

History

One of my favorite books is *1066 and All That: A MEMORABLE HISTORY OF ENGLAND*, by the British humorists W.C. Sellar and R.J. Yeatman. This is not your ordinary history book, as it dances along through the history of England, it ignores dates almost entirely, fails to mention various kings and queens, and generally has a lot of fun in the process. One significant aspect of this book, though, is that it actually gives an accurate sense of the overall picture of how England developed.

A large portion of the Bible is written as a history of God's kingdom and his people. While the Bible's books of history – Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther – do not necessarily give us every fact and date, they accurately give us God's word concerning what he has done for his kingdom and his people. Let's spend this week together looking at the early years of the nation of Israel, God's loving kindness for them, and what this means for Christians today.

Monday – Joshua: Israel's Commander

"Sacred history is not the history of individuals but of the kingdom of God in its onward progress." Matthew Easton, 19th c. Scottish preacher and writer

1. Please read Joshua 1:1-11. What is happening to Israel's leadership in this passage? What did God promise to do for Joshua? What role does God's Word have in this promise?
2. Now look at Joshua 24:1-14. Why do you think Joshua recited God's work in Israel's history? What does this tell you about the importance of understanding how God has cared for his people in the past?
3. How did Joshua look to the future as well, in Joshua 24:14-24?

Making it Personal: Pray, asking God for guidance in understanding what he has done for his people and where he wants you to go next.

Tuesday – Leaderless People

"Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms." C.S. Lewis

1. Please read Judges 2:6-23. What did the people of Israel initially do after Joshua died? What happened later? Why do you think this happened?
2. How did God provide for his people in verses 16-19? What was the Israelites' response? Why?

Text Insight: The word "judge" in our English versions of the Bible translates the Hebrew word "shophet," which refers to a magistrate or ruler as opposed to someone who hears court cases.

3. What does this passage tell you about the role of God's people in receiving and enjoying his blessings?

Prayer Focus: Pray that God's people will receive his blessings gladly, with willingness and obedience.

Wednesday – Othniel: the first judge

"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." Hebrews 13:7

1. Please read Judges 3:7-11. What had the Israelites done?
2. What do you think it means to forget God? When are you most likely to forget God? Take a moment and ask God to keep you mindful of him always.
3. Now look at Joshua 15:13-19 and note Othniel's attributes, accomplishments, family connections and possessions. Why would these make him an appropriate choice as Israel's first judge?

Prayer Focus: Consider the words of Hebrews 13:7 (above). Pray for the leadership of FBC, that they might carry out God's work faithfully. Also, ask that the people of our church would act on the words of Heb. 13:7.

Thursday – Deborah: the wise judge

"Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve." John Stott, British pastor and author

1. Please read Judges 4:1-3. What were the Israelites doing? How might they have avoided this problem?
2. How did God provide for the Israelites in verses 4-10? Why would Barak ask Deborah to go with him? What do you think Deborah is suggesting in her response to his request?
3. Read Judges 4:11-23 & 5:24-27 in conjunction with Isaiah 55:8-9. What can you discern about following God's will in your own life from these passages?

Text Insight: The name Deborah is from the Hebrew word for "bee." How does this passage reflect the appropriateness of this name for Deborah?

Friday – Turning on Themselves

"Leadership has a harder job to do than just choose sides. It must bring sides together." Jesse Jackson, American pastor and political leader

1. Please read Judges 19:16-30. Is there anyone who is without blame in this passage? Why?
2. Continue by reading Judges 20:1-11, 33-35 & 46-48. How did the Israelites respond?
3. How did the people try to correct matters in Judges 21:6-25? In what way does the last phrase of the Book of Judges (verse 25b) explain how they got themselves into this mess in the first place?

Digging Deeper (optional): Read 1 Samuel 11:1-15 regarding Israel's first king. Notice that the city King Saul rescued in his very first battle is Jabesh Gilead, which was also the last city to suffer in the Book of Judges. What does this tell you about God's faithful love and care for his people?

For the Weekend: Read Judges 5:1-31 and Isaiah 46:9-13. Why would God want his people to remember what he accomplished through Deborah, Barak and Jael? What can you do to become more familiar with God's love and care for his people over the centuries?