

The Book of Ruth – 1

These Are the Days of the Judges

Introduction

Several years ago, when many Syrian refugees were coming to Canada, we as a Church examined ways where we could be part helping. One way we discerned was to help ministries who were actively involved in assisting refugees. Let's imagine a different story! What if a Jordanian widow arrived in Canada, even here in Elk Point! What if she came to our Church? How would she feel as she would enter for the first time? Who would talk to her? What would be some of the issues she would face, with no means of support?

At a time after the conquest of Canaan and before the kingship of Saul, a Moabite (Moab is modern-day Jordan) widow come to Bethlehem to find refuge and a home. Her name was Ruth. Over the next few weeks we are going make ourselves available for God to speak to us through this story.

Why?

Why did I choose the Book of Ruth? Well there are several reasons:

- #1. Ruth is a female Job, so to speak, and her story addresses the sovereignty and providence of God in suffering. For many in our church family you are going through things where you need to hear that God is in control. He has a plan. You will need to know that God hasn't dropped the ball. He is still on the job.
- #2. It's also a book about a godly female that rises to the top in a culture of patriarchy. Extreme patriarchy is a society where everything revolves around the man. Men dominate. Men make the decisions. Unfortunately, men can be abusive in these kinds cultures. Surely, we are living in a day like no other where abusive men are being called out. Ruth is also a story about a man of great standing, wealth and power who shows great respect to women. We need to look carefully at the man called Boaz.
- #3. Ruth is a story of God's people seeking refuge, seeking rest, seeking comfort and a future.
- #4. The context of the story of Ruth is nothing short of a backdrop of political and moral failure. That part of Ruth's story is what we are going to look at today.

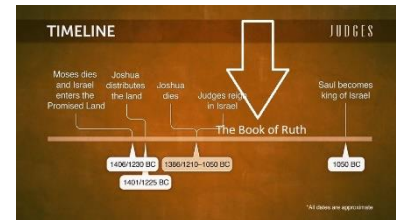
One thing different that I have done in this series that you will note in your Sermon Notes, is the inclusion of a Study Guide for individual or group study. Many of our Bible studies will be ending and for those who still want the exercise of engaging with someone through the week, this will help facilitate that. These Sermon Notes and Study Guide will also be available on the Church website.

Let us pray. My text for this week is found in the first phrase of Ruth, chapter 1, verse 1: *"In the days when the judges ruled . . ."* (Ruth 1:1a, ESV). This sets the historical background to this story. The question that we are going to pursue this morning is this: "What are the 'days of the judges'?"

The Days of the Judges

It is believed that the story of Ruth occurred about 1100 years before Christ. As the text says, it was during the time of the Judges. This period of Israel's history is recorded in the book by the same name: Judges.

Let me just give an overview of the book of Judges. An interesting phenomenon occurs in movement of Israel to Canaan under the leadership of Moses. Moses had an understudy, a man that would take his place and lead Israel into the Promised Land. His name was Joshua. Joshua obeys the Lord and leads Israel into occupying the land of Canaan. The Book of Joshua ends with Joshua dying at the age of 110. Then Israel enters the period known as Judges.



In Israel, at that time, there was no cohesive, unifying leadership in the nation. The story of the Judges ends with this comment: *"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* (Judges 21:25, ESV). That phrase was repeated 3 other times in the Book emphasizing the point that the society of individualistic: everyone doing what was right – as they determined what was right.

The book of Judges is a story of Israel's ups and downs:

1. The people would abandon the Lord and compromise with false religions;
2. Then God would punish them by raising up a foreign power to oppress them;
3. The people would respond in distress and ask God for deliverance;
4. God would raise up a judge or leader to help them; and
5. Soon the cycle would just repeat.

An illustration (from Judges 6-8)

For seven years the land of Israel was invaded with roving bands of terrorists. They were from the Midianite and Amalekite nations. At harvest they plundered crops and cattle. The reason for the demise was Israel's idolatry to Baal worship. God raised up a young man by the name of Gideon.

Gideon's first assignment was to destroy his father's altar of Baal in the family's backyard (Judg. 6:25). That took courage! As the Midianite oppression intensified Gideon called the nation to war. The numbers were 32,000 for Israel versus 135,000 Midianites. Not good odds. After dismissing the fearful and afraid, only 10,000 remained. Gideon's band was now outnumbered about 13 to 1.

"There are still too many," God told Gideon. Gideon culled the army. Now only 300 soldiers remained (Judg. 7:5-7). The Midianites outnumbered Gideon's band 450 to 1. The story includes a glorious victory for God and His people. But the story ends on a sad note. Gideon himself chose to worship idols and we

read this sad ending: *"As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god. And the people of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side"* (Judges 8:33–34, ESV).

Judges is a history lesson of what happens when a people live idolatrous, self-centered lives. Judges is a story about what happens when people seek to please self, instead of God. Why is this history important to us today?

- #1. First, we go to Romans 15:4 (ESV), "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." The period known as the "Judges" is given to us for our instruction, endurance and encouragement – ultimately for our hope.
- #2. Secondly, the New Testament makes us starkly aware of the fact that we too are living in the "days of the Judges". Notice 2 Timothy 3:2–4 (ESV), "² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God . . ."

