

# OpenTheo

## James Bejon on the Book of Judges

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## Transcript

Welcome back. This is a new episode and a new experiment. I have never had an interview before on this channel, and this is my first time.

I'm joined today by James Bejon, who's going to talk to us about the Book of Judges. James, would you like to introduce yourself? Sure, yep. I'm James Bejon.

I go to a church in Romford, in Essex, and I'm currently doing a year's work for an organisation called Tyndale House, which is based in Cambridge. Fantastic. What first got you interested in the Book of Judges? I don't have a particular interest in the Book of Judges.

In some senses, it was just an accident. A friend at Tyndale House asked me what I made of various numbers in the Book of Judges. I realised I didn't have a particularly clear idea,

so I started reading the book.

I had just joined Twitter at the time. I threw some words into Twitter and came out with lots of tweets on the Book of Judges. So that was that, really.

It was through Twitter that I first came across your work, and I've been very impressed by just the sort of biblical theology that you're doing in that setting. I've enjoyed following particularly you and Peter Williams in the context of biblical theology on Twitter. There aren't many people who have quite so interesting threads as the two of you do, so I thought it would be great to have just to talk about some of the things that you've been discovering.

Some of the things that you're looking at are quite unique. I don't see many people getting into the significance of the numbers and certain aspects of comparisons between words, word plays, and these aspects of the Book of Judges and other parts of Scripture. I often see people neglecting that, and I've been encouraged to see some of the things that you've unearthed through that, and just seeing people's response, that people are seeing there's something here.

Maybe we should look at this more generally in Scripture. I wanted to have you on just to talk about the Book of Judges and then some of the aspects of Bible study more generally that I think are exemplified in your work. So maybe to begin with, what should we make of the Book of Judges? I mean, I find the Book of Judges is quite a daunting book to come to as a biblical theologian.

You have the books of the Pentateuch and Joshua make a lot of sense. They fit into the story quite neatly. And then Samuel and Kings and Ruth as a sort of something that precedes the Book of Samuel.

A lot of that fits very nicely into our understanding of Scripture. The Book of Judges can often be quite threatening. The stories within it are quite horrific at points, particularly at the very end of the book.

And I think a lot of readers of that book are just daunted by it. How can we get a grasp upon the book, just an initial grasp, and how can we find some blessing within it? Okay. I mean, start just with a very broad summary of what the book contains and roughly its shape, because that may help us and perhaps people who listen in.

I mean, the book, I guess, just starts with a very quick summary of the different tribes' attempts to inhabit and possess their allotted territories in Canaan in chapter one. Then it rewinds slightly and tells us who's involved in this project. And it's the post-Joshua generation.

These are a generation who have seen the works of the Lord in Egypt in the same way as their predecessors had, and who needed to learn, the text says, how to fight and how to

do battle in the name of the Lord. And then various cycles of judges and fools begin. And I see this as starting with a very simple, sort of no-frills test case.

There's a man named Othniel, and Israel are subjugated by a Mesopotamian king. They call out to the Lord. Othniel is then raised up, and they're delivered.

And then the land enjoys rest, quiet. You could translate it as everything's great. But then these cycles sort of repeat over the book, and things become a bit more complex, less orthodox.

The next judge to arise is a guy named Ehud, and he introduces various complexities. He's slightly deceptive in his plan of attack. He's a left-hander.

There's some gore involved in how he disposes of a Moabite king. And then things sort of become more and more complex. Shamgar is a sort of an unexpected character.

I guess he doesn't sound like he's an Israelite. He doesn't have a classic Hebrew name. Deborah and Jael then come along, very active in Israel's deliverance and in their warfare, which is unexpected for women to have such a prominent role.

And then sort of characters really become more complex, and at the same time more flawed as the book goes on. Also, the relationship between the way in which Israel cry out to the Lord, and the Lord responds becomes more difficult to understand. In chapter 10, the Lord says he's no longer going to deliver Israel when they cry out.

