THE TIME OF THE JUDGES

Deborah, Gideon, Samson, Ruth

Author: Eleanor Delport

© Eleanor Delport 2024

There was no king

in Israel

at that time

all the people did

just as they pleased

Judges 17v6

BOOK OVERVIEW AND STORY CIRCLE

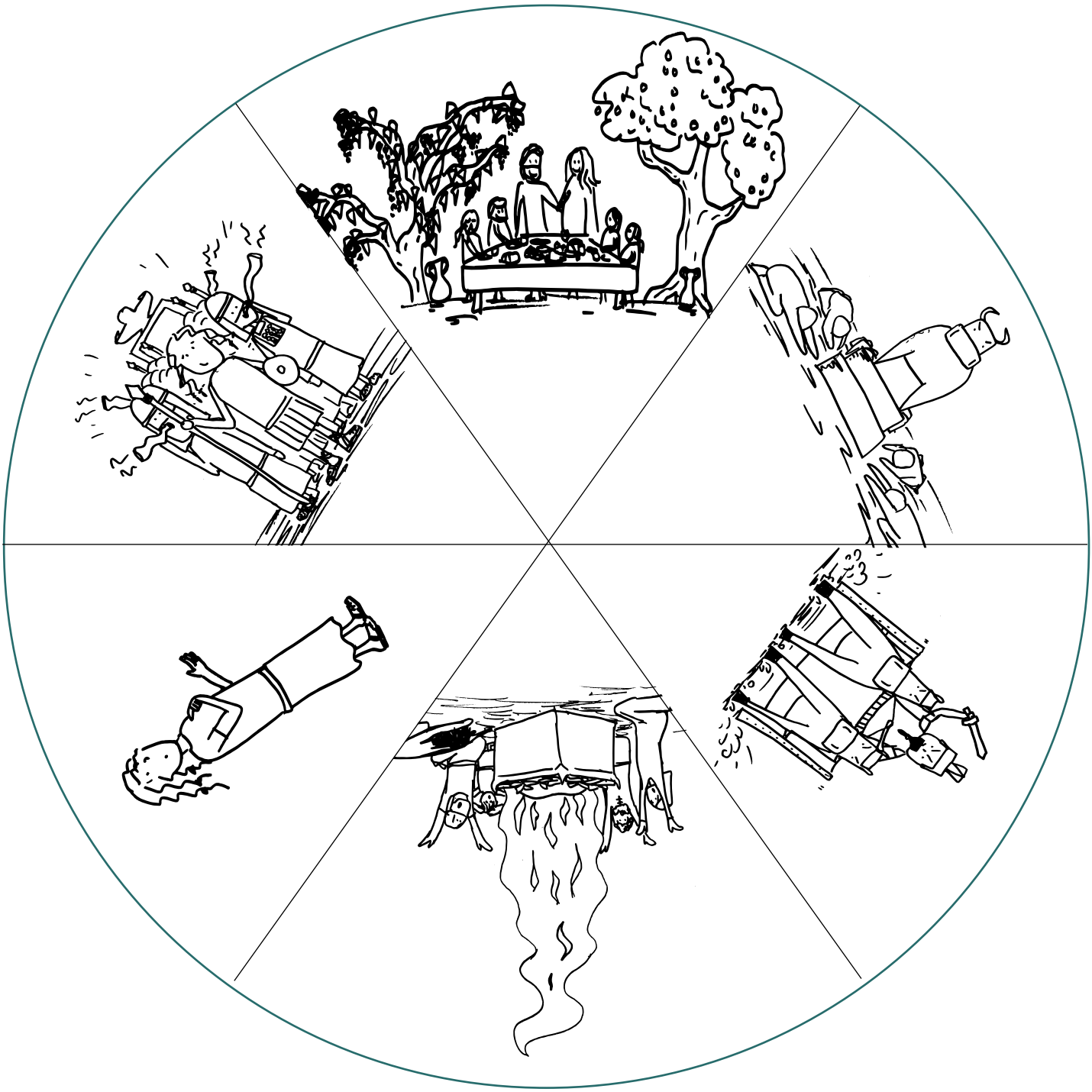
The book of Judges circles round a repeated story pattern (demonstrated in the story circle) where:

