

Story of the Old Testament

Lesson 5 - Theocracy - Judges and Ruth

Lesson five in the story of the Old Testament, this lesson is titled the Theocracy, the time of the Judges.

The chart on page 31 shows the primary book that we're looking at is Judges, the complimentary book that reinforces this narrative is the book of Ruth. A short summary of the book of Judges is as follows.

Israel experiences the repeated cycles of apostasy, oppression, repentance and restoration through divinely appointed judges or deliverers throughout the long period following Joshua's death.

Look in the middle of page 31 under the introduction heading. The period of time for the Judges is 332 years, it extends from 1390 BC following the death of Joshua up until 1043 BC, which would be the coronation of the first king of Israel, the United Kingdom under King Saul.

Some of the time frames and date stamps are noted.

God's people enter Canaan in 1405 BC

Joshua dies in 1390 BC.

We read about the first cycle of apostasy beginning in 1375 BC

And this period of the Judges ends with Saul becoming king in 1043 BC.

A keyword for the this period of the Judges would be "defeat".

It's not a glorious time for the people of God following Joshua. There's a generation that continues to serve the Lord. But after that, a generation is raised up where the people didn't know the Lord and they began a downward cycle of spiritual and moral decline that impacted all of society.

A key chapter in the Book of Judges, chapter two, and we'll read that in a moment. It gives you a summary of these cycles in the judges.

There are seven cycles repeated throughout the Book of Judges that are an illustration of the downward spiral of the nation during this period. The Scriptures that align with this portion of the story of the Old Testament are the Book of Judges, Ruth. And then the period ends with Samuel in 1 Samuel chapters one through seven.

Some of the key characters during this time are Deborah, Gideon, Samson. You have Ruth and Naomi and Boaz, Eli and Samuel. We'll touch on some of these as we go through this lesson.

The Book of Judges, this is at the bottom of page 31. The word Judge means ruler, judge, deliverer, or savior. They are all synonymous with the role of a judge at this time in the story of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament.

What we see in chapter one of the Book of Judges is that following Joshua, the people of each of the different tribes did not completely take possession of the land that they inherited as commanded by God. In chapter two, we are introduced to The Angel of the Lord and the angel of the Lord meets with the leaders of the community and has a message for them.

Beginning in Judges chapter one, you can highlight a few observations here. It's the beginning of the different tribes going in to take possession, to claim full possession of the land, to drive out the inhabitants of the land. And beginning with Judah, we see them going through their territory.

Look even at verse 19 of chapter one. It says, and the Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron.

In verse 27 we read that Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages. The same thing in verse 29.

Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites. In verse 30, Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron. Verse 31, Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco.

Verse 33, Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh. Even in verse 34, the Amorites pressed the people of Dan back into the hill country for they did not allow them to come down to the plain. Just to repeat it over and over again, that the people and each of the tribes was to take full possession of the land.

They were in the land, but they did not take full possession. These different nations remained and they would become a thorn in the side of the nation of Israel. As you transition into chapter two.

There's an interesting encounter with the angel of the Lord. And some believe the angel of the Lord to be a Christophany, a pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ. Not just an angel of the Lord, but anytime we see the angel of the Lord, many believe that this is, again, a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus.

So just reading through chapter two, verse one to five, it says, Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim, and he said, I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, I will never break my covenant with you. You shall make no covenant with inhabitants of this land. You shall break down their altars, but you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides. And their gods, notice a small g, their gods, their idols, shall be a snare to you. As soon as the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. They called the name of that place Bochim, which meant the place of weeping. And they sacrificed there to the Lord.

The people of God were disobedient and did not trust God to deliver the nations into their hands.

God said, I will drive out the nation, you will take possession of the land. The people had a part in that, just as we do today. We have a part in fulfilling God's purposes for us.

We're called to obey. God will not obey for us. We're called to obey.

We're called to follow through. We're called to represent, to put our faith into practice. The people of Israel then were not obedient.

They did not follow through with what God had promised for them. And it led into this period of 300 and more years of a downward cycle, downward spiritual decline of the nation.

