

#### Sunday, March 25, 2018—Ruth 1-4

During the days of the judges, everyone did what was right in their own eyes. As a result, all kinds of calamity fell upon the people of Israel as they faced the consequences of the sin. God had promised this.

Naomi's story, however, is different. She and her husband left Israel with their two sons because of famine. While finding respite in Moab, her two sons married, but soon her husband and sons died. Scripture records no sin for which she was being punished, so we see heartache and bitterness descend on an individual inexplicably. Naomi was understandably bitter, and she chose to move home, and Ruth moved with her.

Boaz, one of Naomi's husband's relatives, took notice of Ruth's noble behavior, and he offered his personal protection over her. Naomi had Ruth. Ruth had Boaz. God had provided for both widows, women who were extremely vulnerable in their day, especially if they had no sons.

Naomi soon encouraged Ruth to see whether Boaz would become more than a protector and provider. Ruth needed a husband, and Boaz agreed to take on that huge responsibility as well. He would redeem her to himself and carry on her deceased husband's name, providing for her while perpetuating another's legacy. In so doing, they became parents to Obed who fathered Jesse who fathered David. From a humble foreign woman would come the greatest king of Israel and the King of kings.

Praise God for the way He can take those things which devastate and turn them into things which bless His people and bring honor to Him.

#### Saturday, March 24, 2018—Judges 19-21

"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him" (21:25). So ends the book of Judges and a miserable season in the life of God's people. Ironically, there never had been a king in Israel at the time of Judges' writing, so why would the author have made this note (repeatedly)?

The lack of a leader led the people to do whatever they wanted. Their leaders, Moses and Joshua, guided the people faithfully (though imperfectly) in the ways Yahweh had prescribed for them. When those men died, there was a void. The people had settled in the land and lived separated from one another in their tribal lands. No one in those tribes rose up to proclaim the word of the Lord and lead people to obedience.

As a result, the pattern of Judges developed—sin, the wrath of God, oppression by an enemy, a cry for redemption, and deliverance from God. In the process, heinous sin occurred, including the horrific details of Judges 19. The entire nation was guilty of complacency and sin. The death of the woman and the distribution of her body was a call to repentance.

The process of retribution against Benjamin was a type of what should have been happening throughout Judges. The people saw sin. They inquired of Yahweh how to remove it. They fasted, wept, and made sacrifice, and they removed the sin. That kind of daily self-evaluation would have made their lives spiritually rich and practically fulfilling.

Pray for a life which aligns with His truth. Pray for the spiritual leaders in your life to lead well.

#### Friday, March 23, 2018—Judges 16-18

Everyone has a moral foundation which guides choices about right and wrong. Even the most hardened atheist believes in things which he calls good and fights against things he calls bad. The decisions one makes in one area of life are a reflection of the decisions he will make in others areas.

As a leader of the people, Samson had certain gifts that were helpful. Super-human strength and a willingness to attack the enemy were two of the most prominent. Samson also had a great weakness—he was incredibly impulsive. His desires and emotions were far too controlling in his life. Rather than letting truth guide his decisions and emotions, he allowed what he wanted and what he felt to guide his actions. While being a Nazirite and a judge, he had intimate relationships with at least three different women. He apparently was more concerned with fulfilling his desires than fulfilling his calling from God and responsibility to the people.

God called and equipped Samson with the necessary skills and gifts to accomplish the task, but there was never a time Judges records where Samson said, "God, I am your servant. I will follow and obey." God may use man or beast, but He is most honored by and can bless in the fullest the one who is fully surrendered to Him. The selfish and self-destructive behavior of Micah and the Danites in Judges 17-18 further illustrate the foolishness that results when emotion rather than truth become the guide.

Pray for a spirit surrendered to Him and guided by truth.

Thursday, March 22, 2018—Judges 13-15

Samson's story is the longest in Judges, and while it provides insight into the continual devolvement of the spiritual condition of Israel, the chronicle gives in-depth enlightenment into the spiritual, emotional, and relational health of Samson himself. He was a most unusual character but illustrates how, in every generation of every society, the culture is simply the result of the condition and contribution of each individual.

As God had done before and would do again, Samson came from a barren womb. He chose Samson's mother specifically to carry him and shared, through His angel, the purpose for Samson's life—to save Israel from the Philistines. This required Samson's being set aside as a Nazirite from birth and certain prenatal practices by his mother. Rather than dismissing her story, her husband Manoah prayed that God would send His messenger again to teach them what they should do (13:8). Samson's parents were ready to be obedient and raise this child as God required.