1. the people of God have rest and blessing
2. then they turn from God
3. God allows disaster to come upon them
4. they cry out to God
5. God raises up a champion for the people called a judge
6. that champion pushes back their enemies and they have peace again for a time

However, as the book goes on, the Israelites rebellion against God becomes worse and worse and the judges God gives them also are less and less good. The repeated verse through the book is "everyone did what was right in their own eyes, because there was no king". God should have been their king, but they turn from God and by the end of the book, we are left wondering, "who could be a king to bring these people together, save them from their enemies and lead them back to God?"

We will look at three judges in this series and then look at the story of Ruth and Boaz, who live at the time of the judges and will lead to the king after God's own heart, David, being born.

Use the story circle to recap the story with the children, asking them to map the events in the story to the stages on the circle.



SESSION 1
DEBORAH

Big idea: God is faithful to rescue when His people turn back to Him

God gives His people a choice, Life or Death. The people are unfaithful, but God promised to help them when they turn back to Him with all their hearts, so He raised up Judges or Champions/Saviours to help them.

© Eleanor Delport 2024

10 years +

SESSION 1: DEBORAH

(TOGETHER)

SHARE NEWS, REGISTER

Reiterate expectations of session: We hope to have a lot of fun together, particularly in the game. We also expect everyone to listen respectfully to one another and sit on their bottoms in the Bible study and prayer times.

(TOGETHER) INTRO PART 1 – SETTING THE SCENE

We are starting a new series on the book of Judges. Use the Bible timeline to orientate yourselves in the overall Bible story. See **the book overview** and **story circle** explanation.

(IN GROUPS) PLURP PART 1:

We will be using a Bible study method called "PLURP!" (Pray, Look, Understand, Respond, Pray again) Read Judges chapter 4

Use PLURP worksheet 1 to help you Pray and Look at the passage.

(TOGETHER) CHAMPION CHALLENGE –: Joust

(IN GROUPS) PLURP PART 2

Use PLURP worksheet 2 to help you understand, respond to the passage and pray

MEMORY VERSE

We are going to learn this memory verse

There was no king in Israel at that time; all the people did just as they pleased Judges 17v6

© Eleanor Delport 2024

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand the story

Read Judges 4

WHEN?

- When in the Bible story did this happen?

WHERE?

- Where is it set? (See map)

WHAT?

- What happens?

LOOK

WHO?

- Who are the enemies of God's people in this passage? How powerful do you think they were?
- Who was the person God raised up to judge/govern/lead God's people? What was her role?
- Who was the key person who struck down the enemy in this passage? Who was she related to?

© Eleanor Delport 2024

10+ years

CHAMPION CHALLENGE: JOUST

Equipment:

Foam noodles, cone or upended empty plastic bottle or cup on a round ended post, like a wicket or something with a foam ball shoved on top for health and safety (please do not have the children run at a sharp post. It could be a chair if nothing else suitable), cones to mark 2 parallel jousting runways, score sheet/scoreboard

1. Divide into two teams and line up at starting lines at opposite ends of the runway as you would in a joust.
2. The first child from each line gallops forwards with a foam noodle under their arm and tries to knock the cup off the post and onto their opponent's side of the jousting arena. Whoever succeeds scores a point for their team
3. The children gallop to the end and back to the start to give the next pair the noodles
4. Keep score and the team with the most points at the end wins
5. Important rule: No head shots! Noodles only to be used on the cup, not people

Alternative: have the children balance a plastic tray each on the hand closest to the centre line held by one hand and not balanced against the body. They have to try and knock their opponents tray out of their hand

© Eleanor Delport 2024

UNDERSTAND

Read Deuteronomy 30v1-3

What did the Israelites choose at the beginning of this story?

Do you think the people deserved God's help?

Why did He help them?

