

Small Group Guide THE PROMISE KEEPING GOD™

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. J.D. Payne

July 20, 2014

Joshua 23; 24:14-15

Use this resource as a tool to help Christ-followers move forward in their spiritual growth. To do this well requires that the Small Group Leader is building a relationship with the individuals in the small group and has identified where the people are in their relationship with God. Are they Christ-followers? Are they growing in Christ? If so, in what areas do they need to grow further? As disciplers, Small Group Leaders shepherd people to know the truth of Scripture, to understand why it matters, and to apply it to their lives. Small Group Leaders come alongside those whom they disciple to discover how loving God, loving each other, and loving those not yet in the Kingdom should shape how they live. The structure of this resource coincides with moving people from knowledge (Main Truth) to understanding (Why It Matters) to application (Now What Do We Do?). Utilize this Small Group Guide as a flexible teaching tool to inform your time together and not as a rigid task list.

GETTING STARTED

Before Small Group

Weekly Readings for July 14-20
Judges 4-10 and Acts 8-14

Where We Are In The Story ~ Old Testament (Joshua)

Background of Judges: While authorship of Judges is traditionally assigned to Samuel, we do not know who wrote this book. Judges presents Israel's cycle of idolatry, judgment, repentance, and deliverance that occurred between the death of Joshua and the establishment of Israel's monarchy (Josh. 2:11-19). Throughout this book, God remains faithful to His covenant, but Israel receives judgment that comes as a result of God's promises to *punish* His people for their disobedience. However, Israel's depravity emphasizes the scandal and the greatness of God's mercy and forgiveness. While God raises up twelve men and women during this time period to lead His people, *He* remains the ultimate Judge and Savior of Israel.

Structure of Judges:

- Judges 1:1-3:6 introduces the reader to the circumstances after Joshua's death and gives an overview of the cycle Israel would follow as God raised up judges to deliver and to lead His people.
- Judges 3:7-16:31 provides accounts of twelve judges in Israel's history.
- Judges 17-21 describes the moral descent of Israel and how the nation demonstrated little difference from their pagan neighbors.

This Week in Judges: Judges 4-5 recount the era when Deborah led as prophet and the judge of Israel. Because Israel was a nation, Deborah's role as a judge was political, not just ministerial. Her leadership often brings up the subject of women's role in society and in the church, but bear in mind that Judges 4-5 is *not prescriptive* of the way things should be. Instead, these chapters *describe* a time in Israel's history when the nation engaged in idolatry and when male leadership was lacking (as seen by Barak's hesitancy). When processing complex issues such as women and ministry, we must take *all* of Scripture into account and do the heavy lifting of studying the issue in its entirety, not just selecting certain portions of the Bible. Three helpful resources on this subject include the Secret Church on "Family, Marriage, Sex, and the Gospel" by David Platt (radical.net), "What about Women, Paul?" by David Platt (radical.net), and *Two Views on Women in Ministry* edited by Beck and Blomberg.

She summoned Barak with a directive from the Lord to take 10,000 men into battle against a Canaanite king who had 900 iron chariots, which presented terrible odds for Israel. God had assured victory, but Barak wanted Deborah to accompany him and the army into battle. Because he recognized Deborah as a godly woman who spoke God's words, he wanted her with him on the battlefield. But because of his conditional request, he would not get the honor for his participation in the defeat; instead, God would give honor to a

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woman (Jael). The events of Judges 4 mirror the Exodus (Ex. 14-15) in that both passages emphasize the military strength of Israel's enemy (Judg. 4:3, 7, 13; Ex. 14:9, 17-18, 23, 28), God uses bodies of water to destroy their enemies (Judg. 5:21; Ex. 15:6, 10), God confused their enemies (Judg. 4:15; Ex. 14:24), the enemies were completely destroyed (Judg. 4:16; Ex. 14:28), and the narrative was directly followed by songs of praise (Judg. 5; Ex. 15).