But then the Lord has a change of mind, as it were. Actually, he says that he became impatient with Israel's misery. And in the final deliverer, in Samson's case, Israel don't cry out at all.

They don't seem to want to be delivered from the field of the stone. So there are all these complexities which come as the book progresses. And then in chapter 17, we get this kind of retrospective analysis of the book of Judges.

But it's not the normal retrospective that we might do today, maybe after a cricket match, you might sit down and analyze what went wrong and where. Rather, in keeping with the book as a whole, it's a retrospective in the form of a narrative. So it takes us chronologically, it takes us back to the very start of the book.

And it gives us these, what seem initially to start out as very low key incidents, but which gives a real feel for where things went wrong. And I guess my analysis of them is that it shows that what went wrong in the book of Judges was really ground up corruption from priests and commoners. And that's in contrast to a book like Kings, where we have really a top down corruption where the kings lead the people into evil.

So those are, I guess that's a very brief structure of how the book evolves and works out.

Do you want to take us on from there in terms of sort of how it teaches us? Yes, there's one expression that we find at a number of different points in the book of Judges, which is very familiar to people who think through the book of Judges, which is, there was no king in the land in those days, everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Is this something that gives us some key into the lesson or something of the message that the author of Judges is seeking to convey? I think so, yes.

To do what seems right in your eyes, seems to be identical in the book of Judges with to do what is evil in the eyes of the Lord. And there are syntactic correspondences between those two phrases that have a similar structure in Hebrew. And those flaws are seen in particularly in Samson's life, actually, when he marries a woman who seems right in his eyes, there's a clue there, given the overarching structure of Judges that things aren't right there.

But yeah, it's a revealing phrase. One thing it teaches, I guess, is that small government, as it were, is destined not to work when people are just left to do what seems right to them, the results won't be good. And I guess a sub aspect of that is that the people in the days of the Judges didn't need any encouragement from rulers to stumble, they could work out how to sin perfectly well on from their own account and did.

Reading through the book of Samuel, I was thinking recently, the way that particularly in First Samuel, you have three different forms of government, essentially, that are juxtaposed with each other. So you have the rule of the high priest, in the case of Eli and his sons, then you have the rule of the prophet, in the case of Samuel and his sons. And then you have the rule of kings with Saul, and then later David.

And to what extent do you believe that it is making broader political points about having a king as a better form of government? Or is it more, you cannot use the presence of an evil king to exculpate yourself for your wickedness? I think that last statement is definitely true. I see, I guess, Judges in its wider canonical sense, almost as a statement of the fact that government ultimately isn't going to be Israel's saviour, if you like. I see it as ultimately extolling no particular form of human government.

There are some interesting dynamics, I think, within the book of Judges, insofar as, as time goes on, Judges seem to be more interested in leaving a legacy behind them, and almost in setting up that kind of kingship. And in some senses, there isn't a great dichotomy between kingship and judgeship. When Saul is introduced, the verb to judge is actually applied to him.

It refers to a king who will judge us. But you definitely see, so with Gideon, for instance, Gideon is the first judge who we're told a great deal about his situation, generally, his heirs, for instance. And he begins this heptad of judges, if you like, who are arranged in a chiasmus, which is something that I think is worth pointing out, not only because it annoys people who don't buy into the idea of chiasmus in the text, but it flanks up this

idea of heirship and descendants.

So Gideon has 70 descendants, and this is an attempt, I guess, to set up some sort of legacy. Tulla comes next, we're not told anything about his descendants. Then we have Jeh, who has 30 descendants.

And then at the top of this heptad, if you like, is Jephthah. And one of the key sentences of that text is, is he going to have someone to leave his inheritance to? Will he have heirs? And then sort of coming down the other side, the numbers of heirs people have are symmetrical. So Ibn Zan has 30 heirs, then Elon has none, and Abdon has 70 heirs.

And that's setting up this idea of legacies, really. But there's an irony to it, because as these judges try to have a firmer control of Israel's history and to leave a legacy, it's almost as if God sort of withdraws, and these judges achieve much less. There is not a rest, to follow their reigns, with the exception of Gideon.