Extra: Deborah sat on a hill between "high place" (Ramah) and "house of God" (Bethel) in the hills of "fruitfulness" (Ephraim) underneath a palm tree (symbolic of victory). From there she governs with wisdom. Does anything in that image remind you of a garden where God dwelt perhaps? Or maybe a mountain with a burning tree on the top from which Moses brought God's instructions to the nation of Israel?

There are some interesting links in this story to Eden and Mount Sinai.

In Deuteronomy 18:18, God promised that He would send a Messiah, an anointed one, who would be a prophet like Moses and who would crush the head of the snake (Genesis 3:15). None of the characters in this story are the Messiah spoken of, but how do they point forwards to the Messiah that was to come?

RESPOND

God never forgets His promises and we have the same choice each day to obey or disobey God. However, if you are in Christ, Jesus took every curse and punishment we deserve on the cross and gave us resurrection life. Jesus chose life for us! How does that make you feel?

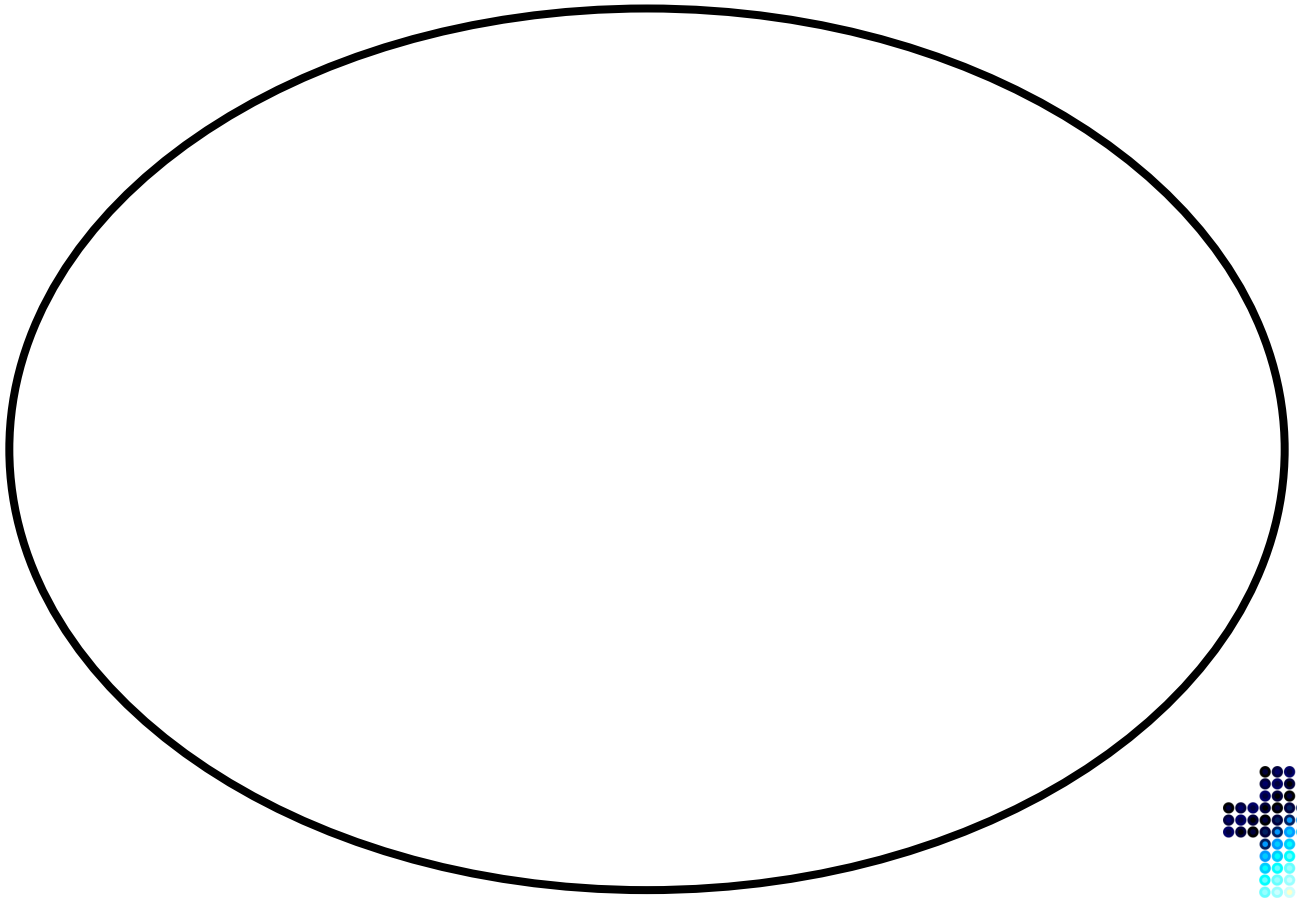
If you could write to God in a short letter about what you have learnt today, what would you write? Have a go... Maybe a thankyou note, maybe some questions?

