**Biblical Theology**

Lesson 7 – A Nation Like Other Nations (Judges – 1 Samuel 15)

1. The death of Moses and Joshua left Israel without a singular leader to guide the nation. As a result, the settled tribes act more like a confederation. Each tribe has its own difficulties and acts independently of one another. Not only did they have to deal with external enemies, but the tribes also had disputes among the tribes. Van Gemeren writes, “The religious, social, political, and moral distinctions of Israel as a holy nation were being obliterated by its refusal to live up to God’s expectations.”
2. This period also is marked by God’s discipline of His people. Though Israel deserved to be consumed by God’s wrath and kicked out of the land immediately as Adam and Eve were, nevertheless, God in His patience disciplined them repeatedly by handing them over to their enemies. Van Gemeren again writes, “Out of His fatherly concern, God made Israel feel uncomfortable with the nations so as to bring them back to Himself.”
3. Conversely, this period is also repeatedly marked by God’s grace to Israel in that he repeatedly sent them a judge or deliverer to rescue His people from their enemies and give them rest.
4. Judges 1-3:6 sets up the problem of this period. The Israelites grow comfortable with their pagan neighbors. Their military failure to obey the Lord leads to social and religious failure. They begin to adopt pagan ways of living, including the idolatry of those around them as well as intermarrying with them.
5. Though the tribes repeatedly sinned, in their distress, they would call upon the Lord who would graciously raise up a judge to deliver them and give them a temporary respite. However, the Israelites soon forgot the grace and mercy of God went back to their sinning ways.
6. This will be the entire cycle of Judges: Sin🡪Delivered over to enemy🡪distress🡪Plea to Yahweh for mercy🡪Judge/Deliverer🡪Temporary Rest🡪Sin; Van Gemeren says that this cycle shows that there is no movement in Israel’s history at this time. They go through cycles of crises which reinforces the idea of meaninglessness.
7. The major refrain of Judges becomes: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Even the judges did not unify the tribes into a nation. Gideon who was one of the best of the judges was only able to mobilize 4 of the tribes together – Asher, Manasseh (Gideon’s tribe), Zebulun, and Naphtali. Ephraim actually gets made at Gideon for not calling them to help in the fight. Needless to say, just as there was strife among the sons of Jacob, so now there is strife among their descendants who are named after them.
8. D. A. Carson says, “You read the book of Judges and the cycles downward are so appalling that in the last 2 or 3 chapters, it’s really difficult to read them in public because they are so grotesque and barbaric.” The message of the Judges is that the people of God need a king who will unify them together.
9. In this same time period, we are introduced to the story of Naomi and Ruth. Ruth 1:1- “In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land…” A famine was a covenant curse that God had talked about back in Deuteronomy 28 and which He promised He would bring for the people’s disobedience.
10. Ruth is commended as being a loyal woman and in 3:11 she is called “a worthy woman,” that is, a woman of noble character. Ruth is a picture of loyalty and commitment to the covenant people of God. She is a picture of what Israel should have looked like! Boaz becomes a picture of a kinsman-redeemer. He is a faithful man who is willing to be obedient to the Lord’s law as well as provide for those who are in need (3:12-18). Together the story illustrates that the people of God need a kinsman-redeemer to deliver them from their spiritual poverty, they are supposed to be loyal and committed to the Lord, and God is going to bring these themes together in the king.
11. That is the other purpose in Ruth. God is going to use a Gentile and an ordinary Israelite to bring a king to the people of God.
12. This brings us to 1 Samuel where we are introduced to the prophet Samuel, Saul who would become king, and a shepherd boy named David. Now movement begins to pick up again in the history of Israel.
13. Samuel acts as a transition from the period of the judges to the monarchy of Israel. He is called a prophet of the Lord (1 Sam 3:19-20), he serves as a priest (1 Sam 2:18), and is the last judge of Israel (1 Sam 7:6).
14. But the people are dissatisfied with Samuel, and especially because he is a poor parent (1 Sam 8:3-5) and they demand a king appointed to them by Samuel. Notice the reason they give for wanting a king. In 1 Samuel 8:5, the elders of Israel say, “Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations.” The Israelites, just like in the period of Judges, want to be like the world. And Yahweh indicts them because this is a rejection of God as being king over them (1 Sam 8:7-9).
15. Samuel anoints Saul as king over Israel who has some initial success as king in delivering the Israelites from the Philistines (1 Sam 9:15-16) and the Ammonites (1 Sam 11; 13:1-7). But because Saul becomes impatient and offers the sacrifice instead of waiting for Samuel to offer the sacrifice, the Lord tells Saul that the kingship of Israel will be taken away from him and given to another who is “a man after his own heart” (1 Sam 13:8-14; 15).
16. When we consider the Israelites who were first hearing these books read, additional layers of understanding are opened up to us.
