

Journey Through the Bible (46)
Period of the Judges (7)
Trouble and hope
Judges 17-21, Ruth

Tonight, we continue our study through the 17 time periods of Bible history. Last month, we concluded the timeline of period 8 – the judges. However, there are still a few events associated with that period that we want to address. There are 3 events that we want to address in this lesson.

I. Trouble in Israel

- a. The later part of the book of judges is somewhat of an appendix to the time period of the judges. It records 2 sad and troubling events that show the depth of depravity that Israel sank to during that period. The timing of these events during the period of the judges which lasted between 350 and 450 years, were likely fairly early. We glean this from various descriptions and the names of various Israelites. As I begin this section, let us notice Judges 17:6, *“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.”*; 18:1, 19:1 repeats the idea of no king and then 21:25 concludes the book, *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes*. THAT describes the problem with Israel – an unwillingness to follow YHWH as their only God and His priesthood.
- b. Micah’s idolatry – Judges 17-18
 - i. 17:1-5 - in Ephraim there was a man named Micah. He had taken money from his mother and returned it. “Blessing” him, she took the money and made an idol out of it and placed it in her son’s house. He also made an ephod and consecrated one of his sons to be priest.
 - ii. 17:7-13 – There was a Levite from Bethlehem who came to Ephraim to the house of Micah. Being a Levite, Micah offered to make him priest. NOTE: From this it is obvious Micah knew that his son was NOT qualified to be priest. Neither was the Levite, but in his eyes he was closer to what the law taught so he made him priest, *Then Micah said, “Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!”* (vs. 13)
 - iii. 18:1-26. the tribe of Dan was seeking an inheritance for itself (they wanted more land – Joshua 19:47 describes the children of Dan seeking to enlarge their territory for a small band of their tribe. The account in our text could be describing this in more detail.). They send 5 men to spy out a city called Laish. On their way they come to the house of Micah and recognize the voice of the Levite “priest”. They ask him to inquire of YHWH about their success. He tells them they will be successful. As they finish spying out their new territory, they return and prepare their clan to conquer the land. ON their way to conquer this city (far north of Israel), they stop at Micah’s house and raid it. They take his idols while the “priest” is watching. When he asks what they are doing, they ask him to come with them reasoning, “Be our priest. Which is better to be priest over one house or over an entire tribe?” The Levite betrays Micah and goes with them. When Micah pursues them to get back his possessions, the Danites threaten him because of their strength. Micah has no choice but to return. NOTE: Because of his sins, how could he possibly turn to YHWH for help?
 - iv. 18:27-31 – the Danites go to Laish, defeat the people, burn the city, rebuild it and rename it Dan. The Danites then set up the carved image, and establish their own priesthood. NOTE Vs. 31, *So they set up for themselves Micah’s carved image which he made, all the time that*

the house of God was in Shiloh. God did NOT recognize their idol. It is also worthy of note that some time later, Jeroboam will set up one of his golden calves in Dan (1 Kings 12:29-30)

c. The sin of Benjamin – Judges 19-21

- i. An even darker event takes place among the people of Benjamin. Note again 19:1, there was no king...
- ii. 19:1-21 - We read of a Levite staying in Ephraim who took a concubine (as wife) from Bethlehem in Judah. But she played the harlot and returned to Bethlehem for 4 months. Her husband then returned to retrieve his wife. Her father urges him to stay awhile. He does for a few days, but after the 5th day he leaves in the afternoon. As night approaches they are near a city called Jebus (near Jerusalem – as of yet it was NOT under Israelite control), but the Levite refuses because it was a city of foreigners. Instead they go to Gibeah in Benjamin (vs. 12-14). He started to spend the night in an open square because he found no lodging. But then an old man passing by who offered him lodging in his home.
- iii. 19:22-30 - as they were enjoying themselves, “perverted men” surrounded the house and wanted the master of the house to give the Levite to them so that they could violate him (this is homosexuality). For whatever reason, the man instead gives them his virgin daughter and the concubine. The men are not satisfied and abused the concubine all night and let her go. The next morning she lies dead at the door of the old man. The Levite picked her up and put her on his donkey. He then took her body and cut it into 12 pieces and sent it throughout the territory of Israel. NOTE: Vs. 30 notes no such deed had been done before (though later something similar would be done with an Ox – 1 Samuel 11:7) . It was shocking and prompted the men of Israel to gather at Mizpah to decide what to do.
- iv. 20:1-28 - After the Levite explained what happened, they determined to punish the Benjamites who had done this. There were some 400,000 soldiers, of which 40,000 were selected to go to Gibeah and demand that they turn over the perverted men (vs. 13). But the men of Benjamin refused and gathered together and fought against Israel. 26,700 Benjamites went to war against the whole army of Israel (400,000). Vs. 18 – they inquire of YHWH who should go first. “Judah”! They arise in battle and the Benjamites defeat Israel – 22,000 are killed. The children of Israel weep and again inquire of YHWH. They are told to go, but the 2nd day, another 18,000 are defeated by Benjamin. Vs. 26- The children of Israel weep and fasted until evening. Then they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to YHWH. The Israelites again inquire of YHWH through Phinehas the priest. YHWH tells them to go and this time He would deliver Benjamin into their hands.
- v. 20:29-48 describes the defeat of Gibeah. It was similar to Ai, as they again attacked the city, but when the Benjamites came out to pursue them, they fled and were pursued. Then other men attacked the vulnerable city and burned it. When the Benjamites saw their city burning they panicked and fled. But Israel defeated them. Some 25,600 Benjamite soldiers died in that battle. Also every city of Benjamin was attacked and struck them down with the edge of the sword.
- vi. 21:1- - after the battle, Israel made a rash oath at Mizpah that none of their sons would give daughters to the men of Benjamin as wives. As a result, they realized Benjamin was doomed to die out. They wept bitterly. The next morning they worshipped YHWH and found a way to preserve the tribe. No one had come from Jabesh Gilead, so the city was struck but 400 virgins were spared and brought to Shiloh. But it was not enough for all the men. So they devised a plan that during a feast at Shiloh, the men of Benjamin who did not have wives would be in hiding and would catch wives for themselves. Thus the tribe of Benjamin, though smaller was spared.