In chapter two into the beginning of chapter three, is a summary of what this period of the Judges looked like.

And let's just read this together as well. Beginning in verse six, Joshua dismissed the people of Israel, each went to his own inheritance to take possession of the land. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works that the Lord had done for Israel.

Joshua, the son of Nun, servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years. They buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-Herez, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountains of Gash. And all that generation also was gathered to their fathers.

And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel. So one generation after Joshua walks with the Lord.

And the generation after that didn't know the Lord, whether it was from the leaders not disciplining others, not teaching people who the Lord is and how to walk in his ways. There was not a foundation that continued on. What we read in verse 11 through the end of the chapter is the cycle of decline that takes place and is repeated seven times through the book of Judges.

And as we read on in verse 11, and the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods from among the gods of the people who were around them, bowed down to them.

They provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Asherahs. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and he gave them over to plunderers who plundered them.

He sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies. They could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for harm.

As the Lord had warned, as the Lord had sworn to them, they were in terrible distress. Then the Lord raised up judges who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. They did not listen to their judges for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them.

They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed their commandments, who had obeyed the commandments of the Lord and did not do so. Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. The Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them.

But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and he said, Because his people have transgressed my covenant that I commanded to their fathers and have not obeyed my voice, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died in order to test Israel by then whether they will take care to walk in the ways of the Lord as their fathers did or not.

So the Lord left those nations, not driving them out quickly, and he did not give them into the hand of Joshua. What we just read is repeated seven different times throughout the book of Judges. You can see at the top of page 32, how this cycle occurred in history.

The people of God would be walking along with the Lord. They'd be serving the Lord. Then they'd fall into idolatry and sin. They'd begin to turn away.

God would bring judgment on them. It was often in the form of a conquering nation or a plague or a famine.

It would go on for some period of time. The people would then cry out to the Lord. They'd confess their sin.

They'd turn to the Lord in repentance, and God would raise up a deliverer. He'd provide deliverance through a judge, a deliverer, a savior. And then the people would return to the Lord.

Then there would be peace in the land for 20 years or 30 years or 40 years. That would go on for some time. Then they'd turn away from the Lord again.

You could see that God would bring judgment from the Mesopotamians, from the Philistines, the Moabites, the Canaanites, the Midianites, the Ammonites, and all throughout this story until you get to Judges 21-25. It says, and the people did whatever was right in their own eyes, and there was no king in the land, even though God was meant to be their king. There's a contrast.

You see God's faithfulness is evident throughout the story of the Old Testament. And here we see the disobedience, the lack of faith on the part of the Israelites. You can see God's grace and mercy in response to repentance.

As people would cry out to God, He would hear, and He'd provide deliverance. He'd raise up a deliverer. He's a promise-keeping God.

His desire is to build His kingdom, and He's going to do it through His people, and that is His heart's desire. And you can see how sin is infectious, and how sin can turn us away from the

Lord, yet repentance always leads us back into deliverance. So those are just some major themes we see throughout the book of Judges.

One of the thoughts, and there's a note I have written down here, that God's ultimate solution for human sinful condition is not more laws. That's important to know. But neither is lawlessness.

He doesn't desire lawlessness either. Until the inner nature of humans is transformed, humanity will swing widely between these two extremes. The book of Judges shows the unfortunate outcome of lawlessness, the commitment made at the end of Joshua to forsake all the other gods and to serve God alone has been quickly forgotten.

A need for a lasting divine solution was clear. Something more was needed.

And here's a vision of this, looking forward to the red thread, to Jesus as Messiah. He would be the ultimate judge, the ultimate deliverer, the ultimate redeemer. So that's what's going on in the book of Judges.

And what you see in the book of Ruth is a small four-chapter book of the Bible that's set in the time of the Judges. And it provides a picture of hope. Hope in the darkest times.

