in the passage?

EXODUS 12

¹The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt,
²“This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.³ Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.⁴ If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat.⁵ The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats.⁶ Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.⁷ Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the door frames of the houses where they eat the lambs.⁸ That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast.⁹ Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs.¹⁰ Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it.¹¹ This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.

¹²“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord.¹³ The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

¹⁴“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance.¹⁵ For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the

yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel.¹⁶ On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat; that is all you may do.

¹⁷ “Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come.¹⁸ In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day.¹⁹ For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And anyone, whether foreigner or native-born, who eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel.²⁰ Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread.”

²¹ Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb.²² Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning.²³ When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

²⁴ “Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants.²⁵ When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony.²⁶ And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’²⁷ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’” Then the people bowed down and worshiped.²⁸ The

- Are there repeated words or ideas that help you identify the main point of the story?
- If you were a first-time reader, what surprises would you find in the passage?
- What unresolved issues or questions would a first time reader find in the passage? (Maybe the rest of the story resolves them?)
- What words or ideas link to the ‘overview’ of the Bible’s story?

MEANING QUESTIONS

- Are there any ‘editorial’ comments from the author about the events in the narrative? How do these comments illuminate what is happening?
- Does someone in the narrative learn something or grow in some way? How? What does this person learn?
- What would this narrative have said to an ancient Israelite living in episode 2?
- How does the passage point forward to what God is going to do in the future?
- Does it anticipate Jesus in some way or make us ‘wise for salvation’?
- How is it part of the long story line that Jesus brings to a climax?
- How could you sum up the overall meaning of this passage in your own words?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Remember, whenever we read Old Testament narrative, it is describing episode 2, when we are living in episode 4. You'll always need to ask, "What details would have been limited to historical Israel, and what applies to us as Spirit-enabled followers of Jesus?"
- How does this passage challenge your understanding about who God is and what he is like?
- Is there some attitude or behaviour you need to change - especially in the light of the way Jesus brings fulfilment and forgiveness and pours out God's Spirit on our hearts?
- How are we as Christians 'better off' than Old Testament Israel?

Enjoy reading the Old Testament narratives, with God's big plan unlocked.

Israelites did just what the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron.

²⁹ At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well.³⁰ Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.

³¹ During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested.³² Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me."

³³ The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. "For otherwise," they said, "we will all die!"³⁴ So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing.³⁵ The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing.³⁶ The Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.

³⁷ The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Sukkoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children.³⁸ Many other people went up with them, and also large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds.³⁹ With the dough the Israelites had brought from Egypt, they baked loaves of unleavened bread. The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves.

JUDGES 1:1-3:6

**AND SO IT
BEGINS**

Judges is a foreign book, even to many long-time Christians. That's one of several good reasons for studying it now! But because it's so foreign, it can be helpful to start with an overview.

Watch the Bible Project's great overview of the whole book:
youtu.be/kOYy8iCfIJ4

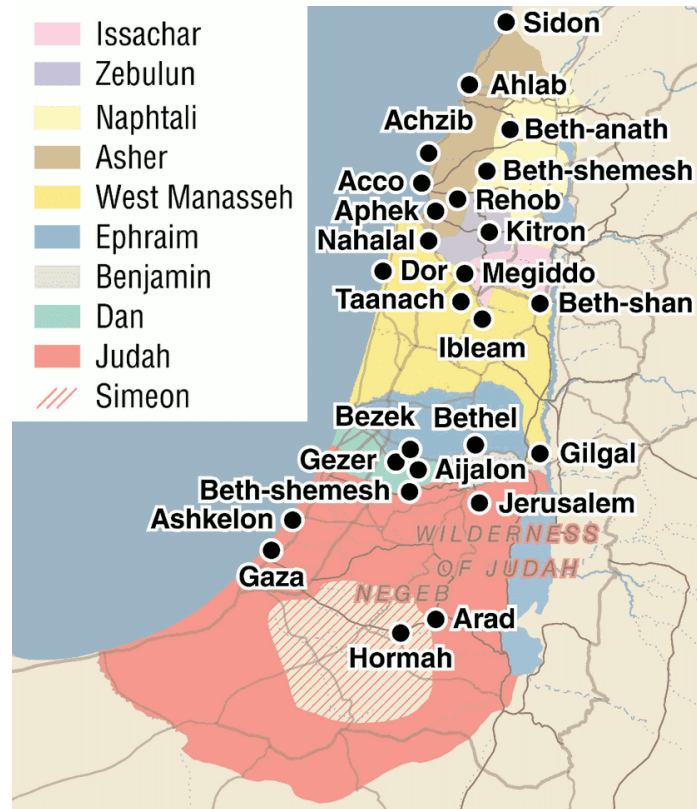
A PROMISING START?