PRAY

Praise God for His grace and mercy and for always keeping His promises.

© Eleanor Delport 2024

Dear God,



© Eleanor Delport 2024

SESSION 2
GIDEON'S TEST

Big idea: Gideon tested God, because he lacked faith. God tested Gideon to grow his faith

God tests and trains those He loves

© Eleanor Delport 2023

10 years +

SESSION 2: GIDEON'S TESTS

(TOGETHER)

SHARE NEWS, REGISTER

Reiterate expectations of session: We hope to have a lot of fun together, particularly in the game. We also expect everyone to listen respectfully to one another and sit on their bottoms in the Bible study and prayer times.

(TOGETHER) INTRO

Use the story wheel to recap the cycle in Judges

(IN GROUPS) PLURP PART 1:

We will be using a Bible study method called "PLURP!" (Pray, Look, Understand, Respond, Pray again)

Read paraphrase of Judges 6 and 7 (Ask the children to read Judges 6 and 7 with their parents in the week)

Use PLURP worksheet 1 to help you Pray and Look at the passage.

(TOGETHER) GAME – Shotput challenge

(IN GROUPS) PLURP PART 2

Use PLURP worksheet 2 to help you understand, respond to the passage and pray

MEMORY VERSE

There was no king in Israel at that time; all the people did just as they pleased Judges 17v6

© Eleanor Delport 2024

GIDEONS TESTS (JUDGES 6+7)

After 40 years of peace with Deborah leading the Israelites, the people of Israel turned from God and worshipped the Baals again. God allowed them to be overrun by swarms of Midianites who destroyed the land and stole everything valuable they found. The Israelites were frightened and hiding in caves, but at last, they began to cry out to God.

God appeared to a man named Gideon and called him a mighty warrior. Gideon had a hard time believing that it really was God speaking with him and that he could be a mighty warrior. Gideon tested God. He said, "if I have found favour in your eyes, wait there while I bring you an offering." When he had brought it, the angel of the Lord touched it, it was consumed by fire and the angel disappeared in the flame. Gideon realised it was God speaking with him and he was afraid because he had seen God, but God was merciful to him and gave him peace.

Then God tested Gideon. He told him to destroy his town's altar to Baal and build an altar to God instead. Gideon was scared, so he did it at the dead of night. In the morning, the townspeople wanted to kill him, but his father came to his rescue. He said that if Baal was real, he could kill Gideon himself. Gideon was ready to call the people to war at the valley of the hill of Moreh.

Gideon called men to come and fight with him against the Midianites. 32000 men gathered. Gideon still struggled to have faith that God would help him, so he tested God again. He laid a fleece on the ground and said that if the fleece was wet and the ground dry in the morning, he would know God would give him victory. It happened just as he said, but he still doubted. So he tested God a third time and said, if the fleece is dry and the ground wet, then I will know that God is with us. It happened just as he said, and he believed God would give them victory.

Now, however, it was God's turn to put Gideon to the test again. He told him that 32000 was too many. He should send home everyone that was scared. Gideon did so and only 10000 remained. God tested him a third time and told him to keep the men that drank water from cupped hands and send home the ones that knelt down to drink. Gideon did so and only 300 were left.

