

Seeing Clearly through the Darkness

A Study of Judges

by Kay Daigle



B E Y O N D
O R D I N A R Y
W O M E N

Seeing Clearly through the Darkness



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Our beautiful cover was painted by Sandy Sparks (sandysparksart.com) ©2019. Thank you for sharing your artistic gifts with BOW, Sandy.

Appreciation

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Introduction

We're bombarded daily by the impact of media and culture on our lives. Like it or not, our advanced technology has rendered us incapable of escaping it. Though we may seek retreat in our churches, homes or private schools, our world is always there, intruding upon our lives.

The issue is not how we can escape such a world, but how we deal with it.

Sometimes I'd like to be like the Amish, living in a cocooned environment where the culture doesn't intrude. But what would I do with the commandments to be salt and light? Can boundaries really keep out evil and wrong thinking?

What we all need is discernment, the ability to see clearly through what we hear and see in the world, so we live wisely in the culture.

The book of Judges details a dark time when the people of God looked increasingly like the culture around them. We are right there—facing the same temptations today.

The Bible is actually God's story. It records events that reveal how he interacted with his people, the descendants of Abraham, today called the Jews. The stories are rich spiritually and practically if we take the time to study and apply what we learn about God and his message to us. God remains the same always. What is revealed about him in the Old Testament is also true of him today. To love and trust him, pay attention to what these stories teach you about him and about yourself.

Kay Daigle

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Pages skipped in preview

Week Two: Do Justice and Love Mercy

Light for Living

He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:8 (NKJV)

If you follow the news, you realize that like everything in our broken world, there is injustice in our judicial system. DNA testing has proven the innocence of many who were wrongly convicted and punished with dozens of years or more in prison for crimes which they didn't commit. Others seem guilty and yet get off on technicalities. The systemic injustice for people of color in the U.S. becomes clear when their sentences are compared with those of white people who commit similar crimes.¹

Our God is just and expects us as his image-bearers to work toward justice, as we see in this week's verse. Ultimately, a day will come when God will right the wrongs of our all too human systems.

And yet God is not only just but also merciful, and he asks us to display all aspects of his character to the world around us. The more I study Judges, the more convinced I am that it is God's mercy that is most prominent throughout the book. Mercy, like diamonds, shines most brightly when juxtaposed with the dark.

Part One Study

Review the cycles in Week One on p.14, in the Appendix on p. 58 of this study, or in Judges 2:11-19.

Judges taps into a theme that runs throughout the Scripture: God in his mercy is our Savior/Deliverer. This biblical theme is first introduced after sin enters the world and God curses the serpent who tempted Adam and Eve:

*And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel. Genesis 3:15 (NIV)*

¹ The Sentencing Project, "Criminal Justice Facts," at <https://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/> accessed 4/27/19.

This verse is considered the first proclamation of the gospel or good news. God promises that a child of a woman will heroically save/deliver the world from the forces of evil. Although Adam and Eve's sin marred Paradise, hope was ahead, not because they, or we, deserve it, but because God is merciful. Those of us who live after the New Testament recognize the child as Jesus.

The Bible tells us that 2,000 years ago Jesus did come and die to deliver the world from the evil that enslaves us personally and corporately. The scriptures also describe a coming day when he'll return, judge perfectly, and restore all creation to the paradise of Eden.²

The stories in Judges provide a shadow of the gospel story that only comes to light in the New Testament. The judges' victories were incomplete and temporary, but they provide a glimpse of Jesus's future rescue of his people from the power of sin and death. In this time between Jesus's first and second comings, God deals with us as he dealt with the Israelites of the Old Testament days: he lets us live with the consequences of worshiping and relying on the gods of this world to cause us to cry to him and turn from our idols. Someday when the Savior returns, we'll be freed from the very presence of sin as we live on a new earth with him forever—our deliverance complete!