- vii. 21:25. *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*
And thus ends the book of Judges.

II. Hope in Israel – Ruth

- a. With these two tragic events in Israel during the period of the judges, we find periods of hope. The Book of Ruth is one such time.
- b. Ruth 1:1-5 – at some point there was a famine in Israel, so a man named Elimelech from the tribe of Judah, took his wife Naomi and their 2 sons, Mahon and Chilion, and moved to Moab. The two sons married in Moab – Orpah and Ruth. Then Elimelech and the 2 sons die.
- c. 1:6-13 - Naomi being old tells her two daughters-in-law to return to their land because she could not provide heirs for them. She intended to return to Judah. The women both weep and Orpah returns to her people.
- d. 1:14-22 – But Ruth determines to stay with Naomi and return with her to Judah. Note vs. 16-17 which describes her loyalty. Naomi and Ruth return to Judah and the people are glad to see her. But she asks them to call her Mara (bitterness).
- e. 2:1-18 - introduces us to Boaz, who was a relative of Elimelech. Ruth offers to go and gather food for Naomi and herself. She comes to the field of Boaz (unaware of the family tie). When Boaz sees her and finds out who she is, he tells her to only glean from his fields and orders the men to leave her alone. In fact, he takes extra measures to make sure she receives more than enough. NOTE vs. 10 where Ruth asks why he has shown her so much favor. He replies in vs. 11-12. She is protected and brings back abundant barley to Naomi.
- f. 2:19-23 Naomi asks where she had gleaned and was told it was in the field of Boaz. Naomi praises YHWH for not forgetting about her (vs. 20). Ruth continues to glean until the end of both barley and wheat season.
- g. 3:1-11 - Naomi then seeks security for Ruth. She tells her that when Boaz laid down to sleep at his threshing floor, that she was to uncover his feet and lay down there. She did, and about midnight, Boaz is startled that she is there. When he learns it is Ruth, she asks him to take her as a close relative. NOTE: This is invoking the Levirate vow which was intended to preserve lineage in the event of the death of a son before he had a male heir. Boaz praises her for her kindness (vs. 10-11) because she was loyal to Naomi instead of going after younger men.
- h. 3:12-18 - He agrees to redeem her, but FIRST there was a closer relative that had first opportunity. He gives her a large portion of food and sends her home to Naomi to wait for an answer. Naomi lets Ruth know the matter would be addressed before the end of the day.
- i. 4:1-12 -The next day, Boaz goes to the gate of the city (where business was usually conducted) and sees this closer relative. In the business he offers him opportunity to redeem the field for Naomi. The relative is willing UNTIL he finds out it also included taking Ruth as a Levirate wife. He is unable, lest it interfere with his own inheritance. So Boaz agrees to marry Ruth. The elders of the city bless him and her.
- j. 4:13-22 – Boaz takes Ruth as his wife, and she conceives and has a son. Naomi praises YHWH and blesses Ruth. Naomi helped to raise the child. His name was Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.
- k. NOTE: We find here a glimmer of hope in a time of darkness. The genealogy of David is why this book is recorded.

III. Lessons to consider

- a. “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” – there is great danger when we choose our own ways over the ways of God. We CANNOT serve God when we refuse to obey His will – Luke 6:46, *“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?”*
- b. The lawlessness of idolatry – we find grievous consequences to those serving idols, ESPECIALLY when they profess to be following YHWH. Self-made religion is an illusion – Matthew 15:8-9.

- c. EVEN when images were created in the name of YHWH, they were still an abomination. In fact that violated the 2nd commandment (Exodus 20:4-5)
- d. When someone is willing to compromise God's word for you, they will do it again for someone else when they offer them something better. A willingness to compromise truth to any degree reveals one's character.
- e. The consequences of moral decline within a society = it is sad to consider how quickly the tribe of Benjamin degraded in their moral stand. Like doctrinal error, when we loosen moral values, the natural progress is further degradation. The next generation will very likely take it further.
- f. Repentance leads one back to God – after 2 defeats by Benjamine, Israel finally got it, and for a brief moment they repented and returned to God. When we have wandered away, we MUST repent. And when we do, we can have confidence that God will return to us.
- g. Be careful when you make vows – we have addressed this in times past. Vows are serious! Therefore, they need to be carefully considered before you make one. E.g., marriage is intended to be for life, obeying the gospel is a vow to make Jesus your Lord, etc.
- h. Ruth – a lesson in God's providence.
- i. Loyalty during difficult times – Ruth remained loyal to Naomi during her darkest hours. Proverbs 17:17, *A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.*
- j. We all face choices in this life – Ruth made a choice. It was the right one.
- k. Integrity is often noticed – recall how Boaz showed kindness to Ruth because of her integrity.
- l. Ruth is one of the few women mentioned in the lineage of Matthew 1:5. Here we have a foreigner mentioned in the lineage of Jesus.

And thus we conclude our study of the period of the judges. This will lead into the United Kingdom with King Saul. Does your life reflect trouble or hope? Think about it!