

## RUTH

As one finishes reading the book of Judges, you have to wonder how God is going to fulfill his promises through such wicked people. The book of Ruth shows the faithfulness of an ordinary family through whom God would raise up a godly seed to rule over his nation.

The setting is familiar: Israel is being disciplined for sin by a famine sent by God. One family chooses self-exile (instead of repentance) and all of the men die. The Israelites learn a lesson in faithfulness and devotion from a non-Israelite who leaves her family and idols to commit herself to God and his people (in Naomi). The Lord blesses that great faith by giving her a righteous husband and a family that would produce Israel's righteous king.

### GOING FURTHER

What are the problems in reading the book of Judges as a series of moral tales of people to be imitated or not?

Who is the hero of the book of Judges? How is this clear in the book? What response should it provoke?

What application can be made from the book today? What effect should comparing our world to the world of the judges have on us? (Think in terms of "king," and be more specific than "our nation should repent.")

What would we lose if the book of Ruth was not in the Bible?

### PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read 1 Samuel. Think about how it relates to the book of Judges and the promises God has made in Genesis–Ruth. What is God doing? Why does he raise up Samuel? Why does he raise up Saul? What is so special about David? God could have cut all of the "intermediate" action out and just crowned David from the start. According to hints in the book, why did he do it this way?

## THE NATION WITHOUT A RIGHTEOUS KING (JUDGES, RUTH)

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read the book of Judges. Pay careful attention to chapters 1-2. As you read the whole book, think about what Israel's problems are. How does this book contrast with Joshua? What is the solution?

Read the book of Ruth, a beautiful story which occurred "in the days when the judges ruled." How does this book contrast with Judges? What does it say about Israel's hope?

### OUTLINE OF JUDGES

- I. The persistent failure of the Israelites to keep the covenant results in their living among the nations (1:1–3:6).
- II. The persistent failure of the Israelites to keep the covenant results in external oppression that the Lord delivers them from repeatedly (3:7–16:31).
- III. The persistent failure of the Israelites to keep the covenant results in internal dissolution of societal and moral standards (17:1–21:25).

### OUTLINE OF RUTH

- I. Ruth demonstrates devotion to Yahweh in clinging to Naomi when she is left empty (1:1-22).
- II. Ruth and Boaz demonstrate devotion to Yahweh in their provision for Naomi's physical needs (2:1-23).
- III. Ruth and Boaz demonstrate devotion to Yahweh in their agreement to marry (3:1-18).
- IV. Yahweh demonstrates *hesed* [lovingkindness] to Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz in giving them a child who would produce the nation's great king (4:1-22).

### MAJOR THEMES OF JUDGES AND RUTH

The book of Judges is about the sinfulness of the people, the grace of God, and the need for a righteous king. The book of Ruth shows God's grace to a righteous family leading to the gift of a godly king.

## THE SINFULNESS OF THE PEOPLE

The book looks backwards to Deuteronomy and Joshua where the righteous commands were given and obeyed. The obvious problem with the Israelites in the book of Judges is that they are not faithful to their covenant with God, as Moses had instructed them and Joshua had reminded them. God was faithful, and the faithful response to covenant-breaking was the covenant curses (Deut 28). Thus God brought foreign armies and famine to provoke his people to repentance and restoration.

## THE GRACE OF GOD

Every page of the Bible resounds with the grace of God and the book of Judges is no different. While the Lord was faithful to punish his people for rebelling against his kingship, he was gracious to deliver them when they cried out for help. The book of Judges records many cases of God saving his people and no instances when he failed to listen to their cry. As is God's style, he delivered his people through a human leader that he raised up. In these years of rot and decay in Israel, God often raised up leaders that shared the sins and weaknesses of the people. Samson was grossly immoral and Jephthah lacked any kind of moral compass. Gideon was a faithless coward and Deborah led the nation in the absence of male leadership. Yet God used these weak vessels to deliver his nation and bring them back into fellowship with him.

## THE NEED FOR A RIGHTEOUS KING

The book of Judges is in many ways a preparation for the monarchy. Indeed, without the book of Judges, one would not appreciate the request of Israel's elders for a king when Samuel was getting old. The horror of returning to the days when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" because "Israel had no king" motivated the nation to move to monarchical rule. Judges shows both the strengths and weaknesses of submitting to human leadership. On the one hand, the book regularly records that "during [the judge's] lifetime, the land enjoyed peace forty years." In the absence of a leader raised up by God, the nation was quick to

rebel against the Lord and enter oppression. On the other hand, the leaders were failures in significant ways. The book then is an argument not just for a *king*, but for a *righteous king*.

## THE DOWNWARD CYCLE

Though Judges is often seen as a book of cycles (sin, suffering, supplication, salvation), it is better seen as a downward spiral. The progression is evident in many ways, including the character of the leaders. Two of the early judges, Othniel and Deborah, seem to do no wrong, but the last two, Jephthah and Samson, violate the most basic principles of morality. The progression is seen in the prayer for deliverance, such that in the last cycle the Israelites never even cry out to the Lord. The final notice that the land was at peace is in the time of Gideon (8:28). The length of the rules of the judges or of the peace that they brought generally decreases over the course of the book. The first four recorded lengths averaging fifty years, whereas the final four average a mere eleven.

The representation of the tribe of Ephraim illustrates the general decline. Near the beginning, the Ephraimites are faithful in assisting Ehud to rid the land of the Moabites (3:27). But with Gideon's campaign, they do not come to the battle until the victory has been won (8:1). Jephthah appeals to them for help in fighting the Ammonites, but they show up only in time to collect the spoils and with a belligerent attitude (12:1-3).

Finally, the book concludes with two episodes which reveal in sordid detail how the Israelites have become like the Canaanites they were to replace. The sin of idolatry is not just the sin of a single man or family, but in chapters 17-18 the *entire tribe* of Dan hires a priest and steals a shrine in order to establish their own worship apart from the Lord who brought them out of Egypt (a fact mentioned 8x in the book). In chapter 19, one town in Benjamin gang-rapes an Israelite woman. The situation deteriorates when the *entire tribe* of Benjamin chooses to defend the perpetrators.