
JUDGES 1-21; RUTH 1-4

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OUTLINE, JUDGES

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INTRODUCTION

During the period between Joshua and Saul, Israel was a collection of separate tribes with no unity. In fact, one of the messages of Judges is how they disintegrated into civil war. Judges also expresses a pattern of being oppressed by a foreign power, which came as a result of apostasy, then the people would repent and plead for relief, and a judge would step forward and lead them to freedom. This cycle is repeated at least seven times in the book.

Twelve judges are mentioned, one for each of the tribes (though not one *from* each tribe). Two more should probably be included from 1 Samuel—Eli and Samuel—making the total fourteen. Of the twelve in this book, we have substantial information about six of them, so they are called the ‘major judges.’ But of five we know little more than their names and how long they judged, so they are referred to as ‘minor judges.’ The exception is Shamgar—we only have his name.

The major judges and the minor judges each are presented following a pattern. The major judge pattern (for Othniel, Ehud, Deborah/Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson) is:

- Apostasy and worship of other gods
- God’s anger
- Enemies and subjection
- Cry for help (and God’s response)
- Deliverer chosen
- Deliverance
- Domination
- Peace
- Death of the judge

The minor judges (Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon; not Shamgar) include simply: Succession, Location, Information, Years, and Death/Burial.

The Hebrew word translated “judge” (*šāfat*) has a judicial sense but also can mean ruler, defender, deliverer, vindicator, and restorer of peace. If we were retranslating and renaming the book today, we might well call it “The Deliverers.” Their role tied to defending and teaching God’s laws and championing obedience.

If you add up the periods of time described in the book, it would total about 410 years, but the actual amount of time between Joshua and Samuel is more like 250-350 years. The difference is accounted for

by: 1) rounding of numbers (e.g., 40 = 'a lot'); and, 2) overlap (overlapping events and timeframes).

Name	Start	Meaning of name	Tribe	Years
1. Othniel	3:8	Lion of God	Judah	48
2. Ehud	3:15	I will give thanks	Benjamin	98
3. Shamgar	3:31	Sword	Asher?	?
4. Deborah	4:4	Bee	Ephraim	60
5. Gideon	6:11	Hewer	Issachar? Manasseh?	47
6. Tola	10:1	Worm	Issachar	23
7. Jair	10:3	He enlightens	Manasseh	22
8. Jephthah	11:1	He opens	Manasseh	24
9. Ibzan	12:8	Their whiteness	Zebulun (Judah?)	7
10. Elon	12:11	Mighty	Zebulun	10
11. Abdon	12:13	Servile	Ephraim	8
12. Samson	13:24	Like the sun	Dan	60



INTRODUCTION: DISOBEDIENT ISRAEL (1:1 – 3:7)

INTRODUCTION

The introductory section (as well as the conclusion) is clearly the work of a later editor. Though the stories of the judges are told nearly without editorial comment, this section is used by the editor to make

points of the composition, much like Mormon's 'and thus we see' remarks scattered throughout the Book of Mormon.

COMMENTARY

Incomplete conquest (1:1 – 2:5)

Judges opens with an account of the tribe of Judah, assisted by Simeon, attempting to fulfill the command of Moses and Joshua (and thus the Lord) to rid the land of foreign inhabitants. Judah is perhaps featured because the later editor was from the southern kingdom of Israel and thus was most interested in that history. The king mentioned is Adoni-bezek, whose name simply means 'king of Bezek.' Capturing this king, the Judahites cut off his thumbs and great toes, which apparently was his own custom, so he felt it was a just punishment. Judah also conquered Jerusalem "and set the city on

fire" (1:8) but were not able to hold it as even 1:21 notes.

Judah also captured Hebron (though Joshua 10:36-37 and 14:6-14 report that it was already captured) for Caleb, and Zephath/Hormath, as well as the Philistine cities of Gaza, Askalon, and Ekron. The text notes that the Philistines had "chariots of iron" (1:19) so Judah and Simeon were not able to fully conquer them.

The tribe of Joseph also captured Beth-el with the help of a local man who knew how to safely get in the city. Manasseh did not drive out those in their

territory, including Beth-shean, Taanach, Dor, Ilbeam, and Megiddo. Other tribes—Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan—are also unsuccessful at conquering the land. Thus a messenger (probably a mortal one, not a heavenly being as might be implied by the title “angel” in 2:1) came to tell them that because they had not obeyed the Lord’s command to clear the land, the Lord was now going to leave the enemies to be “thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you” (2:3). The people were so sad when they heard this declaration that they called the name of the place ‘weeping’ (“Bochim” in 2:5).