The previous book in the Bible, Joshua, emphasised Israel's initial success in taking the land of Canaan, thanks to the way God has been keeping his promises to Abraham. Judges starts the same way... initially. **Read Judges 1**, listening for the striking shift in tone.

1. After the positive start, how does the tone shift? Where does the shift occur?

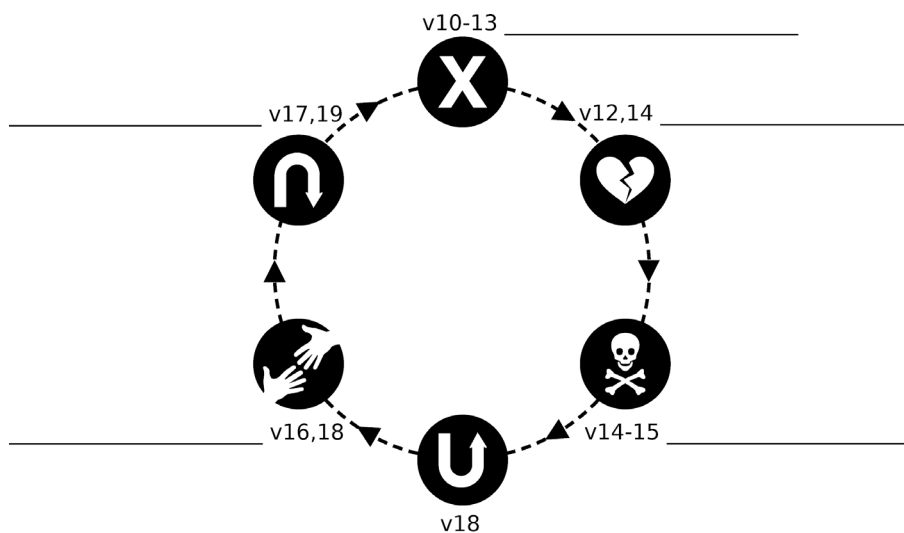
2. Help each other find the events of Judges 1 on the map. What impression does that give about Israel's overall success or failure?

3. **Read Judges 2:1-5.** How does God's messenger explain Israel's failures? What does it highlight was missing from Israel's actions in Judges 1?



The book's introduction sets the scene: Israel must now live among the Canaanites due to their own refusal to remove the Canaanite idols and altars. A second introduction (which starts again with "After Joshua") foreshadows what will happen as a result: **Read Judges 2:6-3:6.**

4. Verses 10-19 outline a cycle which happens over and over again in Israel's subsequent history. Describe each step in the cycle:



The cycle diagram appearing in Judges studies 1, 2 and 6 is adapted from © Mary Barry 2015.

DEUTERONOMY 4

⁵ See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. ⁶ Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” ⁷ What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? ⁸ And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? ⁹ Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

DEUTERONOMY 7

¹ When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you—² and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. ³ Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, ⁴ for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. ⁵ This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire.

5. Read Moses’ earlier words to Israel from **Deuteronomy 4:5-9**. What was God’s stated purpose in giving Israel the land of Canaan?