During the night God told Gideon to get up and go, but He said "If you are still scared, take your servant with you and sneak down to the camp and hear what they are saying. Then you will be encouraged." Gideon was scared, so he crept down to the camp with his servant and they overheard two people talking. One said, "I have had a dream, where a barley loaf suddenly rolled into this valley and a huge tent was overturned." The other man said, "oh no! This means God is giving the Midianites into the hands of Gideon!"

Gideon was delighted! He worshipped and thanked God and went back up to his 300 men and made a battle plan. They took jars with torches in them and trumpets and surrounded the camp. On Gideon's signal, they smashed the jars and cried out "for the Lord and for Gideon!". The Midianites woke up in a panic and started attacking one another! They fled the valley and Gideon called out the rest of the tribes to pursue their enemies.

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand the story

Read paraphrase of Judges 6+7

LOOK

WHEN?

- When in the Bible story did this happen? What time period?
- What happened just before this?

WHERE?

- Where in Israel is this happening? (Mount of Moreh)

WHO?

- Who are the Midianites?
- Who was Gideon?

WHAT?

- What happens?

© Eleanor Delport 2024

10+ years

CHAMPION CHALLENGE: SHOTPUT WATER BOMB

Equipment:

Water bombs

1. Challenge 1: Children take turns throwing a water bomb like a shotput. See who can throw it the furthest

2. Challenge 2: Set a target. The children try to hit the target with their water bomb shotputs

© Eleanor Delport 2024

UNDERSTAND

Mount Moreh means hill of teaching and God is going to teach Gideon some important lessons here, but there is also an important wordplay. Moreh sounds very similar to Moriah which is the mountain that Abraham was called up to be tested by the Lord. Abraham had struggled to trust God many times since God had called him. God put him to a final test at Mount Moriah. Do you remember what Abraham's test was and what it showed?

In this story, Gideon is being tested like Abraham was.

How many times did Gideon test God?

Why did he keep testing God? (lack of faith)

How many times did God test Gideon?

Why did God test Gideon? (to see if he would trust him and so that Israel would know it was God alone that saved them)

Gideon tested God, because he lacked faith. God tested Gideon to grow his faith

God tests and trains those He loves

RESPOND AND PRAY

In what ways do you think God tests His people today?

Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's prayer "lead us not into the test, but deliver us from the evil one."

Jesus is encouraging us to pray "please God, don't let my faith be tested today, but if it is, help me through and keep me safe from the evil one."

What tests do you face? Pray like Jesus taught us.

© Eleanor Delport 2024

SESSION 3
SAMSON'S SACRIFICE

Big idea: Samson gave up his life and destroyed more of God's enemies in his death than in his life

Samson's life was full of folly and violence, but in his dramatic death, pulling down a pagan temple and destroying God's enemies, he points forward to what Jesus will achieve on the cross.

© Eleanor Delport 2023

10 years +

SESSION 3: SAMSON'S SACRIFICE

(TOGETHER)

SHARE NEWS, REGISTER

Reiterate expectations of session: We hope to have a lot of fun together, particularly in the game. We also expect everyone to listen respectfully to one another and sit on their bottoms in the Bible study and prayer times.

(TOGETHER) INTRO

Use the story wheel to recap the cycle in Judges

(IN GROUPS) PLURP PART 1:

We will be using a Bible study method called "PLURP!" (Pray, Look, Understand, Respond, Pray again)

Read paraphrase of Judges 13-16 (Ask the children to read Judges 13-16 with their parents in the week) Then read Judges 16v23-31

Use PLURP worksheet 1 to help you Pray and Look at the passage.

(TOGETHER) GAME – Target practice

(IN GROUPS) PLURP PART 2

Use PLURP worksheet 2 to help you understand, respond to the passage and pray

MEMORY VERSE

There was no king in Israel at that time; all the people did just as they pleased Judges 17v6

© Eleanor Delport 2024

Samson's Sacrifice (Judges 13-16)

As the Israelites lived through the time of the judges, the situation became darker and darker. With each cycle of turning from God, disaster coming, turning back to Him, and God sending a champion to save them from their enemies, the people's sin became more shockingly rebellious and the character of the judge God sent them also became worse and worse.