Judges 6-9 follow the account of Gideon, the fifth judge listed in this book. At this time, the Midianites have become Israel's oppressors, and instead of immediately delivering Israel, the Lord first sent a prophet to the people to remind the people of who God is and the consequences of their sin. "The people of Israel cried out to the LORD on account of the Midianites" (Judg. 6:7), but that does not necessarily mean that they were repentant of their sin. The sending of the prophet implies that they needed to be convicted over their sin and not just their circumstances.

Gideon requested several signs from the Lord as a reassurance of God's identity as Sovereign Lord and of His favor. Gideon's actions do not necessarily mean that we should ask God for a sign when it comes to any decision we have to make. The fleece situation was not about direction in decision-making; it was about God's power, which was the motivation behind the *types* of requests that Gideon made. In Judges 6, Gideon destroyed the altar of Baal, and the Canaanites believed that this god controlled the rain and the dew. If God could rule over nature (showing Himself as more powerful than Baal), then he could empower Gideon to lead Israel and to defeat the Midianites.

In Judges 8, the people of Israel attempted to make Gideon their king, but he declined, reminding them that God ruled over them (v. 23). However, he turned around and ordered them to donate gold from the spoil of their victories, and he made a golden ephod out of the gold, which was part of the clothing worn by the high priest. Whatever his motivation for doing this, the golden ephod became an object of worship for the people and for Gideon and his family (v. 27). Furthermore, his son Abimelech later killed all of his brothers except one, Jotham, in order to rule over Israel, and he ruled for three years until God brought an end to his leadership. Regarding Gideon's actions in Judges 8, Robert Chisholm states in *A Commentary on Judges and Ruth*,

Despite knowing the people's and his own family's penchant for idols, he makes an ephod which quickly becomes an object of worship. By marrying many wives and giving one of his sons a royal name [the "melech" in Abimelech means "king"], he acts as if he is a king. While giving lip-service to the Lord's kingship, his actions contradict his words and set the stage for new depths of civil strife and chaos (p. 295).

Where We Are In The Story ~ New Testament (Matthew)

Background of Acts: As with the Luke's Gospel, Luke wrote Acts to a man named Theophilus to describe the events that occurred after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, and Luke 1:1-4 states the purpose of both Luke and Acts: to provide a narrative of the truth from eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word. Acts details the thirty years following the resurrection of Christ and describes the spread of the gospel throughout Asia and Europe.

Structure of Acts:

- Acts 1-5 describes the advent of the church.
- Acts 6:1-9:31 portrays the persecution and the growth of the church.
- Acts 9:32-12:24 details the inclusion of the Gentiles into the faith.
- Acts 13:1-19:20 follows the missionary journeys of Paul.
- Acts 19:21-28:31 chronicles Paul's journey to Jerusalem where he is arrested, tried, and sent to Rome for an audience with Caesar.

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This Week in Acts: With the advent of the church after Christ's ascension, Acts depicts many situations where believers had not yet received the Holy Spirit or where the apostles would lay hands on individuals and pray for them to receive the Spirit. With this particular subject, it is important to remember that the Holy Spirit indwells the believer *at the moment of salvation*. Acts depicts a unique time of transition in salvation history, but the activity of the Spirit has not ceased since this time. With regards to Acts 8, either these people were not yet regenerated (converted), or they had not yet received the Spirit because the promise of His coming could not be fulfilled until Christ had ascended. Because this began the spread of the Christian faith outside of Jerusalem into Samaria, there is also a sense in which the delay in receiving the Spirit supported the unity of the church as the apostles were able to ratify the work of the Spirit among the Samaritans. A similar situation in Acts 10 led Peter to recognize and affirm God's work among the Gentiles. Many denominations build entire doctrines about the Holy Spirit based on what they see in Acts alone, but when studying the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (or any doctrine, for that matter), we must look at *all* of Scripture. Two helpful resources on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit include the Secret Church on "Exploring the Holy Spirit" (radical.net) and *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem.