In the same sense, there is the early judges, and these judges sort of come and go very quickly. And so we get used to this sense, and he died, that comes at the end of the judges' reign, which is very Genesis 5-esque. And it's, I suppose, slightly more notable in Hebrew, because it's all the one word, and he died, and you get used to that same rhythm.

And obviously, this just prepares us for the fact that we need a saviour who will save in the power of an endless life. So there is this sort of paradox within the book, that as the judges try to establish themselves, really, they fail. And Samson has a particularly small impact, I suppose you could say, on Israel.

It was not the Lord's time for a permanent ancestral legacy to be set up. Now, when you're reading the book of judges, I think I'm not the only one, I think, who has found a struggle to fit together these different stories into something that's more, that has a greater integrity and a greater unity. And as you look closer, you find ways in which you can do that.

But how have you found some of the literary features of the text, some of the thematic features and other things like that, establish this text as a clear unity, not just a sequence of isolated characters? Now, you've given one example in that, Heptad of judges. What are some other ways in which you found literary and other features, giving a unity to the text? Well, one feature I'm very interested in is the way in which many of the narratives have ironic elements to them, or I might call them elements of poetic justice. And we've given a very clear signpost to this.

In the very first chapter of the book, the Israelites come across this fellow Adonai Bezek, who has subjugated 70 kings and he has cut their thumbs and toes off, and they sit under his table in Bezek. And the Israelites, the Judahites in particular, helped by

Simeon, they defeat him and they defumb and de-toe him, as it were, and take him back to their city. And Adonai Bezek sees the irony of this and says, as I have done to other kings, so the Lord has done to me.

So there is this aspect of, there is an irony to his end. You could fit this into a lex talionis type motif. But that sense of irony very much continues throughout the book.

Eglon, for instance, arises, he's a Moabite king who is said to be very rotund. And that's reflected... One of my favourite stories as a kid. Grim to me as well, actually.

And that roundness of him is reflected possibly in his name to some extent, but he's fattened up by these grain tributes which he receives and ultimately perishes with a sword thrust to his belly. So there's an aspect of irony there, which continues. Sisera arises with these iron chariots.

He's a Canaanite, but he falls at the hand of Jailer, a descendant probably of a metal worker. She's related to a clan that has to do with smithery and metal work and so on. And he would possibly have seen himself as a descendant of the Canaanite storm gods, but he is undone in a thunderstorm, as it were.

And we can continue this through at the start of the Gideon story. For instance, Gideon is found in a... He's been forced underground, as it were, by the Midianites and he's threshing wheat in a wine press. But as Gideon then takes the upper hand, he chases a couple of Midianite kings and one of them hides underground in the rocks.

Then another is slain in a wine press. His son, Bimelech, slays Gideon's sons on a single stone. He executes 70 of them and he perishes by a single stone thrown by a single worm.

It says he uses that term, ishe-achat, quite pointedly. And that sort of goes on and on. And I think it's the way that plays out, shows God's sovereignty in events, the way God is behind history and, if you like, using this theme of an eye for an eye as the way in which he rules history, sometimes at least.

Another interesting point is the way in which Israel's judges seem later to find themselves on the wrong side of these ironies, which is a sense of really the decline that you get throughout the Book of Judges. So Jephthah would be one example of that. His brothers cast him out of Israel initially because they don't want him to have a share in their inheritance, but ultimately they have to welcome him back as their head and, in that sense, I guess, as the lord of their inheritance because they need someone to deliver them from the Ammonites, I think it is, at least in part the Ammonites.

And Jephthah is caught in a slight irony. He makes his brothers swear before the lord that they will enthrone him after he's delivered them. He doesn't want them to go back on their word, but Jephthah finds himself wanting to go back on his own word towards

the end of the text.