Ruth gives us a glimpse of the gospel, a glimpse of hope, a glimpse of the fulfillment of God's kingdom that was promised to Abraham, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. In the book of Ruth, we can see when the people of God are walking in step with God and they're shining his light out to the world around, people from the nations will see God and turn to Him. And that's what happens with the story of Ruth.

Again, a four-chapter book tucked in the middle of the Old Testament. You can see this at the bottom of page 32. In the book of Ruth, Ruth offers a message of hope.

Ruth is a story of redemption. This reminder that through faith, Gentiles, even Gentiles, can be part of God's plan. There's always a faithful and godly remnant.

Boaz is a key character in the book of Ruth, a man from Judah who loves God and is walking with God. And God works through him in a powerful way. What we see, too, is that there's a picture in Ruth of this, a picture of the kinsman redeemer.

The kinsman redeemer had to be a close relative to someone. And this kinsman redeemer in the book of Ruth is Boaz.

Elimelech and Naomi lived in Bethlehem. And there was a famine. This was taking place in the time of the Judges. So they did something that they weren't supposed to do.

They left Bethlehem. They left their home, the place called the House of Bread, and they went to Moab, an arch enemy of Israel. And they left there with their two sons

And while they were in Moab, the two sons married Moabite women, something else they weren't supposed to do. And during that time, Naomi's husband and the two boys died. Naomi is left in a foreign country, in Moab, with two daughters-in-law, who are Gentiles, who don't know much about the one true God.

Noami once had everything, and now she feels like she has nothing. At the end of chapter one in Ruth, beginning of chapter two, the famine has ended, and they hear that there's food back in Bethlehem. They said, okay, let's return. Let's return to Bethlehem, the house of bread.

And Naomi says to her two daughters-in-law, you should just stay here. She was not going to have other children for them to marry. Even if she gave birth to two boys, by the time they grew up, the daughters in law would be too old to marry and have children.

So why don't you stay here, and you could remarry here in Moab. And the one daughter-in-law says, yes, she is going to just stay in Moab.

But the other daughter in law, Ruth, says, no. Where you go, I'm going to go. And where you stay, I'm going to stay. And your God will be my God. And I'm going to follow you all the days of my life. I believe in the one true God who you've told me about.

And that's a picture of the gospel. The gospel was for all, for Jew and Gentile. God said to Abraham, I'm going to give you a great land, a name. Many people will come out of you, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through you. That was back in Genesis 12. There is a picture of the gospel.

And here you can see the grace and mercy of God lived out in the book of Ruth. Ruth, who is a Gentile, a Moabite, puts her trust in the one true God. And she is saved by grace through faith.

She comes, and she begins working. She returns with Naomi. She's working in the field. The sovereign hand of God at work. She's working in the field of Boaz, a noble man, a man of faith, a man from the tribe of Judah.

And he allows her to work in the field, and he takes care of her and allows her to glean along the edges of the field. He's being faithful. He's caring for the poor in the community.

And one day, Ruth comes back to Naomi and says, I met this man Boaz, and look at all the grain that I gathered. And Naomi knew Boaz and put it all together and said, Boaz is a close relative of my husband, and he may be our kinsman redeemer. The kinsman redeemer would be the one who, was a close relative, from that same family line, who could marry the widow and the children that they would have together would continue on the family line of the first husband who died. And as the story continued, that's what happened. Boaz ends up marrying Ruth, and together they have a child.

Let's read Ruth 4:13, it says, So Boaz took Ruth, she became his wife. He went into her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. And the women said to Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel. He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons that's given birth to him. And Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the woman of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, A son has been born to Naomi.

They named him Obed, and he was the father of Jesse, the father of David. And then there's a genealogy that follows. It says, Now these are the generations of Perez.

Perez fathered Hezron. Hezron fathered Ram. Ram fathered Aminadab.

Aminadab fathered Nashon. Nashon fathered Salmon. Salmon fathered Boaz.

Boaz fathered Obed. Obed fathered Jesse. And Jesse fathered David.

Out of the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, two generations later, the child David is born. Ruth is a great-great-grandmother of King David. And King David, out of the tribe of Judah, would be the one that, ultimately, Jesus, the Messiah, will come from.