Acts 10 records two visions that prepare both men (Peter and Cornelius) to cross the barrier between Jews and Gentiles as the gospel spread beyond the Jews. Dietary differences and circumcision were just two of many differences that prevented Jews from socializing with Gentiles (doing so would make a Jew unclean), and such barriers would have to be eliminated if these two groups were to form one unified body of believers. A vision was necessary for Peter to accept such an invitation from Cornelius in the first place. His vision consisted of a sheet coming down from heaven, and in it were all sorts of clean and unclean animals (as defined by levitical law) with God telling him not to regard common things as profane. Peter understood that this vision applied not only to food but also to people (see Acts 10:28), which is why Peter accepted Cornelius' invitation. This led to Cornelius' household hearing and receiving the gospel (Acts 10:34-48).

In Acts 11, Peter defends the acceptance of the Gentiles in the community of faith when believers in Jerusalem criticized him for eating with uncircumcised men. Why was this such a big deal? Table fellowship with Gentiles involved eating food that either was unclean or had not been tithed on. Furthermore, to accept hospitality from a Gentile meant associating with someone who was not circumcised, and circumcision was a sign of the old covenant, marking the person as a member of the covenant community. To a Jew, Gentiles did not need to be treated as full members of the covenant community without them also bearing the sign of the covenant community – circumcision.

Acts 9-14 also describes the conversion of Saul (a.k.a. Paul) and the first of Paul's missionary journeys. The church at Antioch served as his home base, his sending church, and it was first in Antioch that believers became known as "Christians" (Acts 11:26). In his first journey, Paul set out with Barnabas and John Mark from Antioch to Salamis (on the island of Cyprus), Paphros, Perga (in modern day Turkey), Antioch Pisidia (in Turkey – this is different from the Syrian Antioch that served as their home base), Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Attalia, and back to Antioch in Syria. Paul's routine involved visiting the Jewish synagogue upon arrival to a city and preaching the gospel there. While many Jews and God-fearing Gentiles believed, Paul and his compatriots regularly faced opposition from the Jewish authorities. During this journey, Jews in Lystra stoned Paul and left him for dead (Acts 14:19). The fact that Paul was able to rise up and reenter the city on the same day as being stoned and the next day travel to Derbe implies a miracle occurred that enabled Paul to recover so quickly.

Acts 8-14 depicts the opposition faced by the early church. Saul as well as unbelieving Jews ravaged the church because they thought it propagated blasphemy about Christ being the Messiah and because they became jealous about the popularity of Christianity and its proclaimers. Opposition also came from those whose industry was threatened by the faith, such as the businessmen who owned the spirit-possessed slave girl in Philippi (Acts 16:16-24). Despite the attacks from unbelieving Jews as well as from unbelieving Gentiles, the gospel continued to be proclaimed, and the church continued to grow.

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During Small Group

Welcome – Incorporate time for greeting one another, enjoying any refreshments, and making announcements. If guests are visiting, make introductions and help them feel welcomed. Ask for their contact information, so you can follow up with them.

Looking Back – Provide an opportunity for small group members to share what God is teaching them, how they are applying what they are learning, and how He has given them opportunities to share the gospel with others. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. Do the people know each other well enough to share more than surface level information? How can time together be used to foster deeper relationships among those in the small group? Also, what are the struggles and needs of the people in the small group? How can the people in the small group sacrificially serve each other?

Looking Up – Hold prayer as fundamental to small group time rather than supplemental to it. Give adoration and thanksgiving to God in prayer. Submit yourself to Him, confessing sin. Petition God for personal needs and other requests. Pray for the disciple-making efforts of those in the group and for the salvation of the lost in each other's families, spheres of influence, and in the world. The Weekly Prayer Focus below can also be incorporated in the group's prayer time.

Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)

- **Pray for Our Lives:** Praise God for His great promises and for fulfilling each one. Ask God to strengthen our own faithfulness to Him. Pray for us all to be convicted of anything in our lives we are serving instead of God. Pray for perseverance as we live in a world hostile toward the things of God. Pray for those living without Him to see their need for God. Praise God for fighting for us in every struggle of life.
- **Pray for Our City:** This week we are praying for the children who live at The Lovelady Center. The Lovelady Center is a transitional ministry in the East Lake area for approximately 400 women who have experienced prison time, homelessness, addiction, or abuse. On average, 100 children ages birth through twelve years live with their mothers at the center. Approximately 40 of those children will attend Birmingham City Schools and Restoration Academy this year. We are also praying for Gardendale First Baptist Church and Kevin Hamm, Pastor.
- **Pray for Our World:** This week we are praying over the 1.5 billion Muslims around the world who are participating in Ramadan. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. This year, it began the evening of June 28th and will last through July 28th. Ramadan is the holy month in which Muslims believe Mohammed received the revelation of the Quran. Muslims observe Ramadan by fasting from dawn until sunset and will work harder than any other time of the year to please their Maker and earn redemption for their trespasses. Join us this week as we pray for Muslims around the world in their last week of Ramadan and for Brook Hills partners who are serving among Muslim people groups. This week we are also praying for our Short-Term teams serving in East Asia, Dominican Republic, and Ecuador.

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MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

The Promise Keeping God Joshua 23; 24:14-15; Judges 2:6-15; Acts 2:16-17

- I. Knowing He is the Promise Keeping God, We Must Remember What He has Done (23:3-4, 9-10)

- II. Knowing that He is the Promise Keeping God, We Must Align Ourselves with Him (23:6, 8, 11; 24:14-15)

By:

 - Being very strong to keep the Word (Observe, Believe)
 - Being very strong to do the Word (Practice)
 - Not turning away from His Word
 - Clinging to the Lord.
 - Loving the Lord
 - Fearing the Lord
 - Serving Him
 - Choosing

- III. Knowing that He is the Promise Keeping God, We Must Not Unite Ourselves with that which is in Opposition to Him (23:7, 12-13)

- IV. Knowing He is the Promise Keeping God, We Must Understand that Past Faithfulness is not Sufficient for Present Victories (23:5, 14-16; Judges 2:6-15)

- V. Knowing that He is the Promise Keeping God, We Must Understand that His Rest Only Comes through His Messiah (Acts 2:16-17, 32; Heb 4:8)

Message Summary

Unlike people, God has no Plan B because He does not need one. Everything that He promises will come true. Because God keeps His promises, we must remember what He has done and align ourselves with Him. This includes adhering to His truth, obeying His Word, clinging to Him, fearing Him, serving Him, and daily choosing Him. Because of God's faithfulness, we must not unite ourselves to that which is in opposition to Him, and we must understand that past faithfulness in our lives is not sufficient for present victories. Lastly, we must understand that His rest comes only through the Messiah.

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WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

Consider at least three directions your small group can take in light of the current Bible reading plan. Knowing the people in the group, prayerfully think about what would be the best route to help those in your group grow. The group's meeting style could also vary each week, so, feel the freedom to take all or some of the content in this guide to do what you feel is best for your group.

- Using the discussion questions below, the small group time can focus on discussing the sermon and how to apply it.
- The group can discuss the Bible readings from the past week. If choosing this route, ensure that the group does not simply discuss information but also focuses on how to apply what they have learned from the Bible readings. The information in the "Where We Are in the Story" section can assist the leader in knowing the background and context for the readings.
- Using the REAP (read, examine, apply, pray) outline for studying Scripture, the group can take one or both passages from that day's readings and discuss them. If the group meets on Monday, you could pick one or both of the passages for Monday. This also helps those who are new to studying the Bible or who struggle with reading it learn how to do so. To assist the group with REAP questions, download the *Guide to Personal Worship* from brookhills.org.