After 120 years of peace, the people turned from God again and did evil, worshipping the gods of the nations around them, like Dagon of the Philistines. The Philistines ruled over the Israelites for 40 years until eventually the people remembered who their God truly was and cried out to Yahweh, Creator God, who brought them out of Egypt.

In response to their prayers, the angel of the Lord visited a barren couple, a couple like Abraham and Sarah who had not had a child, and told them that they would have a son. The angel gave special instructions to the child's mother not to drink alcohol or eat any unclean thing all the while she was pregnant, because he would be a Nazirite, which means he was set apart for special service to the Lord. The angel said that he would begin delivering the people from the hands of the Philistines. He was not to drink alcohol, or touch any unclean thing and no razor was to touch his head. He was never to cut his hair. The boy's name was Samson.

Samson grew up and had supernatural strength from God, but just like the rest of the Israelites, he was not good at recognising what was right and what was wrong. When he was a young man, he saw that a daughter of the Philistines was beautiful and he wanted to marry her. His parents warned him against it, but he demanded that he have her as his own. The Philistines used her against him, however, and so he began to fight against the Philistines.

One day he was hiding in the cleft of a rock in the territory of the tribe of Judah. The Philistine army surrounded the people of Judah and demanded that they give up Samson. Samson agreed with the men of Judah to be bound and handed over to the Philistines, but just as the Philistines thought that he was caught, he tore the ropes off his arms and legs and, taking a donkey's jawbone, killed a thousand Philistines, defeating the army.

From that day, Samson ruled over the Israelites for 20 years, until he fell in love with another Philistine woman. He married Delilah, but the Philistines used her against him. They promised to pay her money if she could trick him into telling her the secret to his strength. She agreed and after many attempts, finally she got him to tell her his secret. He told her that if anyone cut his hair, he would lose his strength. One night, while Samson slept, Delilah cut his hair. Philistines rushed in and bound him. They imprisoned him and mocked him and he could do nothing to resist them.

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand the story

Read paraphrase of Judges 16v23-31

LOOK

WHEN?

- When in the Bible story did this happen? What time period?
- What happened just before this?

WHERE?

- Where were Ashkelon and Gaza (Philistine cities) and the Philistines invading from?
- What might Dagon's temple have been like?

WHO?

- Who are the Philistines?
- Who was Samson?
- What was a Nazirite?
- Who was Dagon?

WHAT?

- What happens?

© Eleanor Delport 2024

10 and up

CHAMPION CHALLENGE: TARGET PRACTICE

Equipment:

2 Beanbags, 12 plastic cups, cones to mark the arena, score board

1. Divide into two teams and line up at starting lines
2. Balance 6 upturned cups opposite each team as targets stacked with three on the bottom, then 2 on the next row, then 1 on top
3. Stand one teammate (this could be a leader or an older child) behind the cups as a backstop
4. Count 1, 2, 3, Go! On Go! The first child from each line takes their teams bean bag and throws it at the cups
5. The backstop throws it back and the next person has a turn
6. When all the cups are knocked down, mark one point for the team, restack the cups and let the children to continue to take turns throwing beanbags. You could get the backstop to restack the cups and/or a leader could help them
7. At the end, the team that has had their cups restacked the most times, because they have knocked all 6 down, wins the game

© Eleanor Delport 2024

UNDERSTAND

In what ways did Samson reflect the Israelites attitude of choosing whatever he thought was right in his own eyes?

Why did the Philistines think that they had defeated Samson?

How did Samson regain strength one last time?

Samson killed more of the Israelites enemies (and destroyed a temple to Dagon) in his death than he did in his life. What details of his death point us forward to what Jesus will achieve on the cross?

What did Jesus achieve by His death on the cross?

RESPOND AND PRAY

How do you make decisions of what you think is right or wrong?

How can prayer help you?

