

The Books of Judges and Ruth

Listed Scriptures

Judges, Ruth

Lesson Aim

- 1) That the students may understand the instability during the time of the judges was a result of the Israelites' turning away from God time and again
- 2) That the students may understand the chaos of that time period and how God saved those who cried to Him for help
- 3) That the students may appreciate the fear of God in Ruth, and her filial piety towards Naomi, which led to many blessings

Memory Verse

"Entreat me not to leave you or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, your God shall be my God." (Ruth 1:16)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Judges, Ruth

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



Judges

The chronology of the book of Judges is problematic since the sum of the periods mentioned in it comes to about four hundred years. However, the time of the settlements in Canaan to the time of the kings (anointing of King Saul) is usually dated from the 13th Century B.C. to the middle of the 11th Century B.C. The era of the judges as we can calculate from the book is far too long. Nevertheless, this book gives us a good glimpse of what the history of the Israelite nation was like after the death of Joshua, when they settled down to a life in the land of Canaan. It shows us the consequences of their having spared some of the inhabitants of Canaan. It also continues a pattern that was seen earlier in the history, that the Israelites were prone to forgetting God, turning to evil deeds, including the worship of other gods.

Nazirites

A nazirite was dedicated to the sacred service of the Lord through a vow made either by the individual or by a parent. He or she had to abstain from the fruit of the vine and other intoxicants, avoid defilement by contact with a dead body and not allow a razor to cut the hair (Num 6:1–7). Ironically, Samson the nazirite fulfilled none of the stipulated requirements (Judg 14, 16).

Ruth

Set in the period covered by the book of Judges (Ruth 1:1), Ruth brings to bear various customs of the Hebrew society at that time. One of these is the gleaning provision set by the Lord, that they should leave the corners and the gleanings to the stranger, the fatherless and the widow (Lev 19:9–10; Deut 24:19–22). Another is the levirate marriage, where the next of kin has to marry the widow of a deceased so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel (Deut 25:5–10). This is a heart-warming narrative that reflects the interaction of love and care within an extended family in an era when the importance of God in one's life was often neglected.

W A R M U P



Have you experienced times when you felt that you were really close to God and that all that you did was acceptable in the sight of God? Were there times when you sinned against God and realized that you felt really lousy and things just didn't seem to go right? It is important that we, as children of God, are sensitive to God and His laws. The world we live in today sends out many different kinds of messages, sometimes even conflicting ones. Being bombarded by different standards and norms, we can get lost very easily. It is important to know God and His word really well, and keep His word in our hearts. That way, we can navigate safely through life in this ambivalent world of confusion.

Today, we will look at two books of the Bible belonging to the "history books." One of them depicts a world of confusion, just like the one we live in today. There, we see how the children of God often lose sight of what is right or wrong and lead their lives in an ad hoc and often tragic manner. Another book will provide a contrast, where we will see how the fear of God and true love triumph in an era when things are not going right.



Part 1

The Book of Judges

Judges is the second of the history books. It records the period of time between the death of Joshua and the time of Eli the prophet/priest. This was a period with repeated wave patterns of spiritual highs and lows. The Israelites turn away from God and worship foreign gods – they are oppressed by the foreign tribes – they cry to God for help – God saves them by raising a judge to fight for them – soon after, they go back to their old idolatrous and sinful ways.

At the beginning of the book, there is an explanation given about why such a pattern recurred: the Israelites did not continue to chase away the remaining Canaanite tribes. They also made alliances with them through marriage and religious assimilation. That became the root of the troubles that followed (Judg 1:27–3:7). Judges records a dark period of religious and moral confusion. Some of the deeds of the Israelites were clear attestation of their departure from God's laws. For example, Micah the Ephraimite made idols, set up a temple of worship and appointed his son to be the priest (17:1–6).