The stories of the judges teach us that we can never put our trust in worldly deliverers who can only provide temporary safety. From where we sit in history, we understand that whatever happens our only hope for the present and future is in the God who has rescued us through Christ.

As you read these passages about our Deliverer/Savior, write your thoughts on the questions: John 1:1-5, 9-17; Romans 5:6-11; 6:5-10; Ephesians 2:1-10; Revelation 19:11-16 and 21:1-4.

- Where are you spiritually? Do you believe what these verses reveal about Jesus? Do you need his mercy to free you from your dysfunctional life that causes pain to you and others because of sin? Do you need him to provide a life as God's child? Will you follow Jesus by the power of God's Spirit? Be prepared to share honestly with your group about your current relationship with Christ. We are all still growing. If you have questions about Jesus, contact your small group leader, minister, or contact us at BOW (<https://beyondordinarywomen.org/contact-alternative/>).
- How do these verses about Jesus's life and future relate to God's justice and mercy?
- What is God saying to you through these passages?



Read these additional passages in light of the questions above: John 3:16-21; Colossians 1:15-22.

² If you have never studied the big picture story of the Bible, consider doing BOW's study The ONE Story (<https://beyondordinarywomen.org/the-one-story/>) which focuses on the overall story and unity of the Bible.

Part Two Study

Remember that there are three sections in Judges: the double introduction (Judges 1:1-3:6), stories of the judges (3:7-16:31), and a double conclusion with two stories of moral decay (17:1-21, 25). We studied the introduction in Week One, and now we'll begin reading about the judges in the second and longest part of the book.

As we study through the cycles in Judges, note that they descend in an overall downward spiral—the judges become less virtuous and the people adapt more and more to look and think like the people of the land.

Review Judges 1:11-15, and read Judges 3:5-11 about Othniel, considered by some to be the ideal judge.³ Then write your thoughts on these questions:

(FYI: There is some debate about how Othniel and Caleb were related.⁴ Many scholars believe that Othniel is Caleb's nephew.)

- How would you describe Othniel? Why might some describe him as the ideal judge?
- How do you see God's justice and mercy in the cycle that includes Othniel?
- What is God saying to you about your own life?



Read in Bible resources about the idols Baal and Asherahs⁵ (Judges 3:7), and write down what gets your attention. Many outstanding Bible resources are free online, including bible.org.

Part Three Study

In every judge's story the people of Israel dealt with an oppressive foreign ruler as a consequence of their idolatry, and yet God in his mercy raised up a deliverer. Sometimes innocent people deal with cruelty; it is not always a consequence of their personal sins or disobedience. So we have to be careful here. The faithful remnant also lives with the consequences that the majority deserves. As you think about applying Judges, remember that Israel is unique as a designated God-given land for the Jews. Because no other country falls into that category, we need to apply what we read to ourselves and our churches, not to the unbelievers in the nation around us.

³ Younger, Jr., 36.

⁴ Othniel's "exact relationship to Caleb is uncertain. The antecedent of 'his younger brother' could be either Caleb or Kenaz, in which case he would be Caleb's nephew." Block, Daniel I., *The New American Commentary: Judges and Ruth*, Vol. 6, E. Ray Clendenen, Ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1999), 93.

⁵ "The Asherahs were local manifestations of the Canaanite goddess Asherah." Note 9 on Judges 3:7 in <https://netbible.org/bible/Judges+3>. See the Appendix section "Additional Information about Judges" p.57 for more specifics.

We believers are to be salt and light in our nations as aliens, knowing that our first allegiance belongs to God's kingdom (Philippians 3:20). To apply the stories in Judges consider how we as God's New Testament people are making compromises, the nature of our idols, the ways we ignore God's commands to love him first and our neighbors as ourselves, and the ways we replace trusting and worshiping God with trust in ourselves, other people, government, money, etc.

