

Bible Workshop


Developing Bible study skills

10. “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes”

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THIS STUDY is designed to highlight a number of different aspects of Bible study, as follows:

- that Bible study is not difficult or the preserve of the intellectual
- the need to give careful attention to the text
- the value of following up quotations
- the value of recording and preserving information found.


 You will need:
Bible with marginal references

Four times in Judges we read that “there was no king in Israel” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Twice we are told, “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25). The realisation that there are these recurring phrases comes from a careful reading of the text and looking at and following up marginal references. Whilst it might be thought that this was a general description of lawlessness, there is a Scriptural way of assessing what is being spoken of.

This study will:

- locate the origin of the quotation
- examine what was being taught in the original passage
- show what Israel thought when they entered the Land
- draw lessons for ourselves.

Are we right in thinking that these phrases are a general comment on the time of the Judges? Or is there some specific reason for the use of this language here? Speculation is of no value in establishing Bible truth. Good Bible study is based on comparing Scripture with Scripture and letting the Bible interpret itself. So we ask, Does the phrase we are considering, or similar language, occur elsewhere in the Bible?

 Look at the marginal references against Judges 21:25

Looking at the marginal references against Judges 21:25, we see a link to Deuteronomy 12:8, which says, “Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes”. When compared with Judges 17:6 and 21:25 we see striking similarities and a contrast. Setting the two passages one over the other helps us to see the relevance of the link:

“Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes” (Deut. 12:8).

“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25).

The Deuteronomy reference, speaking to Israel as they were about to enter the land of Canaan, commands the people that they *should not do* that which was right in their own eyes, whereas the Judges references states clearly that the people *actually did* that which was right in their own eyes.

Having noticed the contrasting link, we must ask ourselves, Why does the book of Judges utilise the language of Deuteronomy 12? This requires that we look at Deuteronomy 12. Now is a good time to read carefully the whole of Deuteronomy 12.

 Read all Deuteronomy 12

One point that emerges from reading Deuteronomy 12 is the repeated refrain, “. . . which the LORD your God shall choose” (vv. 11,18,21,26). It would be useful, at this point, to underline those occurrences of this phrase in your Bible and link them in some way, so that this element of the structure of the chapter can be easily seen.

✍ Underline and link together the occurrences of the phrase, “. . . which the LORD your God shall choose”, in Deuteronomy 12.

Another element of the chapter is that Israel was to “overthrow” the symbols of false worship in the Land and not to copy them (vv. 3,4,30,31). Further, Israel were reminded that “ye are not as yet come to the rest” (v. 9).

It is against this background that Moses said, “Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes” (v. 8).

Returning to the book of Judges and taking a broader view of those times, we learn that the tribes did not drive out the inhabitants of the Land (1:27-36). Rather “they took their daughters to be their wives . . . and served their gods” (3:6). In fact the motif of ‘serve’ is picked up and becomes a token throughout Judges, and with only a couple of exceptions speaks of false worship.

So we can conclude that Israel during the time of the Judges had forgotten the exhortation of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy. Consequently they thought that dwelling with the inhabitants of the Land was preferable to driving them out. The comment, “every man did that which was right in his own eyes”, is confirmation of the fact that the

nation had turned away from the commandment of God, through Moses, in Deuteronomy 12:8, and it is used and repeated so that we can see how Israel’s behaviour contradicted what they had been told to do when they entered the Land.

That there was “no king in Israel” provides an explanation as to why the people failed to observe the words of Moses. As God said to Samuel, “they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Sam. 8:7).

✍ Record your findings in the way set out below

A way in which we might record our findings would be to underline the relevant texts, and, with chain references as outlined in our study on themes in Matthew’s Gospel (Oct. 2006, p. 351), link the passages together. We might underline the two occasions where the quotation from Deuteronomy 12:8 occurs in Judges and write a marginal note linking them to Deuteronomy 12:8, and also indicate in Deuteronomy 12:8 that this is quoted on two occasions in Judges by underlining the relevant words and putting the references to Judges in the margin.

The lesson for ourselves is very clear. When the instructions that God gives are compromised or disregarded then disaster follows.

Advice about Bible study

Marginal references

For the ordinary student of the Word of God there is no single tool available to match marginal references in general helpfulness. It is a token of the laziness of this generation and its disinclination to serious application to the Bible that editions with “mg. refs.” are going out of fashion. How many besides Christadelphians make serious use of them? For that matter, how many Christadelphians do so? Yet as a help to finding your way rapidly and easily about the Book there is nothing to compare with an intelligently-compiled set of marginal references. In a thousand ways they come to your assistance, saving you endless trouble and frequently handing to you, ready made, some of the most stirring ideas the Bible can provide.

Asking questions

No one can expect to go far in Bible study except he have or develop a well-sharpened faculty for asking questions. The ability to answer questions, to find the solution to problems and difficulties, will come with experience. But if there be no lively curiosity in the first instance which reads every verse and every phrase with a large question-mark against it, progress will be little better than meagre. It matters little at the moment whether you can find the answers to the problems or not. Many of the answers will be supplied by others, because if your mind is full of questions they are bound to crop up frequently in your conversation. Many more solutions will arrive of their own accord with the passing of time and your growing over-all knowledge of the Bible. Quite a number will remain with you all your days without any convincing answer—suitable reminders of your own fallibility and limited powers, but not (it is sincerely hoped) as seeds of unfaith.

From *Exploring the Bible*, Harry Whittaker, pp. 29, 36.