    1. Those reading Judges under the rule of Saul or David would naturally have questions about the Promised Land. The Philistines are a severe thorn in their side and even destroyed the city of Shiloh where the tabernacle first resided (1 Sam 1:3; 4). Jerusalem is still in the hand of the Jebusites. Why are God’s people being plagued in the so-called Promised Land? Not because of God’s unfaithfulness, but because of Israel’s unfaithfulness and that is the story told in Judges.
    2. Judges also shows their tribalism. While unified under Moses and Joshua, that disintegrates after them with generations that had forgotten the Lord and did not know His wonderful works. So, Judges shows the threat of civil war looming among the tribes. It begins with Israel fighting the Canaanites (Judg 1:1) and ends with the Israelites fighting against the tribe of Benjamin (Judg 20).
    3. Van Gemeren says, “The Book of Judges provides a rationale for kingship. The Book of Judges explains the danger inherent in kingship as well.” Between the tension of independence and unity, it provides both warrant and warning.
    4. Judges also exhorts Israel to not overemphasize tribal allegiances. The judges came from a variety of tributes and regions. Never was their tribal affiliation given as the reason a person was chosen as a judge.
17. Considered as part of the storyline of Scripture, additional insight is given into these verses and books of Scripture.
    1. The need for the Word of God. 1 Samuel 3:1 tells us that the Word of God was rare in the period of the Judges. This is quite remarkable given the preponderance of God’s Word given through Moses and Joshua. And Judges shows what happens to the people of God when His Word is missing from them. It is in this context that God raises up Samuel as a prophet and restores the Word of God being given to His people, but all Samuel does is point back to the Word of God as given through Moses – put away your foreign gods and worship Yahweh only (1 Sam 7). This theme will continue with the prophets later in Israel’s history as they constantly call the people back to the Word of God through Moses. This finds its culmination in THE Word of God – Jesus Christ, who calls the people of God back to the revelation given to Moses at the Sermon on the Mount. He teaches the people that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4, Lk 4:4). It’s the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit in which believers fight the spiritual battle (Eph. 6:17; Heb 4:12). At His return, Jesus has a sword coming out of His mouth (Rev. 19:15; see also Rev 1:16, 2:12).
    2. God’s disciplinary acts. Moses had warned Israel that if they did not wipe out the inhabitants of the Promised Land that they would be a “snare” to Israel (Deut. 7:16). They did not and so the Lord makes them a snare for Israel (Judg 2:3). The Lord by these foreign oppressors was teaching His people that they were to look to Him alone. These oppressors were the Lord’s instruments of justice towards His chosen ones. He disciplined them through the nations, then He disciplined them by giving them the despot Saul, the king who they had wanted. Yet, He also delivered them from their oppressors through judges and gave them Samuel as prophet-priest-judge who delivered them from the Philistines. God is a Father disciplining His child and this continues today (Deut. 8:5; 1 Cor. 11:32; Heb. 12:6, 9-10). Christ disciplines us individually through trials and tests, but also through church government provided in the elders who oversee and exercise church discipline (Matt. 16) for the purity of the Church and the repentance of a professing believer. Van Gemeren writes, “The period of Israel as ‘a nation like the other nations’ brings out how short-lived Israel’s enjoyments of the covenantal benefits were and how the Lord disciplines His people like a father.”
    3. The need for a king. Yahweh recognized that the people needed a king even back in the days of Moses (Deut. 17:14-20). The difference is that the people were to let God choose the king, rather than choosing him themselves. This period shows what happens to God’s people when they do not have a king as their leader.
    4. The need for a kinsman-redeemer. Boaz’ taking of Ruth means a grandson for Naomi which means she has an heir to take care of her and be an heir for the line of Elimelech. Just as Boaz pays the full price to redeem Ruth because he loves her and the result is restored life as well as praising of God, so too God does this with Israel. She was in bondage to slavery and God redeems them by the blood of the Passover Lamb because he has set His covenant love upon her, which results in deliverance from bondage and redemption from the house of slavery. But Israel doesn’t ultimately praise the Lord, so God sends Jesus as the new Israel to redeem true Israel as the kinsman-redeemer (he had to be made like us) and He pays the full price with His own blood and the result is newness of life and true Israel, the Church, is the Bride of Christ. The Gospels are the story of our kinsman-redeemer and the rest of the NT is the story of how the bride is act and what she is to believe while waiting her kinsman-redeemer to return for her.
    5. The land promise to Abraham. During this stage of Israel’s story, the promises of God are curtailed somewhat. At the beginning of Judges, there is hope that they can completely conquer the land, but they fail and because of their disobedience they are forced to co-exist with the pagan inhabitants of the land. Due to this, the borders and boundaries of the tribes fluctuate. Even Samuel warns them that continued disobedience will lead to exile (1 Sam. 12:24-25).
    6. Blessing to the nations. Van Gemeren writes that at this stage in their history Israel is too preoccupied with its own problems to be a light to the nations and cause the blessing of Abraham to come to them. Nevertheless, God brings the Moabite Ruth into the covenant people and into the line of King David, and ultimately King Jesus. In spite of His people’s failures, God is able to bring about His own word and His own promises.