Unfortunately, that approach is deadly. In Proverbs, twice we read: *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."* (Proverbs 14:12; & 16:25, ESV). That phrase, "the days of the judges" is a death sentence. It is a lethal phrase. It's a lifestyle that will end in certain death. The deliverers God sent to Israel were flawed and temporary. But the ultimate deliverer, Jesus Christ, has no flaws. His rescue of those who believe in him is complete and everlasting. By His death and resurrection, He delivers Christians from the penalty of sin. At His Second Coming He will deliver His people from the presence of sin. Today, His work is to deliver us from the power of sin.

How does Christ deliver His Church from the idolatrous influences of that tempt us?

1. He gives to His people a new heart. *"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."* (Ezekiel 36:26–27, ESV)
2. He unites us with Christ's death and resurrection, thereby removing the mastery of sin. *"We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin."* (Romans 6:6, ESV)
3. He chastens those whom He loves. *"For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives."* (Hebrews 12:6, ESV). God does this in many ways, even permitting failure and disappointment that we might return to Him. *"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word."* (Psalm 119:67, ESV)

4. He gives us the indwelling reality and work of the Spirit. *“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”* (Galatians 5:17, ESV). Paul could write confidently *“for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”* (Philippians 2:13, ESV)

Application

As God’s people today, we too can be drawn away from the path by independency and idolatry. Yet God has raised up for us the ultimate deliverer in Jesus Christ. He delivers us both now and ultimately from sin’s consequences. I am addressing Christians: If you find yourself drawn away, doing what’s right in your own eyes – placing the wrong value on people and things, today God is calling us to repent and believe the Gospel. How do we do that?

1. We must admit that when other people and things preoccupy our minds and our interests; and when these things become more important to us than our Savior, they become our idols. Idolatry is a lie that started in the Garden and says, “God is holding out on you. God isn’t enough.” Idolatry is unbelief.
2. We need to turn our eyes on Christ and acknowledge that He came to earth to show us that He is enough. He came to give us life, and life more abundantly. He came to die for our sin of idolatry. Every pain and every torment He went through on Calvary was to atone for our sin of idolatry.
3. In the Gospel, He has brought us into union with Himself. He has given us the Holy Spirit so that we would no longer be controlled by sin, that we would no longer live for self, but for Him. He calls us to surrender to that truth; to yield to His will.
4. He gives us many and precious promises for set us free from the deceit of idols. He tells us that in Christ we have abundant life; that in Christ no good thing will He withhold from us; and that in Christ, as we seek His Kingdom first, all our needs will be met.

Perhaps you can identify with the Apostle Paul today: *“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord . . .”* (Romans 7:21–25a, ESV).

Discussion Guide

These Are The Days of the Judges

1. As you anticipate studying the Book of Ruth, which one of Pastor Jim's reasons appeal to you the most? Check the right one(s) and share why?
 - ☐ The Book will address the sovereignty and providence of God in suffering.
 - ☐ The Book will reveal how godly men and women can rise to the top in a man-dominated world.
 - ☐ The Book will show where to find rest and refuge.
 - ☐ The Book will point to living in a world that is failing morally.
2. Read Judges 2:16-23
3. The "days of the judges" was cyclical: Repent → Restored → Failure → Repent, etc. If someone came to you for help and said their spiritual life was up and down, up and down, how might you help them, Scripturally? [Consider James 4:8-9 for example]
4. We too live in "the days of the Judges". In the book of Judges, the people needed a king who would lead them eternally and not fail himself. In the book of Judges, the people needed a king who would guide them through righteous and holy statutes. In the book of Judges, the people needed a king who save them from evil and lead them into righteousness. Pastor Jim identified 4 ways that King Jesus has delivered us from the present power of sin. They can be entitled: The New Birth; Union with Christ; Fatherly Discipline; and the Indwelling Spirit. What other ways does Christ help us to overcome sin and temptation in our lives?
5. Pastor Jim read from 2 Timothy 3:2-4 in the message. In what ways have you observed these "last days" characteristics in your life and relationships? How accurate is that portrayal in today's world? Continue to read 2 Timothy 3. What was Paul's advice to Timothy considering this diagnosis?
6. When the Church looks to other deliverers (apart from Christ) they will continue to fall into sin and oppression. They serve for a time but are destined to fail. What graphic picture did God paint of Israel's choice of what would make them happy. See Jeremiah 2:11-13. How does that word picture help us see the value of Christ and the emptiness of false saviors?

Personal Question

7. The judges or deliverers were temporary and flawed. It is possible that we can mistakenly seek other things or people to meet our needs, other than Christ. These are called “functional saviors”. In a book by Jerry Bridges¹ helps us identify these saviors by answering the following questions:

- a. I am preoccupied with _____.
- b. If only _____, then I would be happy.
- c. I get my sense of significance from _____.
- d. I would protect and preserve _____ at any cost.
- e. I fear losing _____.
- f. The thing that gives me the greatest pleasure is _____.
- g. When I lose _____ I get angry, resentful, frustrated, anxious, or depressed.
- h. For me, life depends on _____.

Has anyone or anything become “a functional savior” in your life? Identify it. Repent of it. See it considering the Gospel. Pray for deliverance. Walk by the Spirit. Confide in a prayer partner.

¹ “Sometimes we look to other things to satisfy and fulfill us—to ‘save’ us. These ‘functional saviors’ can be any object of dependence we embrace that isn’t God. They become the source of our identity, security, and significance because we hold an idolatrous affection for them in our hearts. They preoccupy our minds and consume our time and resources. They make us feel good and somehow even make us feel righteous. Whether we realize it or not, they control us, and we worship them.” (Bridges & Bevington, [*The Bookends of the Christian Life*](#), p. 72)