Thought question: How does only doing part of what the Lord asks us to do impact us today?

The judge cycle (2:6 – 3:7)

This section is a summary by the editor of the cycle that we see repeatedly in the book of Judges—apostasy, oppression, repentance, and delivery.

Judges 2:6-9 repeats Joshua 24:28-30 but then we are told that the next generation “knew not the Lord” (2:10), and that generation “did evil in the sight of the Lord” (2:11), a phrase that in Judges means the beginnings of the apostasy cycle. The evil they did was to follow other gods which “provoked the Lord to anger” (2:12). The two gods specifically mentioned are the Canaanite Ba’al, the male storm god, and his consort, Ashtaroth, the goddess of fertility.

When Israel apostatized, the Lord “sold them into the hands of their enemies” (2:14). This phrase alludes to the Lord being the Redeemer of Israel who purchases their salvation but because they don’t obey him, he ‘unredeems’ them and sells them to their enemies instead.

The editor then explains that in spite of Israel’s rejection of the Lord, he still “raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them” (2:16). This was partly because “of their groanings” (2:18) under the suffering of their enemies that led them to repent. This verse also contains the only JST change in Judges: “for ~~it~~ ~~repented~~ the Lord **hearkened** because of their groanings...” Like other changes, especially in Exodus, where the KJV text talks about the Lord repenting, the JST removes that connotation. In this case, the Lord heeds their pleas to deliver them from their enemies.

The first seven verses of chapter 3 mention the nations that the Lord left “to prove Israel” (3:4). Israel unfortunately chose to have their daughters marry these other nations and serve their gods. The reference to “Baalim and the groves” should be translated ‘Ba’als and Aserahs,’ referring to the same two Canaanite/Phoenician gods previously mentioned.

Thought question: What kinds of things can lead us to begin the cycle of apostasy today?

THE JUDGES (3:8 – 16:31)

INTRODUCTION

The stories in these chapters are of eleven men and one woman who ‘judge’ Israel for some period of time. The stories are told in a way that shows Israel’s decline over time. The early deliverers are strong, obedient, and filled with the Spirit. But as the stories progress, the leaders get more concerned about themselves, less interested or able to hear the voice of God, and finally represent the wasted potential God has placed in them. All of these stories prepare us for the state of Israel at the end of 200 or so years

of judges—an apostate Israel, fighting amongst themselves more than their enemies, and forgetting the great blessings of a loving God. The editor wants us to know that the solution that is later proposed is kingship but is also clear that that institution is not the answer. What Israel really needs to do is call upon the Lord, worship him, and obey his commandments.

Othniel (3:8-11)

Othniel ('lion of God') of Judah, the nephew of Caleb (one of the two from the original generation that left Egypt to enter the land) led the people against the king Chushan-rishathaim (probably not a name but a derogatory title meaning 'the doubly wicked Cushite'). We don't know who this king is other than this reference. The KJV translates his home as "Mesopotamia." Though technically it is on the edge of that land, in Hebrew it's Aram-Naharaim, or 'Aram of the two rivers.' It's clear from the context that the two rivers are the Orontes and the Khabour, meaning he was from the land of Abraham's ancestors (Genesis 24:10, where it is also translated "Mesopotamia" but reads Aram-Naharaim in Hebrew).

Othniel's simple story sets the pattern for the rest—apostasy leads to oppression which leads to humility and repentance which leads to a deliverer. Othniel is led by "the Spirit of the Lord" (3:10) and therefore the Lord delivered the enemy into his hands. Because of his leadership, "the land had rest forty years" (3:11), probably not literally forty years but meaning 'a long time.'

Ehud (3:12-30)

The king of Moab, Eglon (either 'calf' or 'round one,' so perhaps not his name but a reflection of how Israel viewed this clearly overweight man), attacked and occupied "the city of palm trees" (probably Jericho) for 18 years. In this case, the deliverer was a left-handed man named Ehud ('I will give thanks') of the tribe of Benjamin. Sending a tribute to Eglon, Ehud hid a one-cubit (about 18 inches) dagger under his clothes attached to his leg. He personally brought the tribute to Eglon, then said to the king that he had "a secret errand" (3:19) just for the king's ears. So the king sent everyone away (3:12-18).