And Samson is a prime example, I guess, someone who follows his eyes, as it were, ends with his eyes gouged out and someone who has come and gone as he pleased and sort of toyed with the Philistines, really played games with the Philistines, ends up bound and chained and a form of entertainment for the Philistines. And there are other interesting revenge and eye for an eye type motives in Samson's story as well. So these are unifying themes in the book and they're ways in which, I guess, in some senses, I think, the brutality of some of the judges is seen to rebound on them and is held up as not a good way to rule or to take vengeance over enemies at all.

And there seems to be a sense of humor to the book and also to the way that God works. I often think about the association of Benjamites with left-handedness and whether that's using the left hand with a sling or with a dagger in the case of Eglon, that the son of the right hand would be associated with a left-handed weapon. Which also leads me into another question.

What is it with the weird weapons in the book of Judges? Yeah, it's definitely there, isn't it? It's definitely a theme. I guess in the backdrop of this is that in chapter one, one of the big problems the Israelites have are the Canaanites iron chariots. And against that backdrop, I suppose, the Lord uses some quite unorthodox weapons.

In some senses, the Israelites don't have numbers on their sides. They don't have the armaments on their side. But they do have the Lord on their side when they call out to him.

And in some ways, I think just the inferiority and oddness of Israel's weapons could be a sense in which the Israelites need to rely on the Lord, not on their own means. Interestingly, towards the end of the book, we do for once find the Israelites in the numerical ascendancy when Israel has to go to war against the Benjamites to discipline them. And they outnumber them by, I think it's probably 400,000 to 26,000 plus 700.

So they vastly outnumber them. But in their first two wars against the Benjamites, they're defeated again until they go to the Lord and seek to put various things right in their ways and behaviours. So I think there's a sense in that weirdness of weaponry that God doesn't use the traditional means to defeat his enemies.

And we could carry through that for even to the cross. Jesus, if we can say this in a reverent way, was an unorthodox weapon. He was not what Satan expected.

And had the satanic principalities known this was the way in which the Lord was going to defeat them, they wouldn't have played along. If you like, in Samsonite fashion, I guess, our Lord was carried exile into the enemy's territory where he dealt Satan's kingdom a death blow. There are obviously many things we could explore, parallels between

Samson and Jesus, which I know you've written on.

I don't know if you want to take some of those. I can link that in the comments below the notes. I would be interested in developing that point a bit further.

What are some of the ways in which, first of all, judges uses other parts of Scripture, particularly you're talking about characters like the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Moabites. These are groups that have a prehistory, as we read in the book of Genesis and elsewhere. And then later on in Scripture, we see references back to the book of the judges made in, for instance, David's statements after the death of Uriah, or in the New Testament in the book of Hebrews, some of the ones I imagine people would really want to hear about.

How do we read characters like Jephthah and Samson as great examples of faith? How do we read the book of judges as part of the larger body of Scripture? How is it using previous Scripture? And how does later Scripture use it and help us to read it? Okay, well, perhaps we could start briefly with the mentions in Hebrews. I mean, I'm slightly torn between two approaches to the book of judges. On the one hand, I don't want to, on the strength of Hebrews 11, simply go through the book and try to sanitize all its complex and flawed characters.

In large part, I see Hebrews 11 actually as extolling particular acts rather than particular people. So the author might say that by faith, Noah built an ark in his time, or it will even say by faith, the Israelites journey through the Red Sea, which they did do that by faith, it required a certain amount of faith for them to start walking through these heaps of waters. But that's something not to portray every one of those Israelites as a model of great faith.

So I don't want to take that sort of approach that looks to sanitize everything in the book of judges. But then nor do I want to take this ivory tower approach to the book and sort of imbue everyone in it with the worst possible motive. So I would want to say that when Israel achieved significant things in the book of judges, they did it by faith, they did it by relying on the Lord, despite overwhelming odds against them and adversities.

And in particular, the judges who led them for all their flaws, never resorted to idolatry or turn to false gods in that sense, their hope was in Yahweh, the God of Israel, and their loyalty to him, was to him. And I think that's a large part of the faith, which they had. You've probably thought a lot more than I have about the general use of the book of judges in the wider canon.