With this week's Small Group Guide, you could potentially spend your time focusing on the theme of God as a promise keeper, or you can focus more on the passage itself (Josh. 23; 24:24-25). Either way, lead the group to get beyond simply amassing information about God and the Christian life. Move the group members to think through how such knowledge should affect how they live this week. What changes need to be made in their lives? How can they work towards those changes this week? Also,

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

- What promises has God made in Scripture? How have they been fulfilled?
- If God were not a promise keeper, what would the world be like? What would our relationship with Him look like?
- How should God's faithfulness affect our view of Him, our trust in Him, and our relationship with Him? In light of His faithfulness, how should we respond in times of suffering? In times of temptation? In times of rejoicing? Do our lives look like what we described? If not, why? What prevents us from being faithful to the Faithful One?
- One way that we can respond to God's faithfulness is to *remember* what God has done. Why is it important for us to recount what God has done, not only what Scripture describes but also His work in our own lives and churches? What is the point of such rehearsals? What does God want to cultivate in us through us remembering Him and His works? Take time as a small group to recount how God has worked in your life or your family. How have you seen Him answer prayer or be faithful to His Word?

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- Practically, what does it look like to remember Him on a regular basis? Is this something that is a part of your relationship with God and your conversations with believers and nonbelievers? Give examples of what this can look like or how you have seen it demonstrated.
- Describe reasons for why God's people would "forget" Him. What happens when believers do not take time to remember what He has done? What dangers arise for believers who forget God? What do we see in Scripture?
- What happens when we do not align ourselves with God's Word?
- What does it look like to carve out time in your schedule each day to study God's Word and to spend time with God? How should you respond if you have no desire to read the Bible? If you hate to read? If you are overwhelmed when you sit down and open God's Word?
- How can we apply God's Word to our lives, especially when reading historical books like Joshua and Judges?
- What is one thing you can do this week to grow in your study of the Word?
- Are you more concerned about yourself or about God? Do you live your life for your glory or for God's glory? What does it look like to live the rest of today or to live tomorrow for God's glory? How should this affect our thoughts and motivations? Should we wait to obey God until we have the right motivations? Why or why not? How should we respond if we recognize that our motivations are not right?
- Read Joshua 23:11-13. Promises that look negative, such as those in these verses, are also God's promises. Why does God make such promises? Why is it a good thing that He would do so?
- How is past faithfulness not sufficient for present victory in the Christian life? What are the implications of this for temptation in our lives? How do we have victory in the present? What does daily choosing Him look like? How can we resist the influence of this world?
- This week, how can you share this good news about God being a promise keeper? Who will you share it with? What can you specifically relay to them about this attribute of God? Pray for opportunities to tell others about God's faithfulness this week.

Judges & Acts Resources

As we study Judges and Acts, listed below are helpful resources that can assist you in further study of these books.

- *Judges, Ruth* by Daniel I. Block, Kenneth Mathews, & David S. Dockery
- *Judges for You* by Timothy Keller
- *The Message of Judges* by Michael Wilcock
- *A Commentary on Judges and Ruth* by Robert B. Chisholm Jr.
- *Judges* by Dale Ralph Davis
- *The Book of the Acts* by F.F. Bruce
- *Acts* by Darrell Bock
- *Acts* by I. Howard Marshall
- *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1-2:47* by Craig S. Keener
- *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 3:1-14:28* by Craig S. Keener
- *Theology of the New Testament* by Frank S. Thielman
- *An Introduction to the New Testament* by D.A. Carson & Douglas Moo
- *An Introduction to the Old Testament* by Tremper Longman III & Raymond B. Dillard
- *Old Testament Theology* by Paul R. House
- Radical (radical.net) – Listen to previous Brook Hills sermons, and search by Scripture, date, or topic.
- Ligonier Ministries (ligonier.org) – This site provides a helpful list of top commentaries for each book of the Bible.
- The Gospel Coalition (thegospelcoalition.org) – Use their Scripture index to download sermons from trusted pastors on almost every chapter in the Bible.
- Desiring God (desiringgod.org) – Listen to or read sermons by Pastor John Piper.