The exchange took place in the "summer parlour" (3:20), which in Hebrew is 'the room of cooling.' This is a temporary room on the rooftop, set up during the hot summer to provide an escape from the heat. It would have lattice walls for circulation and a

temporary roof (branches or such). So sending everyone away meant they all went downstairs.

The king called Ehud close and Ehud said, "I have a message from God unto thee" (3:20). As the king stood up, Ehud pulled his dagger with this left hand and stabbed the king in his fat belly. He stabbed him so hard and the dagger was so sharp that it went in all the way to the hilt. The scripture says, "and the dirt came out," which means the blade went all the way through and came out his backside (3:19-22).

With the king dead or dying, Ehud made his escape "through the porch" (3:23), probably meaning through a window (the Hebrew word translated "porch" is actually of unknown meaning). Before he left, though, he shut the door leading into the summer room and locked it, so when the servants came to check on him and found the doors locked, they thought, "Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber" (3:24), meaning he was going to the bathroom. Their hesitation to disturb him gave Ehud time to escape. Finally, after waiting a very long time and probably calling out to the king many times, they got a key (a large, wooden key with teeth, inserted through an arm-size hole in the door (the 'keyhole') and used to push the pins that held the door latch in place) and opened the door, finding the king dead (3:23-25).

When Ehud arrived at Seirath—somewhere in the hill country of Ephraim—and sounded the ram's horn (*shofar*) to call Israel to the attack, and they returned and drove Moab back over the Jordan River, starting a period of peace that lasted 80 years (3:26-30).

Thought question: How was the murder of Eglon justified?

Shamgar (3:31)

Shamgar ('sword') gets only one verse. We know his name, his father (Anath) and that he slew "six hundred men [Philistines] with an ox goad."

Deborah and Barak (4:1 – 5:31)

Deborah ('bee') is the only female leader. On the heels of the death of Ehud (Shamgar is ignored), Jabin of Hazor, a Canaanite king, and his captain Sisera, oppressed Israel. Jabin was a powerful ruler, with 900 iron chariots. For 20 years he ruled over Israel.

Deborah is not a military leader but a "prophetess" (4:4). People came to her for judgment and justice. In the course of this effort, she called Barak ('lightning') and told him that God was calling him to battle Sisera and his army. Deborah's promise to Barak was that God would deliver him. Barak agreed to go to battle if the prophetess would accompany him, to which she agreed, reminding him that it was, after all, the Lord that would deliver them. Marshalling troops from the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, they went to face Sisera (whose name means 'battle array'). (4:4-10)

Barak gathered his forces at mount Tabor while Sisera approached from the west. Deborah told Barak: "Up; for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand" (4:14). The armies met and Barak's forces prevailed to the point that Sisera fled east toward the Kenites, who were descendants of Moses' brother-in-law who went with Israel into the Promised Land. However, one particular Kenite, Heber, "had severed himself from the Kenites" (4:11), evidently becoming a spy for Sisera. Heber's wife, Jael ('mountain goat'), saw an opportunity and coaxed the fleeing Sisera into her tent for safety. He naturally trusted her because of his relationship with her husband. Giving him milk which would make him sleepy, and covering him with a coat, Jael got him to fall asleep in her tent. Then she snuck in with a long tent stake and pounded it quickly through his head, "and fastened it into the ground" (4:21). (This incident is what probably gave rise to the expression, "She nailed him.") When Barak came pursuing Sisera, she brought him into the tent for him to see Sisera still pinned down and dead (4:11-24).

It should be noted that women were responsible to set up and take down the tents, so driving a stake into the ground was not a new experience for Jael. The song version in chapter 5 adds that after she put

the stake through Sisera's head, she cut off his head for good measure. No mention of how Jael and her husband, Sisera's spy, got along after this incident.

After the battle, Deborah and Barak sang a song about their victory. Many scholars believe this is the oldest section of Judges, with its archaic and somewhat disjointed Hebrew (chapter 5).

Thought question: "What insight do Deborah and Barak supply into effective and appropriate ways that men and women can serve together in the Church or the community?" (Olson, 125).