6. Read Deuteronomy 7:1-5. What did Israel need to do to fulfil their purpose in the land?

7. According to Judges so far, how well did Israel fulfil the commands of Deuteronomy?

Israel refused to remove the Canaanite idols and altars as God commanded, so God refused to drive out all the Canaanites. As a result, Israel was doomed to keep falling in with the false gods of their Canaanite neighbours. It happens over and over, no matter how many times God punishes them and then saves them. That’s just the start of Judges. As we’ll find in the coming weeks, this actually forecasts what happens over and over through the rest of the book.

LIVING GOD'S STORY

Of course, the sad story of Judges is just a small part of God’s story, the whole Bible. To see how Judges should shape our lives today, we need to see its place in the overall story of which our lives are now a part.

8. At Creation, Adam and Eve rejected God’s good rule, so that since then “every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood” (Genesis 8:21; also 6:5). That might sound harsh, but how does Judges show this to be true of Israel?

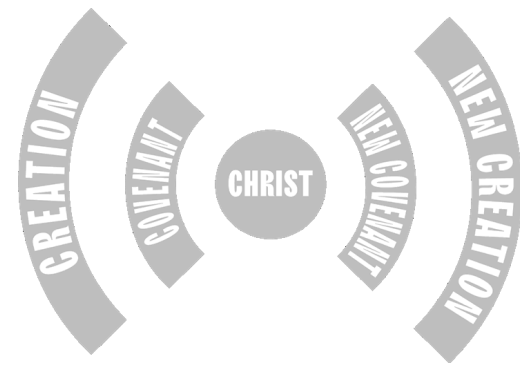
9. Does Israel's Covenant with God fix their heart problem? Why or why not?

Israel failed to bring blessing to the world, since they couldn't resist worshipping the false gods of their Canaanite neighbours instead of the true God. Their hearts were corrupt like all humanity. But **Matthew's Gospel** shows that Jesus Christ was a very different kind of Israelite. Jesus is God's own Son, so he was faithful to his Father alone, even as far as dying on the cross. Since Jesus took the punishment which Israel and all of us deserve, he can give his Spirit to anyone who trusts in him, from all nations, giving them new hearts under the New Covenant. Paul says to the **Colossians** that this at last gives followers of Jesus new hearts to kill idolatry. We can resist idolatry like physical statutes, and also with any other potential God-substitutes, like sexual and material greed.

10. Through this series we'll have lots of opportunities to talk through what it will specifically look like for us to stay faithful to God alone within our surrounding culture. But from this week's introduction, we need to think through how Judges applies to us *in general*. For each of the following statements, discuss: Would this be a valid application of Judges under the New Covenant? Why or why not?

- a. 'Israel's problem was worshipping the Canaanites' physical idols. So as long as we're not doing that, we're OK.'
- b. 'Judges shows that the human heart is corrupt, so we can't help simply repeating Israel's mistakes.'
- c. 'Like Israelites in Canaan, Australian Christians need to remove all non-Christians from Australia, so we're not led astray by those around us like Israel was.'
- d. 'If we don't remove all non-Christians, we at least need to separate from them and fight their political influence. Israel's problem was that they didn't fight enough.'
- e. 'By the Spirit we can now stay faithful to God, even surrounded by a culture offering things like sex and wealth as God-substitutes. That's how we'll draw those around us to God as well.'
- f. 'Judges warns us: the influence will run the other way too, as we unconsciously absorb the values and priorities of our surrounding culture. We'll need the Spirit to help us see that happening and consciously turn from it.'

Spend some time praying that God would help us to be faithful to him alone. Ask God to show you your own blindspots over the coming weeks. There may be areas of our lives where we've made other things - which may themselves be good gifts from God - into something which is more important to us than God himself. It's easy to do without even thinking, especially when those things are highly valued in our culture e.g. family, security, finances, success, reputation, fun, pleasure, comfort. Pray that God would move us away from the idolatry of our surrounding culture and make us more like Jesus himself.



MATTHEW 4

¹ Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil...⁸ The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" [Deuteronomy 6:13] ¹¹ Then the devil left him.

COLOSSIANS 3

¹ Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is...⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.