

Thursday, March 25, 2021—Ruth 1-4

God calls His people to faith that trusts in Him and walks in obedience. When times become challenging, God remains God, so His people are to remain faithful. When their faith weakens, they suffer.

In the days of the judges, Elimelech faced a difficult choice. His family was hungry because of a famine in the land. Did he remain in the land of God's promises, or go somewhere else to find food? Elimelech's name means, "My God is King," but he did not live as if it were true. He left Israel to go and live among the godless Moabites. Few would blame him for providing for his family, but was this faith or practicality?

While in Moab, tragedy struck. Elimelech and his two sons died, so his widow Naomi and one of the daughters-in-law, Ruth, returned to Israel because they heard God had provided bread. Despite Naomi's suggestion to stay, Ruth wanted to go with Naomi and make Israel her people and Yahweh her God. Something about Naomi's faith was appealing to Ruth.

God showed His grace and mercy to both ladies as He wove a relationship between Ruth and Boaz and provided for the ladies as a result. The nation had no spiritual leadership, but God was blessing the pleasing faith of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. Naomi's bitterness turned to joy. Ruth would one day be the great-grandmother of King David. God had transformed their lives through their faith in Him.

Praise God for the abundance that comes from faith in Him.

Wednesday, March 24, 2021—Judges 19-21

Self-help books and recovery programs address the hurts, habits, and hangups that plague mankind. The first step toward recovery—many of them say—is admitting you have a problem. That admission puts words to the reality that life's direction has to change.

Israel had a problem. The book of Judges chronicles the pattern of sin, judgment, oppression, repentance, and deliverance that plagued all of Israel. The problem was the repentance was not permanent, and the sin was worse and worse. They were wandering further from God. The horrific story of the Levite and his concubine caused the entire to shudder.

One wonders whether the nation was scandalized by the actions of the Levite or the actions of the murderers. We often like to point out the sin of others rather than addressing our own. The nation admitted there was a problem. Did they know that problem resided in every heart?

The nation assembled to fight against the people who killed the innocent girl, and they sought the counsel of God before going into battle. Three times they went to Him before fighting. The first two campaigns were not successful, so they sought His wisdom each time, and the third time He gave them success. They were finally seeking God as they should have been all along. The scars and stains of sin were deep in everyone.

Thank God for His faithfulness to answer when we pray. Admit the tendency to do what is right in your own eyes. Repent and follow Him.

Tuesday, March 23, 2021—Judges 16-18

Many who claim to follow Christ live much of their lives pursuing the pleasures of the world. Instead of pursuing Christ and drawing closer to Him, they pursue temptation and self-satisfaction. Heaven is their goal rather than holiness, so God is not honored and life is not abundant.

Samson was God's chosen leader for His people, but Samson had little regard for holiness. He continued to visit enemy territory and find pleasure for himself far outside the boundaries God had put in place for his holiness and flourishing. Samson may have thought he was living his best life, but he was gradually sentencing himself to bondage and death.

God withdrew His hand from His rebellious servant, and the Philistines removed Samson's glorious hair, the symbol of his vow to God. He had neglected his call, and now it was gone. In his chains, for the first time, Samson called out to God (16:28). God used Samson, in his death, to bring judgment on the Philistines.

The country was increasingly sinful and wandering from God. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes (17:6, 18:1). God's word had no value for the people. Micah wanted God's blessing and acted in religious ways (17:13), but he was far from the righteousness God demanded of His people. God cannot bless sin, even when done in prayerful sincerity.

Admit to God the sinful tendencies in your heart. Pray for repentance and holiness so your life can honor Him fully. Ask Him to help all His people realign with His truth (18:31).

Monday, March 22, 2021—Judges 13-15

God works in the lives of those who are surrendered to Him. He is not concerned with outward appearances or natural abilities, though He can use those for His glory. God looks for the one with wholehearted devoted.

Manoah and his wife were members of the tribe of Dan. They had no children. One day an angel of Yahweh appeared to her and said she would have a son who would deliver Israel from the oppression of the Philistines, but he was to be a Nazirite from birth. He was not to drink any wine or strong drink, and he was not to cut his hair. His life would be one of visible devotion from the beginning.

She told Manoah of this visit, and Manoah prayed God would send the messenger again. When he arrived, Manoah asked him how they should raise him. They wanted to fulfill God's plan obediently. Then, they sacrificed an offering to the Lord. This couple was humble and devoted.