Gideon (6:1 – 8:32)

Gideon's story is the longest and most detailed of the judge accounts. Israel was oppressed by the Midianites (nomadic raiders from Arabia, complete with camels) and prayed for relief. First, an unnamed "prophet" (6:8) came reminding them of God's deliverance from Egypt but saying that now they had disobeyed YHWH. Then an angel came to where Gideon was secretly threshing wheat to avoid a Midianite tax (6:11). The "angel" apparently didn't look very divine and perhaps wasn't; the Hebrew word is as easily translated 'messenger' as angel. This could have been a mortal man (or translated—think city of Enoch/Melchizedek) inspired and charged to deliver the Lord's message to Gideon. The messenger told Gideon, "The Lord is with thee" (6:12) but Gideon gave an answer so many who are suffering feel: "if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" (6:13). (Note in this verse both Lord [*adoni*] which means 'sir' and LORD which is the KJV representation of YHWH or Jehovah. When the messenger speaks, the text says it is the LORD speaking but it is clearly the messenger acting under divine investiture—speaking for God.) (6:1-13)

The messenger not only assured him the Lord was with him but gave Gideon the mission of delivering Israel from the Midianites. Gideon complained that his "family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (6:15), but the messenger promised support from God. Gideon asked the messenger to let him offer a "present" (6:18) and prepared a fine meal (which must have been a sacrifice, given his poverty). The messenger had him put it on a rock and then burnt it by touching the end

of his staff to it, then departed. By this sign, however, Gideon knew he was a true messenger. Now fearing that the encounter would cause him to lose his life, Gideon pleaded with God who spoke peace to him and assured him he would not die. So Gideon built an altar and called it “Jehovah-shalom” (‘YHWH peace’) (6:14-24).

The first thing Gideon had to do was destroy the altar of his village had built to Ba’al and the *asherah* (‘grove’ though really a goddess) near it, then make an altar to the Lord instead and use the wood from the idol to burn the offered bull. This he did at night so others wouldn’t see him. When the men of the area found out what he had done, they told Gideon’s father to bring him out but his father defended him, saying, “if he [Ba’al] be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar” (6:31). As a result, Gideon was also called “Jerubbaal” (6:32), meaning ‘let Ba’al contend,’ a defiant name not honoring but mocking Ba’al (6:25-32).

So Gideon called for troops from the surrounding tribes and they began to gather at mount Moreh, just south of mount Tabor. But Gideon still desired another sign, so he asked the Lord to put dew on a fleece while the dirt all around it remained dry. This happened but to be sure, Gideon asked for it to be reversed the next time—dry fleece and wet ground, which also happened. That this was an appropriate request under the circumstance is evidenced by the lack of rebuke by the Lord (6:33-40).

As they prepared for battle, the Lord told Gideon he had too many soldiers and that his 32,000 needed to be whittled down so everyone knew it was the Lord that had saved them, not their own might. So Gideon first told the fearful to do home and 22,000 left. But that was still too many for the Lord, so he instructed Gideon to have them all take a drink. “Every one that lapped of the water with his tongue, as a dog” (7:5), “putting their hand to their mouth” (7:6) was kept. Down to 300 troops now, no one could say Israel won by their own power (7:1-8).

At the Lord’s invitation, Gideon and Phurah snuck down near the enemy’s camp, who was “without number” (7:12). There he overheard one man tell of his dream and the other interpret it that it was “the

sword of Gideon” (7:14) overcoming Midian, which greatly encouraged him (7:9-15).

Gideon divided his army into three groups of 100 or so and gave each man a “trumpet” (*shofar* or ram’s horn), a “pitcher” (clay jar) and a lamp to put in the jar. It was about 10:00 pm as the army surrounded the Midianites. At Gideon’s signal, they all blew their trumpets and cried out, “For the Lord, and for Gideon!” (JSB, 527). Then they broke their jars, making a crashing sound and exposing their lamps (7:16-21).

Suddenly being surrounded by hundreds of lights, with crashing sounds and shouting, the Midianite army panicked, fought and killed some of each other, and finally fled southeast back toward their home in Arabia. Gideon called for reinforcements from the neighboring tribes and they pursued the Midianites across the Jordan, capturing and killing their generals, Oreb and Zeeb (7:22-8:3).

A couple of cities along the way refused to give Gideon’s army food and supplies, not believing he could really defeat the Midianites. He promised to return and deal with them later. He captured the Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, and drove out their armies (8:4-12).

On the way back, he showed the kings he had captured to the people that had not helped him, and punished their treason by taking their towns, destroying their towers, and killing their leaders (8:13-17).

Gideon himself executed the Midianite kings who had slain so many Israelites. The people called for Gideon to be their king, but he refused. He did take some of the gold and makes an ornament for the high priest to wear, but later regretted it because people began to worship it as a symbol of their victory. They had peace for forty years (meaning, ‘a long time’) but as soon as Gideon died reverted back to worshipping Ba’al (8:18-35).