Samson was a flawed, sinful person, yet he gave up his life to destroy the enemies of God's people. Jesus is the sinless, blameless Son of God who came in human form and gave up His own life to destroy the enemies of God's people, satan, sin and death. Because Jesus was without sin, death could not hold Him and He rose to life again. Now we who put our trust in Jesus can live in the power of Jesus' resurrection, which is even greater than the strength that Samson had from the Spirit of God. What kind of strength does God give us?

Pray for one another to be strengthened by God and live in the power of His resurrection life.

© Eleanor Delport 2024

SESSION 4
RUTH AND BOAZ

Big idea: God has a plan to redeem His people

Even though the time of the judges was crazy and unstable, God still had a plan running through it all. It would lead to the King after His own heart, David, being born and eventually to Jesus from the line of David, who would redeem the whole world.

SESSION 4: RUTH AND BOAZ

INTRO AND MEMORY VERSE

Recap using the story wheel and the cycle of the judges, attention test and timeline (see notes)

MEMORY VERSE

There was no king in Israel at that time; all the people did just as they pleased Judges 17v6

BIBLE STORY = Ruth

GAME = gleaning

REFLECTION AND PRAYER

© Eleanor Delport 2023

INTRO

The book of judges has been going around and around a cycle of people turning away from God, getting into trouble, turning back to God and God rescuing them. The way they sin is getting worse and worse as the book goes on and why are they losing their way? What is our memory verse?

There was no king in Israel at that time; all the people did just as they pleased Judges 17v6

Yet despite all of this cycling around and spiralling out of control, God is doing something in the background.

Attention test https://youtu.be/vJG698U2Mvo: Have a look at this video and count how many passes the people in white make. Did you see the gorilla??

It's hard to pay attention to everything that is happening. While one story is going on, there is a whole other story unfolding. That is a bit like what was happening in the time of the judges. While there was war and famine, difficulty and victory, there was another story unfolding in the town of Bethlehem.

We are going to come across this word today:
Redeem: to buy something back. (Redeem has many meanings, but this is the meaning in our story)

If we have sinned and turned away from God, the giver of life, we are choosing to go over to death, but God wants to buy us back and give us a future. How did Jesus buy back those who believe in Him? He died on the cross to pay the price for our sin. Our story today is going to point us forward to Jesus, our **redeemer**.

© Eleanor Delport 2024

NAOMI, RUTH AND BOAZ – PAGE 1

During the time of the judges, there was a famine in Israel. People did not have enough to eat and they thought they would die. If there was a famine, which part of the story cycle do you think they were in?

“There’s no food here in Bethlehem!” thought Naomi and her husband Elimelech. “Yahweh our God must have abandoned us. We will have to move with our boys to Moab and make a life for ourselves there.”

“This is great! We have food here and here are two beautiful ladies to marry our sons. Everything is fantastic!” thought Naomi. But then something tragic happened. Her husband died and a few years later both of her sons died as well.

“What am I going to do?” thought Naomi. “My life is full of sorrow. I should never have come to this place. I hear there is food in Bethlehem. Maybe if I go there, someone will take pity on me and I will live. I must tell my daughters-in-law that I am going back.”

“Orpah! Ruth! Life here is full of tragedy. I am going back to Bethlehem. I am so sorry that my sons did not give you children. I have nothing more that I can offer you. Please go back to your fathers and make a new life for yourself.”

Orpah went back, but Ruth refused to leave.

“No Naomi. I will go with you. Wherever you will go, I will go and your God will be my God.”

“But my God has made my life sad, Ruth!”

“Still, I am staying with you and I will trust in the God of Israel.”

So, Ruth and Naomi returned to Bethlehem. They went to Naomi’s old home and her old field. There was nothing useful growing on it, because it had not been farmed for years.

“Naomi, I am going to find food. I will look for a field to harvest in,” said Ruth one day.

“Ok Ruth, but be careful.”

© Eleanor Delport 2024

NAOMI, RUTH AND BOAZ – PAGE 2

Ruth went out and found a field that was being harvested. She was picking grain from the edge of the field. Yahweh, the God of Israel had commanded His people to leave the very edges of the field to let poor people collect grain there, because God cares for the poor. They called this gleaning.