There are a particular cluster of references to it in the early chapters of Isaiah, which I've noted, but not The Midian and things like that. Yeah, and even some sort of subtle allusions, it talks about firebrands and uses the language of two tales in Isaiah 7, I think, when Syria and Israel come against and Ahaz. But, yeah, why don't you give us some



thoughts on judges within the wider canon? Well, one of the things I'd be interested in is thinking about the way that, for instance, the story of Gibeah plays off against the story of Sodom.

I mean, those stories seem to be very closely related. And even the events that precede that, the events which would seem to be just wasting space within the text, the tarring with the father-in-law, what's going on there? And it would seem to me that that's playing off the story of Jacob in the house of Laban. And those stories help us then to read what's going on in judges, but then judges also is using that background to comment upon Israel's current position.

And then I think, I mean, particularly at the start of 1 Samuel, the story of Benjamin is very much in the background of what happens with Saul, that to understand the significance of a Benjamite being the first king and searching after donkeys at the very beginning and all the other events that before him, it's difficult to understand that fully without looking back at the story of Gibeah and the aftermath. I think that's right. Yeah, sorry, I lost you a little bit there.

Something flashed up on my screen that said your internet connection is unstable as you are speaking. But yes, there are a number of similarities there with Sodom, even to the extent that the narratives use the same number of words. And Daniel Block in his country has pointed out that they're both 69 words in the in those particular narratives.

That is a sense, I guess, of Israel's canonization, if you like. That word, the particular set of consonants that lies behind canon is actually means to subdue when Israel do subdue. Jabein, for instance, the king of Canaan, that is used as a pun on what's going on there.

But there's also a not so nice element to the pun in that Israel become, they don't always subdue the Canaanites, they become tainted by it. And God doesn't have two books, as it were, he doesn't have two standards of accounting for Israel and Canaan, just as the Gibeonites need to be, just as the Canaanites needed to be judged for their sin, so do the Gibeonites when they behave in the same way. There are some interesting similarities I find between, for instance, Gideon and Saul.

And I think one of the ways in which we can get a sense as to the moral rights and wrongs of particular judges is to see where their stories lead to in the long run. The Samson story, as we've thought, doesn't end well, nor does Gideon's. He builds an ephod, which was possibly some sort of garment which could stand on its own, it's built with sort of metal rods in Exodus, or it could have been draped over an image, but it was involved in guidance.

And it seems to me Gideon has this issue with a desire for extra signs. With his initial command, he then sets up this fleece experiment, which doesn't at all strike me as such a great thing. He has been given a clear command, but sets up this situation where

basically the Lord has got to act in some extraordinary way, or Gideon will just disobey the command that he's been given.

And it feels to me as if that desire for signs continues through his life. He's more convinced later in the narrative by hearing one pagan interpret another pagan's dream than he is through the plain command of the Lord. And I think we see a similar thing in Saul's life, where the desire for superstitious signs starts with bringing out, starts but involves bringing out an arc at certain times and having a fast and enduring lots and so forth, and then goes towards him actually actively disobeying a command and ends with him consulting a witch, in fact.

So there is, I think, a similar decline in Saul's life as we see in Gideon's. And those patterns, those shapes, I think can help us make a more informed judgment on some of the lives in the Book of Judges. I'd be interested to hear you say a bit more about the way that, first of all, we can discern a theology within the text itself.

Because I always fear when we're going to the Old Testament in particular, that often when we read the narratives, we have this moral framework that we're bringing to the text from without, and we impose it upon the text without actually thinking about the moral judgments upon the characters that emerge from the text itself. And that is often not in the form of explicit commentary. It's in far more subtle forms.

But I'd be interested to hear you say a bit more about the way in which literary features of the text and other dimensions of parallels, things like that, can help us to derive moral judgments from the text itself, rather than just ones imposed from without. Well, I mean, I may have said largely what I have to say on that already, I guess, in the stories of Gideon and Samson. There may be a sense in which we're not in a sufficient position to make moral judgments about all the actions of the people in the text, in that we just don't have the necessary background information that the text may be underdetermined in some senses, in which case it may not be wise for us to, or the right way to approach the book to necessarily think that we can stand back and say, yes, this should or shouldn't have been done in particular instances.