Their obedience did not translate to good behavior or spiritual obedience in Samson. He longed for a foreign wife (a desire God was going to use for His glory) and participated in things which violated his Nazirite vow (like touching dead things). His parents were responsible to God and to Samson, but they were not responsible for Samson. He made his own choices. Despite his impetuous and demanding nature, God used him to begin bringing judgment on the Philistines and peace to Israel.

Pray for a life of integrity, trust, and obedience. Look for ways to pass those truths to the next generation.

Wednesday, March 21, 2018—Judges 9-12

Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint (Proverbs 29:18). When there is no spiritual foundation, chaos ensues. Judges illustrates that repeatedly. After Gideon's death, his son Abimelech longed for power, convinced the people to anoint him as king, and killed his brothers. The youngest brother, Jotham, escaped and cursed the people for their willingness to treat Gideon's family this way. Eventually, the people's and Abimelech's lust for power cost them all. When people trust self more than God, the results are debilitating and often disastrous.

Because of their sin, God gave them over to the consequences. "Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them deliver you when you are oppressed" (10:14). Then, the Israelites admitted their sin and asked for His rescue. They rid themselves of idols and worshiped Him, and He became weary of their misery (10:16). Before God will rescue, there has to be genuine repentance. God can't take His people where they don't want to go. He isn't a tyrant, but He is jealous.

Jephthah was a bit like God Himself. He wasn't useful to the people until they found themselves in trouble. He was unlike God in countless ways, especially in his impetuous nature. God used him to deliver the people, but the people of Ephraim were jealous (12:1). Proverbs says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath." Neither Jephthah nor Ephraim were able to respond gently, and Ephraim suffered greatly for it.

Pray for daily renewal of trust in God as authority, hope, and guide.

Tuesday, March 20, 2018—Judges 5-8

Judges 5 is a song of victory over the enemies of God's people. Deborah led the attack. Barak led the army, but a simple, unknown woman, Jael, was the one responsible for the death of the enemy's king.

Deborah highlights two sets of people in the song—the leaders and the volunteers (5:2, 9). She says when leaders lead and people volunteer, the Lord is blessed. When, however, the people choose other gods (and, as a result, live in spiritual rebellion), there is war in the gates of the city (5:6). God calls some to lead and some to volunteer. Those two add up to the entirety of the body of believers. Everyone has a role to play in battle.

God uses the available, not the most attractive or able. He used two women strategically in Deborah's story. In Gideon's, he uses a terrified man and a tiny army. God works in these atypical ways in order to bring

the glory to Him Himself—there is no other explanation for the victory. He also works through the unusual so His people always trust Him and not some method or pathway. He is the key to victory, not the process.

God sees through divine eyes. Man sees through a dirty window. God called Gideon “mighty warrior” thought he was terrified and threshing wheat indoors, terrified of the Midianites. Gideon wondered why God had abandoned His people (6:13) when, in fact, the people had abandoned Him.

Thank God for His perfect vision and ability to use whomever obeys His call.

#### Monday, March 19, 2018—Judges 1-4

“What parents allow in moderation their children will practice in excess.” This axiom of life was tragically true for Israel. When Joshua led the people into the Promised Land, God drove out the inhabitants before them, and they joined him in the effort to cleanse the land of the evil people who lived there. They did not, however, drive them out completely, so their influence toward idolatry remained present and persuasive.

When Joshua and the elders of his generation died, the next generation lived as if they did not know Yahweh at all (2:10). They did what was evil and “abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers” (2:12). Jesus accused the church at Ephesus of abandoning their first love (see Revelation 2:4). He had seen their hard work and their attempts at removing evil, but they had walked away from their rich relationship with God Himself through Christ. Israel, too, had abandoned their exclusive relationship with Yahweh that gave them their identity and purpose in life because they had other options available which should have been destroyed a generation earlier. What was allowed by parents was adopted by children.

Their sin led to oppression and suffering, and God gave them over to its consequences. In His faithfulness, He raised up judges. These warriors were able to deliver from misery and help rediscover His peace.

Thank God for Jesus, the greatest Judge, who delivered us while we were still sinners by dying for us and rising again. Pray for a faith which worships Him exclusively and shuns the idols of this world.