Thought question: When can we ask the Lord for a sign that we are truly hearing his words?

Abimelech (9:1-57)

The story of Gideon doesn't end with his death, however. In chapter 9, one of his sons tried to do what his father refused and made himself king. The name he took, Abimelech, means 'my father is king,' a reference to what the people offered Gideon. To cement his position, he had all of his brothers killed. But he missed one—Jotham—who was able to hide and escape. Jotham publicly cursed his half-brother but did nothing more. Abimelech began to conquer some of the cities that stood against him. In Thebez, a woman dropped a piece of a millstone on his head as he was attacking the gate. It didn't kill him but he knew he was going to die so asked his armor-bearer to kill him so it would not be said that a woman had killed him (but we all still say it anyway). Thus ended the three-year reign of the first self-proclaimed king of Israel, though he was never really more than a small, regional king.

Thought question: How might we be exercising unrighteous dominion in our sphere of influence?

Tola and Jair (10:1-5)

Tola gets two verses telling us only that he defended Israel in "Shamir in mount Ephraim" and that he "judged Israel twenty and three years" (10:1-2).

Jair was from Gilead and "judged Israel twenty and two years." Otherwise, we are only told he had 30 sons who each had a city (10:3-5).

Jephthah (10:6 - 12:7)

Most of chapter 10 is an interesting conversation between Israel and the Lord where the oppressed Israelites cried for relief, but the Lord reminded them he had done that already several times and they still worshipped other gods. "Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen" (10:14), he tells them. But their repentance and sorrow only got louder, with the people wondering who could deliver them from the oppression of the Ammonites (10:6-18).

A man named Gilead had many sons, but one, Jephthah, was from a harlot, so he was chased out of town by his brothers. But he proved to be a good

warrior, so when the Ammonites came to battle, the people asked Jephthah to be their leader (11:1-11).

Messages were exchanged in which the Ammonite king claimed that Israel had taken away his lands. But Jephthah gave him a history lesson, explaining that Israel had not set out to take the lands but they had fought against Israel and lost, and after several hundred years of possession the Israelites clearly had the right to the land. The Ammonite king was not convinced (11:12-28).

Jephthah gathered an army and vowed that if they were successful he would sacrifice to the Lord the first thing he saw when he returned to his home. They did win the battle, but when he returned, his only child, a daughter, ran out to meet him in celebration. Apparently, she was thus never allowed to marry, and so his family line ended with her death (11:29-40).

Unfortunately, a disagreement between Gad and Ephraim resulted in a civil war. Because they all looked the same, the Gadites used the Ephraimites pronunciation of a word (*shibboleth*, meaning 'flowing stream' or 'head of grain') to tell them apart (12:1-7).

Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (12:8-15)

In three verses, we learn that Ibzan was from Bethlehem, had thirty sons and thirty daughters, and judged seven years (12:8-11).

Elon, a Zebulonite, then judged for ten years (12:11-12).

Abdon had forty sons and judged eight years (12:13-15).

Samson (13:1 - 16:31)

The final judge of the group is probably the most tragic. From the town of Zorah (about 17 miles west of Jerusalem, near the Philistines), a man named Manoah ('rest' or 'quiet') married an unnamed wife, yet it is to her that an angel appeared. She was promised a son but told not to "drink strong wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing" (13:4). Additionally, she was told her son should be a Nazarite, harking to Numbers 6 which explains this temporary covenant, only in her son's case, it was to

be a lifetime commitment with a great promise (13:1-5).

She told her husband, who prayed to have the angel return. He did return to the woman as she sat in the field, who basically said, 'Wait here' and went to get her husband. The message was repeated to Manoah who then offered hospitality to the angel, but it was declined: "offer it unto the Lord" (13:16). Apparently the husband still not believe it was an angel until the messenger rose up in the flame from the altar. Everything happened as promised and she had a son named Samson, meaning 'like the sun' (13:6-25).

Samson's story thus begins with great promise but quickly turns into a tragedy, starting with the bizarre story of Samson's wedding. He determined to marry out of the covenant from among the Philistines, the remnants of the Sea Peoples who had invaded the coastal areas about this time from Crete. They became for many years one of Israel's worst enemies. On the way to strike the marriage bargain, he saw a lion and killed it with his bare hands. Later, he went back for the wedding, and saw the body of the lion on the side of the road swarming with bees. He took some of the honey they'd made in there, ate it, and brought some to his parents. This was a violation of his Nazarite vow (touching something dead) but sets up the riddle he uses against his new in-laws (14:1-9).