As the day went on, the owner of the field saw her and asked his workers, "who is that young lady who has gleaned from the early hours until now?"

"It is Ruth, who came back from Moab with Naomi."

"Naomi! Why she is a relative of mine and if she needs help, I am to redeem her according to the Law God gave to Moses. Make sure you treat her well. I will speak with her."

"Ruth! Welcome. I am Boaz. Please, harvest with the women on this field and do not go to another field. I have told the men not to harm you. Come and eat with us and whenever you are thirsty, drink from the water jars we have filled."

Ruth was surprised!

"Why are you being so good to me? I am from a different tribe," She asked.

"I have heard how you helped Naomi and are loyal to her. You left your homeland to stay with her. You have come to the God of Israel for protection and I pray that He will reward you for everything you have done."

Ruth was overjoyed! Boaz even told his workers to sprinkle extra grain on the ground so that she could pick it up.

When she went home that evening, Naomi was shocked!

"Wow! So much grain! May God bless the man who took care of you today! Who was it?"

"Boaz! He was so kind to me. He said he had heard that you had come back and that I was helping you and he wanted to help too."

NAOMI, RUTH AND BOAZ – PAGE 3

“Ruth, Boaz is a relative of mine! In the Law God gave to Moses, if someone is so poor that they need to sell their field, their house or their sons or daughters to work for another person, their nearest relative must try and buy them back. We call that relative a redeemer, because they buy back or redeem what was sold. Boaz is our nearest relative. He is a good man. Perhaps he will marry you and redeem the field that belonged to my husband’s family and bring us children so that my husband’s name will not die out.”

When Ruth asked Boaz if he would redeem her, he was surprised!

“You are beautiful and could have married any of the young men of Israel, but you are not just thinking of your own happiness, but of Naomi’s happiness and the honour of Naomi’s husband’s family. You are a truly noble woman. I will speak with the other relatives and elders of the town and settle the matter today.”

Boaz did settle the matter. He gained agreement among all of the elders of the town that he would marry Ruth and they blessed her saying “may you be as fruitful as Leah and Rachel, who brought forth the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Ruth and Boaz had a baby called Obed and Naomi was overjoyed. Although her family had given up on God and gone to Moab, God redeemed them and gave them new life.

Obed was the father of Jesse and Jesse the father of David, who would one day be King.

Even though there was chaos in the time of the judges and everyone was doing whatever they felt like because there was no king, there was still two people faithful to God, Ruth and Boaz and through them, God was writing a different story. He was going to bring about a King who would draw the nation of Israel back to Himself and through that King, He would bring about another King, King Jesus, who would one day redeem the whole world.

© Eleanor Delport 2024

GAME: GLEANING

Equipment:

Straw(s) or wheat and two buckets – best played outside

1. Lay straw or wheat around the edge of a big rectangle
2. Divide into two teams
3. Everyone line up at one end of the field
4. When you say go, everyone has to collect straw as quick as they can and stack it in their team's bucket at the end of the field
5. The team with the most wheat in their bucket when it has all been collected wins the game

Alternatively, you could use bean bags or try to knock down targets

© Eleanor Delport 2024

REFLECTION AND PRAYER

There are many stories in this world that tell us what is going on. The news tells us from a particular viewpoint. Your schools, churches, friends, social media, etc. tell us from another viewpoint.

What would you say are some of the big events happening in the world/school/home at the moment?

Even though all these things are happening, God is still writing His story through it all. What is God doing at the moment? What point in history are we in?

God has sent His son Jesus to redeem the world. Jesus has gone up to Heaven as the risen and reigning King of Kings. God has sent His Spirit to all who put their trust in Jesus so that we can have power to live a life that follows Him. We are waiting for the return of Jesus, the conquering King who will one day redeem all of creation. Whatever else is happening in the world, we can be certain that God is bringing everything towards the point in history when King Jesus will return and make all things right.

Thank God that whatever is going on in the world, God still has a plan to redeem all of creation and for Jesus to return as the true King

Pray that we will trust God even when life seems up and down and that we will be able to see His story unfolding in the world.

© Eleanor Delport 2024