The Judges and Their Deeds:

- a. Othniel (3:7–11)
He defeated the king of Mesopotamia whom God allowed to oppress the Israelites as a result of their worshipping the Baals and Asherahs.
- b. Ehud (3:15–30)
By using a ruse (pretext of going to pay tribute), he killed the king of Moab and the other warriors of Moab.
- c. Shamgar (3:31)
He killed 600 men of the Philistines with an ox goad.
- d. Deborah (4, 5)
She was a prophetess as well. She had the courage to lead the Israelite army against the army of Jabin, king of Hazor. The general of the Canaanite army was Sisera, who died also at the hand of a heroine, by the name of Jael.

e. Gideon (6–8)

When the Israelites sinned once again, the Lord gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Gideon was then called to deliver the nation. Gideon asked God twice to show him a sign that he was really chosen to save Israel, and God performed the sign of the dew on the fleece (6:36–40). When they were going into battle, God instructed Gideon to choose only three hundred men and strengthened his confidence by allowing him to overhear the dream of one of the enemy soldiers. Another note-worthy and praise-worthy episode about him is the way he appeased the Ephraimites who were offended that they were not involved in the battle (cf. paragraph on Jephthah).

f. Abimelech (9)

He was the son of Gideon. He killed seventy of his brothers and established himself as king. He reigned for three years, after which God sent His punishment upon him; he was killed by a woman who dropped a millstone on him and crushed his skull.

g. Tola and Jair (10)

h. Jephthah (11–12:6)

In the battle against the Ammonites, he foolishly made a vow that unnecessarily sacrificed his daughter. He later caused forty-two Ephraimites to be slain, which is a great contrast to the wisdom exhibited previously by Gideon in a similar situation.

i. Ibzan, Elon and Abdon (12:7–15)

j. Samson (13–16)

He was brought up a nazirite (read Num 6:1–7). Even though he was designated to become a nazirite before his birth, he did not fulfill any of the nazirite requirements. In fact, he did not even live a life as part of the nation of God. He frivolously attended drinking feasts (14:10) and touched the carcass of a lion (14:8, 9). He lusted after women and ultimately, revealed his secret to Delilah, allowing his hair to be cut (16:15–19). He lost the abidance and help of God and finally, died tragically with the Philistines.

Teaching Tips

One way to get the students to remember the details of what each judge did might be to get them to work in groups to read the Bible, sort out the details and then present the important points to the rest of the class. It would certainly work better than for them to simply read the summarized notes which are here in the textbook.



Part 2

The Book of Ruth

The author of this book is unknown. This book is sometimes called the “love story” of the Bible. It tells of the love of a wonderful gentile woman for her old and helpless mother-in-law. She was willing to give up a bright future ahead of her, and chose to follow her mother-in-law back to Israel rather than to return to a comfortable life in her own country. As a result of her sacrificial love, she became a part of the chosen nation of God, and God became her God. She, like Rahab, another gentile woman before her, was even given a part in the genealogy of Jesus Christ on earth. The example set by Ruth is one that endures even though centuries have passed. It is not difficult to understand why this woman who was born and grew up in a sinful gentile land became a woman blessed greatly by God. Her love, her readiness to embrace God and His laws, her willingness to take hardships and her obedience to Naomi are all virtues that are so lacking in today’s society. It is important that we all remember Ruth’s story and learn from her, that our lives on earth may be as blessed as hers, and that we may bring benefit to all around us.

The book consists of only four chapters, which can be summarized as follows:

- a. Elimelech fled the famine in Judah and went to dwell in Moab. His sons married Moabite women there. In the end, all the men in the family died. Only Naomi and her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, were left.
- b. Ruth made the decision to go to Judah with her lonesome mother-in-law. She went to glean the fields so as to find food for the two of them.
- c. Ruth proved herself to be a submissive woman. God blessed her and Boaz agreed to speak for her.
- d. Boaz married Ruth according to the Law, and they became the great-grandparents of King David.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



1 Why is the period covered in the book of Judges a period of darkness? What were some of the sinful things that the Israelites did?

2 Why did God raise the judges?

3 Were all the judges wise and God-fearing? Name those who were and those who were not.

4 Why did Ruth become one of the most blessed women in the course of history?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Obedience

Part A- The modern world that we live in today can be described as an alienated and fragmented one. Things are always in a flux; it is hard to find things that stay constant and permanent. Under such instability, it is always a comfort to know that God's love and protection are with us. Other than God's love for us, one other thing we can be sure of is the love of our parents. Our parents' love for us transcends time and space. Our parents do not forget us, or neglect to be concerned about us, just because we move to another state for college. Our parents do not stop loving us just because time has lapsed. No matter how far apart we are from them, no matter how long we have been away from them, their hearts are always yearning for us, and wishing us all the best.