Their son was neither. He demanded his parents give him a Philistine wife. He was careless with the Nazirite regulations, and he was arrogant. The people needed a deliverer, and God chose Samson, but Samson had little concern with God's plan and expectations. He was susceptible to the emotions of his wife and prone to emotional outbursts. Nonetheless, God was able to use Samson to deliver His people.

Thank God for His calling and using everyday people. Pray to be a faithful disciple. Pray for parents to be faithful in disciplining their children.

Sunday, March 21, 2021—Judges 9-12

The month of March includes the NCAA men's and women's basketball

tournaments. Known as “March Madness,” the tournaments draw millions of viewers because there are typically last-second heroics and bracket-busting upsets. The unexpected brings some seasons to a sudden, disappointing end while some “Cinderellas” keep playing.

The unexpected creates chaos. Defeat causes disappointment. God’s people were increasingly experiencing their own madness as they wandered from faithfulness and needed rescue from the oppressors that rose around them. Judges like Gideon were able to defeat the enemy but proved to be flawed. God used them but never intended for His people to place their full trust in them. God wanted His people to worship Him alone, but they put their hope in idols and other leaders.

Judges 9 describes the depravity of Abimelech, one of Gideon’s sons, and the death and destruction that resulted from his selfish desire for power. He lost His reverence for God and respect for his fellow Israelites. God brought the madness to an end, but the people struggled to learn. Peace and strength are only possible when God is the only God.

Like Cinderella, Jephthah was the least likely to succeed. God used him, however, to displace the oppressive Ammonites and rescue His people. Jephthah then made an impulsive vow that cost his daughter dearly. God was showing His people repeatedly that they would find peace only in Him. Disappointment and discord were the fruit of allegiance to a man.

Thank God for the peace and strength He gives in Jesus alone.

Saturday, March 20, 2021—Judges 5-8

Students sing school songs that recount the history and values of their institution. Countries have anthems that describe the story and identity of the nation. Taking the time to write a song is a testimony to the importance of the narrative within.

When Deborah delivered her people, she wrote a song. In it she celebrated the faithfulness of God, and she clearly described the idolatry of His people which caused their problems (5:8). They were under the oppressive rule of a foreign leader, and an ordinary lady acted heroically and decisively to end his rule (5:24-29). This song reminds the singer of the goodness of God, the depravity of sin, the power of obedience, and the potential for God to use anyone regardless of social status.

The song is truly remarkable. In a day when culture saw women as less valuable than livestock, a woman wrote a song about how God used her and another woman to deliver His disobedient children. Judges is a collection of such testimonies to the tendency of God’s people to wander and to His faithfulness to deliver in creative, humbling ways. God is always the hero. Sin and lack of discipline are always the problem.

Gideon was hiding, but God called him “mighty warrior” (6:12). Gideon knew a little about war, but God changed his tactics (7:7) and provided victory. God simply wants faithfulness. He will empower and deliver. Neither idols nor enemies can stand against the work of God.

Sing to God for His faithfulness. Pray for daily discipline.

Friday, March 19, 2021—Judges 1-4

Nature abhors a vacuum. When something empties, something rushes in to fill that space. Temptation comes knocking at the heart of the recovering addict. Predators encircle the weak separated from the herd.

Israel was in a state of transition. Joshua had died. Eleazar the high priest was buried. The next generation was now responsible for moving forward and accomplishing God's purpose for the nation. Those peoples Israel previously displaced became an issue once again. Because Israel had not completely dislodged them (1:28), they remained a hindrance to God's promised rest. Incomplete obedience brought lasting problems (2:2-3).

The vacuum of leadership was quickly filled with people who did not know Yahweh personally and who did not, therefore, know His greatness and the power and holiness He represented (2:10). As a result, the people did evil in the sight of Yahweh and served the gods of the people who continued to live among them. This, not surprisingly, led to Israel's finding themselves subject to these nations. God, in His mercy and grace, raised up judges to deliver His people (2:16) as they repented.

When the judge died, the people wandered away again. God used these foreign peoples as refining agents, determining whether His people truly loved Him or themselves (3:1). Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah delivered the people from hardship brought on by their own disobedience. The ebb and flow of peace and war were not the abundance God had intended.

Identify the idols that hinder your faith, worship, and peace.