But as we said, to the extent to which things lead to forms of behavior, which are particularly bad, I think we have a clue. I think we also have clues in other resonances. So Samson, for instance, sees a woman, he takes her as his wife, a few verses later, he eats.

And this idea of seeing and taking and eating is very resonant with the fool. And that's a little tip of that. We've spoken about Sodom, for instance.

But there is, I think, deliberately, an ambiguity to a lot of the text. If again, we take Samson, and he's a good example, because he is one of the longest, his account is one of the longest in the book. So we have most detail about him.

And I sometimes wonder if Israel's characters become more flawed and complex as time goes on, largely because we just have more told to us about them. But in Samson's case, there is this ambiguity. He's a man.

And in many ways, his life is a riddle. And we're teased to some extent by the narrator, he's a Nazirite, who finds himself in a vineyard at the start of the text. And we might wonder what a Nazirite is doing there.

But we're not told whether he consumes any grapes. And then later on, it says that he scraped up some honey from a lion. And it's a strange element to the story.

We don't know if he touches the dead carcass of the lion, which is a Nazirite or someone who's taken a similar vow, it seems at least, he shouldn't do. But we don't know that he doesn't tell his parents the source of the honey, which casts the thing slightly strange light. And so we just teased a little bit.

Jonathan, when he takes honey, takes it out with the tip of a staff, it might even be a spear, actually, so you wouldn't have to scrape it out with your hands. And some of this ambiguity is even reflected in Samson's name. We can think of the name Samson, roughly in English terms as built around the consonants, sort of a sh sound, and then an M, and another sh, shimshon, or something like that, which can be connected to the sun and could be, it could refer to Samson as a ray of light in dark days in that sense, which would resonate with other names, perhaps Bezek and Barak have that sense possibly.

But we also have idolatrous connections, bet shemesh is mentioned in connection probably to sun god. Samson could even be connected with servitude in some related languages. That's slightly less clear, because there is normally serving as a temple or something.

But there are all these possibilities behind the name, which again, gives us that ambiguity, does this allude to his the light that he sheds or to his pagan tendencies or to the fact that he ends in servitude. There's a lot of that ambiguity in the book. And in terms of the language, the writer of Judges seems to use a lot of wordplay, a lot of, I mean, the language carries a significant amount of weight, the actual words that are used for different characters, the way that the literary structure of particular accounts.

How can we use those features to help us unpack the meaning of a particular text or to understand a specific character? What does it mean that a particular name has numerical connections or has a certain pun connection? You've given the example of Samson. What are some other examples that you see within the book or puns and some of the ways in which we have words that would lead us to expect certain connections, but those connections aren't forthcoming? Yeah, that's quite interesting. I think the book of Judges likes to almost draw our attention to wordplays by not using certain words.

So in the Samson story, it doesn't use the normal word for some, which strikes us as quite unusual. In the Deborah story, for instance, in chapter four, chapter five gives us a sort of poetic account and backdrop that we can use to fill in that with that particular story. And it uses the image of Sinai as we're standing in the background of the occasion when Caesareus is defeated, connected with a thunderstorm.

And in Exodus 19 and 20, there are two particular words are used to describe Sinai, which are connected to the names Barak and Lapidote. But neither of those terms are used in chapter five, which is quite interesting. It almost draws our attention, encourages us to dig a little bit more deeply there.

In the same context, Deborah is a very interesting name. It probably means, almost certainly means bumblebee in biblical Hebrew, which is interesting for many reasons. She judges somewhere between Ramah and Bethel, which is a region probably associated with honey.

It's nearby where Jonathan finds a supply of honey. It's near a town named Sophim, which is probably connected to the word honeycomb. And Deborah in that sense is portrayed as someone who leads, her name can be connected to leading, but who leads Israel into the enjoyment of a land of milk and honey.