Unfortunately, many people simply do not think much of such a great love that God has bestowed upon mankind. We often think little about the feelings of our parents. We put on our best behavior outside of the home, but we often yell at our parents, use hurtful words and have no qualms about throwing tantrums. Sometimes, we treat them like vending machines, demanding this or that, as and when we want.

The following is a story about how a little girl realizes her mother's love for her. How many of us are like her, thinking only of what we have done, and never paus-

ing for a moment to remember the many unsaid acts of love our parents have done for us?

A little girl came up to her Mommy one day and handed her a list.

"What's that, honey?" Mommy asked.

"It's the money you owe me," the little girl replied.

Mommy took the list and her heart ached as she read:

For clearing up the toys - \$1

For washing dishes - \$5

For putting baby brother to sleep - \$2

Total: \$8

Mommy put aside her apron and started to write a list of her own.

"May I see what you have written, Mommy?" the little girl asked. She took the note from Mommy and read:

For carrying you nine months in my tummy – FREE

For staying up to care for you during the nights when you were ill – FREE

For wiping your nose when it ran – FREE

For hugging you when you were in tears – FREE

The little girl's eyes filled with tears and quietly, she took her list from her Mommy. She scribbled on it and returned the note. Over the list was written – PAID IN FULL.

After reading the story, do you see some traces of yourself in this little girl? Write down five things that your father or mother has done for you which you have always simply taken for granted. Then, write down some of the ways (directly or indirectly) in which you can show them that you do appreciate them and are grateful to them.

Part B- "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth'" (Eph 6:1; cf. Ex 20:12). Of the Ten Commandments, the first four deal with God's requirement of man towards Him. The latter six deal with God's requirement of man's relationship with his fellow mankind. The commandment to honor one's parents comes first among the latter six. This shows how important it is in the sight of God that we should honor our

parents. Let us take a look at some other biblical exhortations concerning this requirement that God has of us:

“Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old.” (Prov 23:22)

“Whoever curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in deep darkness.” (Prov 20:20)

“The eye that mocks his father, and scorns obedience to his mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out.” (Prov 30:17)

One phenomenon in this technological age that has gained the scrutiny of sociologists and psychologists is the subtle reversal of roles in many families. Children seem to have gained more and more social advantages over their parents. It is not totally surprising to find families in which the children have more technological knowledge than the parents. The children are completely at ease with computer-related tasks while many a parent may be struggling to catch up with new software and computer gimmicks out on the market. With immigrant families, we often see the children wielding more power to function well in society with the one advantage they have over their parents – they speak the language of the society much more fluently.

Many of us today live against such a sociological backdrop. Unfortunately, not many people realize the hidden harms in this phenomenon. Wisdom, emotional stability and strength of mind to handle the ups and downs of everyday life do not come with education or technological adeptness. They are acquired over the years through life experiences, and most importantly, from a consistent and faithful walk with God. The strength of character in parents and their pivotal role in sustaining the family are often neglected. Many teenagers fail to see the wisdom of their parents until much later in life. As a result, many teenage problems could actually have been circumvented, had the teenagers heeded the advice of their elders.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss as a class your views about this phenomenon. How might this phenomenon affect the life of faith of teenagers and young adults?
2. Recount some of the wise advice you have received from your elders.

3. What are some things you can do to show your respect for your parents now and in the future?

R E F L E C T I O N & P R A Y E R



The last verse in the book of Judges says, “In those days, there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 21:25). The world we live in today can be likened to the period of the judges. It is politically incorrect to talk about a “standard,” much less a “biblical standard” as a guide to life. Hence, we see all kinds of people and actions in our world today. We also see more broken hearts, broken homes and alienated individuals. It is important for us not to sway according to whatever tides there are out in the world. From times of old until today, we have innumerable witnesses to the fact that if we hold fast to the principles that God has set in the Bible, we are right with God and all will be well. May God bless us with wisdom to always seek His will and His righteousness.