Samson hosted a feast with the Philistine neighbors of his wife's family. He bet them thirty changes of clothing ("sheets" is tunics, the main article of clothing in those days; many only had one, so 30 tunics was very expensive) that they could not solve his riddle. The men were unable, so they told Samson's new wife they'd kill her and her family if she didn't find out the answer. She cried and cried and cried and kept asking him over and over, and he finally gave in and told her it was the lion he had killed and then got honey from. She told the men, and they thus won the bet. Knowing they had won the bet by threatening his wife, he paid the bet by attacking Ashkelon, a nearby Philistine town, killed 30 men, and took their clothing (14:10-20).

Samson was mad at his wife for giving away his riddle, so he left her there with her father. The father thought she was abandoned, so gave her to Samson's

best man as a wife instead. Later, when Samson had cooled off, he went to get his wife, but the father explained he'd given her away and offered her younger sister instead. Samson didn't like that offer but wanted his original wife, so he punished their entire village by putting torches with jackals tied together by the tails in their fields of grain, vineyards, and olive orchards (15:1-5).

The Philistines naturally were angry with Samson for burning all their crops and fields, so in revenge, killed his wife and father-in-law. Samson determined to have his own revenge, and killed many of them, then went back into Israelite territory and waited on a mountain. The Philistines chased him and confronted an Israelite army who determined to bind Samson and give him to the Philistines in order to keep the peace. Samson's justification for his actions reflects an attitude still active in many parts of the world: "As they did unto me, so have I done unto them" (15:11). The only problem is, unlike the "eye for an eye" teaching of the Law of Moses, that kind of retribution seems to continually escalate (15:6-13).

Samson was able to free himself from his bonds and grabbed a jawbone as a weapon (appropriate because they were at "Lehi" [15:9] which means 'jawbone'). After killing "a thousand men" (15:16), he tossed the jawbone aside, thus giving the name Ramath-lehi ('the thrown jawbone') to the place. Being extremely thirsty after his battle, he called on the Lord for water, and found a spring near the city, drank, and named it "En-hakkore" (15:19), or 'the spring of him who calls' (15:14-20).

Samson had lost his wife and become a fugitive and a wanted man, so he went south to Gaza—still in Philistine territory—and secretly moved in with a prostitute. But eventually the men of that city found out who he was and decided to wait by the gate to capture him as he left. But he got up in the middle of the night and carried the gates about thirty miles away (16:1-3).

The text records that Samson next "loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah" (16:4). She only pretended to care about him, secretly having made a pact with the leaders of the Philistines to betray him for 1100 pieces of silver, an

unimaginable amount for her. Delilah tried to discover the source of his strength, and Samson teased her by giving her three false leads—bind him with “green withs” (“fresh animal bowstrings”) which he easily broke; bind him with new ropes, which he also broke; and weave his hair into the loom, which he picked up and carried away (16:6-14).

Frustrated that he was teasing her, Delilah begged for the truth over many days. Like his wife, her nagging finally got to him and he told her—it was because he was a Nazarite, represented by his hair never having been cut. It’s not that his hair is magical or something, but cutting it meant he finally and fully broken his covenant and the Lord will no longer support him.

With Delilah’s help, the Philistines captured Samson, put out his eyes, and put him to work in prison grinding grain, which was woman’s work so even more humiliating (16:15-21).

Over time Samson’s hair grew back and he repented of his wasted life. But his repentance didn’t get him

out of prison or restore his sight; he had to live with the consequences of his sin (16:22).

The Philistines made a great feast to their god, Dagon (head of a man, body of a fish), and brought Samson out to make fun of him. To them, Samson’s capture proved that their god was more powerful than Jehovah. But Samson had a boy lead him to the pillars that held up the hall they were in, and he managed to pull the two main pillars that held up the roof, causing it to collapse. The destruction killed him but also (according to 16:30) “more than they which he slew in [the rest of] his life” (16:23-31).

In the end, Samson did not lead a mighty army like other deliverers, nor did he free the people from oppression. He merely caused some trouble for the Philistines.

Thought question: How would our lives be different if we always lived up to our covenants and potential?

CONCLUSION: DECADENT ISRAEL (17:1 – 21:25)

INTRODUCTION

The concluding chapters of Judges tell stories of sin and sadness. It represents the slide of Israel toward more and more wickedness as they reject the God who brought them into the land. These chapters also prepare us for the transition to a king in the books of Samuel, with the repeated phrase, “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (17:6), meaning there was no king to set things right so everyone did whatever they wanted.