A God-given desire for justice lives deeply within all people. Sometimes, however, that desire leads fallen people to seek revenge or become self-righteous. The English words righteousness and justice are two forms of the same word in the Bible. Self-righteousness means judging ourselves as worthy and just while we vilify other people. We can often see it in our hearts when we lack empathy toward "those" who aren't like us. When we do that, we aren't merciful or loving toward our neighbors.

With that in mind let's continue the stories of the judges. The cycle began again after 40 years of rest following Othniel's deliverance.

Read Judges 3:12-31, and record your thoughts as you think through these questions:

(FYI: "An oxgoad was a long stick with a small flat piece of iron on one side and a sharp point on the other. The sharp side was used to drive the oxen during times of plowing, and the flat end was used to clean the mud off the plow."⁶)

- Compare Ehud and Shamgar to Othniel, the first judge. Consider their situations and methods, as well as anything the text tells you about their character. What makes each good or unusual choices for God's leaders? Why would God choose judges with limitations?
- What is God saying to you through the stories of these first three judges?
- What three things does God require of us according to Micah 6:8, our verse this week? How might God be asking you to be an advocate/support for justice and mercy?

Just as the judges delivered God's people from the oppression of foreign kings when the people cried out to God, so we participate in God's kingdom work by speaking and working for justice. The more difficult the situation is, the more courage we need to stand against what is popular and accepted among our friends. The church has not always led the way in this area. As followers of Christ, we are called to speak out against inequality and injustice wherever we find it—on the job, or in the church, our nation or our families.

At the same time we're to be forgiving and merciful because that shows God to others, maybe like nothing else does. We show mercy to the guilty and those affected by sin. Our desire for justice must be tempered by our realization that we too have received mercy— totally and completely

⁶ Note in *Life Application Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 387.

undeserved. Harsh attitudes and hard lines that fail to love our neighbors are irreconcilable with the name of Christ.



Read, listen to, or watch a true story or facts about injustice, discrimination or oppression. Stretch yourself to consider a viewpoint outside of your personal experience from people unlike you. Where can you help bring justice, and where can you give mercy? How can you act on both concepts which are high on God's priorities? (Need suggestions? See a short list in the list of "Resources on Injustice" in the Appendix on p. 61.)

A friend who worked through this study to provide input as I edited it suggested that I "strongly encourage" you to read the resources on injustice suggested in the starred optional section you just passed. She said that she's so glad that I needed her input on them because she would've skipped them otherwise. She ended up challenged by what she read. Consider reading at least one of them! It's easier to turn our heads and ignore injustice, but that leaves us as accomplices to evil.

Crystal's Story

I grew up thinking that our country was a place where justice always prevailed. But then in February 2012, with the shooting of an unarmed black teen, Trayvon Martin, I started to question my views. Was racism still a reality in our country? Did people experience systemic injustice just because of the color of their skin? These questions forced me to dive back into the history of our nation and to revisit the story of the black experience in America through their perspectives.

Over the next few years, I read everything that I could get my hands on to understand more fully what I felt like was not being talked about in the classrooms or even the churches where I had grown up.

There continued to be more high-profile shootings of black and brown men, women and children, often in encounters with police, but now I was starting to see through the typical rationalizations offered that something deeply unjust was happening. Comments that I heard from other white Christians that racial justice was a "distraction from the Gospel" rang hollow.

When I started to study the Bible again, now in community with believers from diverse ethnicities and life experiences, my eyes were opened to the fact that these issues were central to God's heart for justice and reconciliation. Because they are important to Him, they should be important to me as His child.

How has this changed my perspective now? Now I listen first before I speak. I grieve with those communities most affected by the brokenness and injustice in our world. I teach my kids that

God has created us in all our differences and loves this diversity. I speak up and work to support those on the frontlines of creating more just communities where we live. Just as the Israelites learned in the book of Judges, I too have learned that my ultimate hope cannot rest in man but only in the God of perfect justice who has reconciled us in the cross and will make all things right again in the end.