She's a provider, if you like. But then there are interesting elements to her name. Her name can be connected with a hornet, for instance, in other dialects.

Now, I'm not sure we know quite enough about the Canaanite dialect at the time to know, or at least I don't know enough about it, to know how hearers elsewhere would have understood her name. Certainly in rabbinic literature, her name is associated with a hornet, in slight part because they want to cast negative aspersions about her. But it shows it's an association which makes sense against an Aramaic backdrop.

And I guess, to the extent that Canaanite was more closely in line with Aramaic than biblical Hebrew, could have been seen as a hornet by her enemies, which obviously has very interesting resonance with texts in Joshua, the Lord will send a hornet before them to drive out the enemy and so forth. So there are a lot of interesting aspects to the names. I'm excited as someone who's interested in the way in which the Bible gives us reasons to trust it as a text.

I'm very interested in the way in which the Bible gets names right in situations like this. It's not trivial, actually, if you're writing a piece of literature, for instance, to pick the right names from, I don't know, 800, 900 years ago, particularly if you don't have access to much literature from that time, which these days we do, but 2000 years ago, people certainly wouldn't, it wouldn't be trivial to read an ancient text. And names like Barak and Deborah, we have excellent reasons to think that those names are exactly the type of names that people were using in that geographical setting, and in that temporal

setting.

And so, whereas there is a tendency these days to, when we see that a name fits its narrative very well, to just think that this was invented for the sake of the text, I don't think we have to go down that dichotomy at all insofar as history suggests, also insofar as we're Christians who believe in a Lord who shapes history for his purposes. I'll be interested here, just in conclusion. First of all, what books have you found really helpful when thinking through the Book of Judges? And how would you encourage preachers to preach through this book? And how would you encourage just Christians reading through their Bible to dig into this book? How can they get the richness out of it? I guess, so in terms of what I've found to be helpful, I have found Daniel Bloch's commentary to be very helpful, indeed.

There are a whole host of academic papers which are helpful in some respects, but not others. So they can be useful, can shed some useful light on certain aspects of the text. I personally think one helpful focus for preachers is to go with the specifics of each story.

I think that with some treatments of the Old Testament, there is a grand narrative behind the Book of Judges. There is a sense in which it fits into the whole and shows the fallibility of nearly human saviors and need for a better savior. And that is all right and good, and helps us to read the book in light of Jesus.

But there's also, I think, a sense in which that kind of approach can basically lead us to get the same message out of every single chapter of the Book of Judges, which can become quite draining for a congregation of someone who's going to preach through the book. And so to go with the specifics of the text there, I think is very useful to think of, as we did, for instance, Gideon's specific flaws or the specific successes in his life. So I would, I guess, like to encourage people to focus on, yes, the canonical context, but also on the very specific details of the text.

I think it's a wonderful sense, really, in which the book shows that the Lord puts an immense value on the preservation of his people, as he does of us as individuals and of us as a church. And almost despite Israel's attempts to self-destruct, the Lord preserves Israel as a recognizable nation. And some of Israel's attacks are, I think, portrayed directly as a threat to the Abrahamic covenant.

For instance, Midian is described as being without number and even likened to the sand on the seashores in very Abraham-like terms. And there are more subtle indicators. Midian's numbers are likened to those of a locust.

And the Hebrew term for locust is *abbe*, and it resonates with one of the specific promises to Abraham. The Lord says, I will greatly multiply you, I suppose. It is probably an etymological connection between locusts and multiplication, just because of the nature of what they are.

But they are a threat to the covenant, the Midianites. And I think there's a very specific sense in which even despite Israel's flaws, the Lord preserves his people throughout that whole time's dark period of the judges. Thank you very much for coming on.

I would highly recommend that people follow you on Twitter. Your threads on Twitter are always interesting. And I'm not active on Twitter anymore, but I'll still go back and visit on a regular occasion and check your account.

So I would recommend that people right now go and follow James on Twitter. Thank you very much for coming on again. Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow with another video.

God bless and thank you for listening. Thanks for your time.