President N. Eldon Tanner said, “I would like to say to you again, remember these three words: keep the

covenants. And I think I am safe in saying to you that if you and your families will keep these covenants, you will be happy, you will be successful, you will be respected, you will have good families that you can take back into the presence of our Heavenly Father. All you will have to do is remember three words: keep the covenants, the obligations that you have taken upon yourselves, the pledges that you have made. Keep the covenants” (*Conference Report*, Oct. 1966, 99).

COMMENTARY

Idolatry and war (17:1 – 18:31)

Chapter 17 is the story of Micah who created a false religion with the help of his mother who gave him silver for “a graven image and a molten image”

(17:3). He made his son his priest at first, then coaxed a young Levite (with silver) to be his priest. The Levite’s name is not revealed until the end of the story; he is Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Moses (“Manasseh” is a scribal error in 18:30).

In chapter 18, some men from the tribe of Dan, looking for a new land to inherit, passed through Micah's village and stayed at his house. Talking to the Levite, they recognized him and asked him to give them direction from God. They went to Laish in the north and felt it was a place that was good to live and that they could conquer it. They gathered an army and returned to Micah's house and took his possessions and convinced his priest to join them, then invaded Laish, which they captured and renamed Dan. This is how "from Dan even to Beer-sheeba" (20:1) came about, because after this Dan was in the northernmost part of the land.

Crime and war (19:1 – 21:25)

Chapters 19-20 contain the bizarre story of an evil Levite who took a concubine (a wife of lesser status). She ran away (perhaps because he abused her, though the text accuses her of "playing the whore" in 19:2). He went after her and was friendly with her father, who kept inviting the Levite to stay longer and longer. When they finally left, they passed by Jebus/Jerusalem (in the hands of the Jebusites) for Gibeah, but the day was late and they could find no place to stay. Finally a kind man offered them food and shelter, but in a repeat of the story of Lot, some men from the city demand he bring out the visitors. The host offered his daughter and the man's concubine, but they refused. Finally the Levite gave them his concubine and they quit their attack. They

did, however, abuse her all night and finally killed her, leaving her on the doorstep where the Levite was staying.

The Levite took her body and divided it into twelve pieces, sending one to each tribe, thereby calling them to war against the people that did this. Through this grotesque incident, the troops were rallied and the tribe of Benjamin was attacked in a civil war. Ironically, the only time the tribes were united in the entire book of Judges is when they were fighting each other. It is also significant that the tribe singled out was Benjamin—the tribe from which Saul, the first king, would shortly come.

In chapter 21, it is recorded that they realized they had nearly destroyed the entire tribe of Benjamin, so they captured 400 young women from Jabesh-gilead who had not helped in the fighting and gave those women to the remaining Benjamites for wives so the tribe would not die out.

The concluding verse echoes the theme that demonstrates the rule of relativism at this time in Israel's history: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (21:25). In fact, what Israel needed desperately to do was to do that which was right in God's eyes, their true king. What they do instead is appoint an earthly king to rule over them, which ultimately led to their destruction as a people in Samuel through Kings.

OUTLINE, RUTH

1. Ruin in Moab (1:1-5)
2. Return to Bethlehem (1:6-22)
3. Boaz lets Ruth glean (2:1-23)
4. Ruth and Boaz interact (3:1-18)
5. Boaz redeems Ruth (4:1-12)
6. Boaz and Ruth's posterity (4:13-22)

INTRODUCTION

The book of Ruth takes place during the time of the period of the Judges, which is why it is placed after Judges in the Christian canon (in the Jewish Bible, it is part of the Writings, grouped in with Lamentations and Esther). It is a story that

illustrates very well the application of the laws of marriage upon the death of a spouse.

COMMENTARY

Ruin in Moab (1:1-5)

A certain couple from Bethlehem in Judah struggled with the famine (some irony there since Bethlehem means 'house of bread') and so decided to go to Moab. His name was Elimelech ('my god is king') and hers Naomi ('my delight' or 'my beauty'). They had two sons whose names prefigure their fates: Mahlon ('sick', 'diseased', or 'grieved') and Chilion ('pining', 'failing', or 'annihilation'). It doesn't say how long they were in Moab but over the course of time both sons married Moabite women, whose names are also telling: one named Orpah ('back', as in turn one's back on someone, or 'gazelle' which turns its back and runs) and Ruth ('friendship' or 'companion'). Later, Elimelech and both sons died, leaving the three women all childless and widows.

