

March 26-April 1

## **Week 13**

This week we will focus on the period of the judges. We are still in Act 2, scene 4 in the biblical story, which focuses on settling the land of Canaan. The Israelites would now reap what they sowed in two areas of disobedience:

1. They had not driven the other nations out of the land.
2. They constantly turned to other gods.

The people's disobedience introduced a lot of tension into the story. The narrative takes us from the death of Joshua, the key leader in settling the land, to a time when the Israelites would begin to desire a king to rule over them (see Judges 21:25).

Unlike the way we use the term in English, the word judge referred to an inspired leader, especially one who served as a military leader.

As you read, note the disunity of the Israelites. The judges brought together only a few tribes at a time. The spiritual and governmental conditions of the Israelites continued to deteriorate throughout the period, primarily because they refused to acknowledge God as their true King. Yet God showed compassion to his people again and again. His compassion is expressed beautifully in the story of Ruth, with which the week ends.

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**Day 1**

**Read Judges 2-5**

**Act 2 - Scene 4 - Reading 10**

Carefully read Judges 2:11-23, which presents a pattern repeated over and over in Judges:

1. The people sinned, abandoning God's covenant.
2. They suffered as God handed them over to their enemies.
3. God sent salvation in the form of a judge, who delivered them.

*Track this pattern as you read about the first four judges.*

*Have you ever suffered because of the sin in your life?*

*Do you understand how God has provided salvation for you?*

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**Day 2****Read Judges 6-9****Act 2 - Scene 4 - Reading 11**

The reading for today tells the story of Gideon and his legacy. Notice the reference points in Judges 6:7-10,13, which give a theological perspective on how to understand the trouble the Israelites experienced at the hands of the Midianites.

Ironically, Gideon is most often remembered for his request about the fleece in Judges 6:33-40, which expressed a lack of faith on Gideon's part. If we read carefully, we see that Gideon was not very courageous or a great man of faith. Yet God used him anyway, and the story focuses on God's role in the victory.

Sadly, the success Gideon experienced turned to distress as he led Israel astray in chapter 8. Thus his legacy, of which we are told in chapter 9, is not a happy one.

*Ask God to show you how you can live today for him as a person of true faith and usefulness in the face of God's enemies in the world.*

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**Day 3**

**Read Judges 10-13**

**Act 2 - Scene 4 - Reading 12**

Notice that the cycle of sin, suffering, and salvation is repeated in Judges 10.

In chapters 11–12 we are introduced to Jephthah, a gifted outlaw and the son of a prostitute, who led Israel against the Ammonites. Jephthah's story is tragic, illustrating the continuing degeneration of the Israelite people. His rash vow in chapter 11 shows great foolishness.

His story and Samson's story in chapters 13–16 portray the sorry state of God's people; even the judges on whom the Spirit of the Lord came were weak, foolish leaders.

*If you are in a position of leadership, ask God for wisdom to lead effectively and in a godly fashion. If not, pray for the leaders in your life.*

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**Day 4**

**Read Judges 14-18**

**Act 2 - Scene 4 - Reading 13**

Samson's story is one of the most expertly crafted and tragic in all of Scripture. Samson was a Nazirite, which meant he was to be set apart as holy to the Lord. Yet he violated his vows of purity (see Numbers 5–6) by touching a dead body (the lion), marrying a Philistine, and going to a prostitute. He was downright foolish when it came to women, and it cost him dearly.

His story and the one that follows, about Micah's priest, show a culture in great disarray both spiritually and governmentally. Notice especially Judges 17:6, which is repeated in the last verse of the book.

*What are the symptoms in your culture of everyone's doing whatever he wants?*

*Submit yourself in a fresh way to God as your King.*

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**Day 5****Read Judges 19-21****Act 2 - Scene 4 - Reading 14**

The story of the judges comes crashing down in compounding tragedies in the last three chapters. Notice the repetition of the statement “In those days there was no king in Israel” (Judges 17:6; 21:25; see also 18:1; 19:1).

Watch for all the signs of things having gone terribly wrong. The gang rape of the Levite’s concubine in chapter 19 echoes the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 (think about the great contrast between this story and instructions to husbands concerning their wives in Ephesians 5:25-26). Yet this story took place in the heart of the promised land, just north of Jerusalem.

Corruption produced chaos when the Israelites almost wiped out the tribe of Benjamin over this affair.

*Is there chaos in your life or in the lives of those closest to you that has been caused by a disregard for God’s commands or principles? Bring the situation to the Lord, asking for his help and guidance.*

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**Day 6**

**Read Ruth**

**Act 2 - Scene 4 - Reading 15**

Whereas the stories of Judges are appropriately disturbing, Ruth, a story set in the time of the Judges, is encouraging and beautiful, thus presenting a powerful contrast to the book of Judges. Here we see loyalty to Yahweh and to others, epitomized in the person Ruth. We also see a good man, Boaz, and a village committed to God's ways.

As you read, let the beauty of the story wash over you. Notice the parts of the story that speak of faithfulness and compassion. This story is a picture of how well God's ways work when we obey.

The book of Ruth also forms the backdrop for the coming of Israel's greatest king, David.

*How can you be faithful to God and the people closest to you?*

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**Day 7**

**Reading Summary for Week 13**

This week's readings were mainly distressing, with the repeated cycle of apostasy, oppression, repentance, and then divine restoration through a deliverer. How fickle the people were in turning from God, yet he still forgave and restored them when they repented.

We've traced Israelite history from Joshua's death through many dark years. Heroes such as Deborah, Gideon, and Samson have marched before us. The lovely story of Ruth has showed God's mercy to a foreigner, evidence that God's redemption plan is not reserved for Abraham's descendants alone.

**Prayer/Meditation**

Lord, I confess that sometimes it feels that we are now repeating the times of the judges, when "everyone did whatever seemed right to him" (Judges 21:25). Don't let me just lament the times; help me to stay true to you when circumstances grow dark with sin and rejection of your standards. Thank you for raising great leaders for your people, even in the most horrible situations. I'm willing to be a Deborah or a Gideon, if that's your call on my life. Amen.

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