And we'll read about, when we get to, into the next lesson of the United Kingdom, we look at David. A covenant promise is made from God to David, that on David's throne, there will always be a king. A king who will reign forever and ever on his throne, coming out of the tribe of Judah and the line of David.

And this promise, this covenant promise, will point forward to Jesus as the Messiah, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. It's another red thread of Jesus. You can see at the bottom of page 32, some things that relate to the kinsmen redeemer.

Remember, Jesus is the ultimate kinsmen redeemer. You need to be related by blood. You have to pay the price of redemption. Notice how these things are all true about Jesus. You have to be willing to redeem. No one forced Jesus to lay down his life. He did it willingly. And the redeemer had to be free. Jesus had no sin. There was no judgment against Jesus. These qualities were all true of Boaz and they're ultimately true of Jesus as our true kinsman redeemer.

Over to the right of page 32, there's a gray box.

This gives you some summary thoughts of the story of Ruth. Remember hope is the primary message.

During the time of the judges, a period of sin, decline, of darkness, there's this bright light of hope. It's a reminder of God's faithfulness. He's a promise keeping God.

He's going to fulfill his promise to build his kingdom. This is a glimpse, just a small glimpse and reminder that there will always be a remnant. God doesn't need large numbers. He can work through just a faithful few to accomplish his purposes. Remember, the two characters Elimelech and Naomi. As a husband and wife, the story begins when they leave Bethlehem, the house of bread, to go to Moab.

The story from death to life. Chapter one, there's emptiness. From emptiness to fullness.

Naomi is built up. When Ruth is added to her, and Ruth puts her trust in God, and they return to Bethlehem.

Chapter two and three, there's the transition from despair to hope.

In chapter four, the story moves from barrenness to inheritance. The story goes from Boaz and Ruth all the way to King David. And Ruth becomes the great-great grandmother of King David in the lineage of King Jesus.

You can see this in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew chapter 1 verse 5. So it's amazing! It's amazing the story of God through the Old Testament.

It's not cleaned up. Throughout the Old Testament, there's the good, the bad, and the ugly of every character. And what it reminds us of is that it's not so much about the people. The story of the OT shows us the character of God. God's faithfulness, God's love, God's grace, God's mercy, God's judgment, His holiness as well. And He's the God who will fulfill His promises to establish His eternal kingdom.

He's faithful to build His kingdom. And even in the darkest times, there's always hope. And we'll see this continue.

We'll speak about Samuel as we continue with the next lesson because Samuel is the last of the judges and he's the first of the prophets. We will come to story of the monarchy, the development of the kingdom, through the kingdom of Israel under the first three kings of Saul and David and Solomon.

Prior to that time, was the period of the Theocracy. Samuel served God and he was a good judge. The story will transition with Samuel becoming also the first prophet, the first man to truly be speaking as a prophet for God. This transition also moves from the Theocracy to the period Monarchy. We'll see the role that Samuel plays in that as well. All right?

A quick review of the OT Story: From creation to the call of Abraham right after the fall and the flood and the division. The period from Genesis 12 to Genesis 50 where God begins to prepare for the establishment of his kingdom. And then we're looking at the period of the patriarchs from Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and even the role that Joseph played.

And then this period of the formation of the kingdom from Exodus to the birth of a nation, from Moses leading the people out of Egypt, the giving of the law, the wandering through the wilderness, the coming to the promised land, the retelling of the law, Joshua leading God's people into the promised land to take possession of it, to have with God as their king and the people in their land and serving God. During the time of the Judges, things didn't go well. People begin to be influenced by the world around them and they begin to turn away from God and do what is right in their own eyes.

Yet there's a period of hope. God is faithful. He's going to accomplish his purposes.

And the book of Ruth gives us a glimpse of this, the greater purposes of God, the greater purpose and promise of the Messiah, the Redeemer to come, who we know as the Lord Jesus. And we'll pick up with Lesson Six as we move into the period of the Monarchy in the United Kingdom. God bless you.