Return to Bethlehem (1:6-22)

Hearing there was bread again in the 'house of bread' (Beth-lehem), Naomi determined to go back to her homeland. Naomi counseled her two daughters-in-law to return to their parents. Normally younger brothers of their husbands would have taken them to wife and given them children to help care for them, but Naomi is clear that she has no other children, is not likely to marry again, and even if she did, it would be too many years to help these girls (which shows that Naomi was not too old to still have children). Orpah kissed Naomi and turned and left (reflecting her name) but Ruth stayed, giving her well-known reply, which is in the form of a covenant: "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me" (1:16-17). She took a solemn oath on her own life to always be with and take care of Naomi, and she accepted the Lord as her God, implying that up until this moment she had worshipped the Edomite gods.

Returning to Bethlehem, the people asked, "Is this Naomi?" (1:19). Her reply shows the burden she was carrying after her personal tragedies: "Call me not Naomi ['my delight'], call me Mara ['bitter']: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me" (1:20).

Boaz Lets Ruth Glean (2:1-23)

We are next introduced to Boaz ('swiftness' or 'strength'), a wealthy relative of Naomi's former husband, Elimelech. To get some food, Ruth proposes to go glean some grain after the harvest. It was the law that fields were not to be fully harvested that the poor might have something to eat (Leviticus 19:9-10). Ruth happened to glean the fields of Boaz, and she caught his eye: "Whose damsel is this?" (2:5). Discovering her identity, he told her not to go glean other fields, promising her protection from anyone there working, free access to water, a meal a day, and plenty to reap. He told the harvesters to leave plenty for her, and she worked hard. Clearly, Boaz was intrigued by this Moabite woman, but he also admired her devotion to Naomi: "It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law" (2:11). He invoked God's blessing on her, "under whose wings thou art come to trust" (2:12). The word translated "wings" here is *kānāp*, meaning 'wing,' 'border,' or 'extremity,' and which will figure again in Ruth's story.

When Ruth arrived home that night, Naomi was amazed at how much food she brought. She agreed that Ruth should focus on Boaz' fields, letting her know that "The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen" (2:20). This is a clear notice that Boaz might well have the obligation to help them under the law. The last word translated "next kinsmen" indicates that Boaz is a potential *go'el* or 'redeemer,' someone who had the obligation to support or even marry a family member who was a widow like Naomi or Ruth.

Ruth and Boaz Interact (3:1-18)

The next day, Naomi instructed Ruth to wash, anoint herself with oil, and put on fresh clothing before going to the threshing area. The washing might be more than just cleaning up but symbolic of cleansing herself of past sins and preparing herself to worship the Lord. She was to watch Boaz and go in unto him and "uncover his feet" when he laid down to sleep. Though this euphemism has potential sexual overtones, the context indicates that Naomi was not counseling sexual relations but rather just to be near Boaz to get his attention when he awoke. There is, however, a tension that it adds to the story—when

Boaz wakes up with a woman lying near him after a night of drinking, he must at least wonder what might have happened.

Boaz did wake up during the night and in the dark did not know who was there. She explained that she was Ruth and boldly asked to “spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman” (4:9). Though it says “skirt,” this is the same word Boaz used in his blessing to her, *kānāp*; Ruth thus invokes his own words of blessing, making him aware of his obligation as *go ʿel*. Boaz agreed he will take care of her, flattered that she would be willing to be with someone clearly much older than her. But he warned there is another that might have claim on her and sends her home with a substantial amount of food for her and Naomi.

Boaz Redeems Ruth (4:1-12)

Going to the gate where all judgments are rendered, Boaz presented his case to the elders, including the

man who had the claim of redemption. Apparently, Naomi still had title to a parcel of land and the redeemer would have this land in exchange for caring for Naomi. Anxious to have the land, the man agreed. But then Boaz added a condition—he also had to marry Ruth and raise up seed to her dead husband. Not willing to confuse any inheritance with his own sons, the other man therefore declined, leaving the way open for Boaz to be the redeemer, which he accepted to do in front of all the elders as witnesses.

Boaz and Ruth’s Posterity (4:13-22)

Ruth had a son which gave both her and Naomi joy. Naomi took such good care of him that everyone referred to the child as Naomi’s. His name was Obed (‘serving’), who was “the father of Jesse, the father of David” (4:17), thus making Ruth a transition book between Judges and Samuel.

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