



THE HISTORICAL BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Lesson 3

Lesson 3 Commentary

Judges and Ruth

Lesson 4 Questions

The Kingdom of Israel – Part 1

Introduction

In the last session, we concentrated on a few issues in Joshua, related to (1) Joshua's similarity to Moses, (2) the lack of circumcision in the wilderness, and (3) the use of *herem* warfare. After "conquering" Canaan, there was a division of land among the tribes of Israel. However, it is clear in the end that there is much to be done to complete the conquest of the promised land. "When Joshua was old and advanced in years, the LORD said to him: Though now you are old and advanced in years, a very large part of the land still remains to be possessed."¹ In fact, after this statement by the author of Joshua, he (or she) goes on to list all the lands that have not been conquered. This issue will loom large in the Book of Judges.

We now turn to two books that are polar opposites of each other. If you read the Book of Judges from beginning to end (which I suggest you do at some point), your head will spin! You will wonder why the Holy Spirit inspired such stories. An overarching theme can be seen in the book of Judges in the statements that Israel lacks a king. "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in their own eyes."² "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in their own sight."³ After the turmoil of Judges, we move to a love story in the Book of Ruth. It is peaceful and lovely. There is no treachery or deceit. There are no harlots or drunken frenzies. No one stabs anyone through the head with a tent stake!! You simply see a woman and a man go through a loving courtship that leads to the very thing that Judges tells us there is not – a King in Israel.

¹ Josh 13:1. All biblical citations are from the NABRE.

² Judg 17:6.

³ Judg 21:25.

Judges

Before we get into the book, itself, here is a map of Israel after the apportionment of land.



The first two chapters of Judges are a prologue that show the deteriorating condition of Israel following the death of Joshua. Then we get into the stories of the Judges. Here is the outline of the six major, six minor, and one “anti-judge” (italicized in the table, below) that are covered in the major portion of the Book.⁴

Text	Six Major Judges	Six Minor Judges	Home of Judge	Primary Enemy	Years
3:7-11	Othniel		Judah	Mesopotamians	40
3:12-30	Ehud		Benjamin	Moabites	80
3:31		Shamgar	Southern Dan?	Philistines	?
4:1-5:31	Deborah		Ephraim	Canaanites	40
6:1-8:32	Gideon		Manasseh	Midianites	40
8:33-9:57	<i>Abimelech</i>		<i>Shechem</i>	<i>Other Israelites</i>	3
10:1-2		Tola	Issachar/Ephraim	?	23
10:3-5		Jair	Gad	?	22
10:6-12:7	Jephthah		Gad	Ammonites	6
12:8-10		Ibzan	Judah	?	7
12:11-12		Elon	Zebulun	?	10
12:13-15		Hillel	Ephraim	Amalekites?	8
13:11-16:31	Samson		Southern Dan	Philistines	20

In general, there is cycle that is repeated over and over again. “The central theme of Judges is the cycle of sin and punishment, repentance and deliverance.”⁵ The title, Judge, is not what we think of as a judge in our days. Nor is it a “king” figure. For the most part, it is a person who leads in delivering Israel in a time of crisis, usually in a military-type position. It does not appear that the Judges were “ruling” the entirety of the twelve tribes. Scholars, in general, speculate that they may have served concurrently over a specific area of Israel. There are hints, especially in the two stories at the end (after the stories of the 13 judges) that suggest there was some form of unity that existed between the tribes. Citing Victor Hamilton, Bergsma and Pitre remark “some scholars have also noted that the accounts of the major judges move in the geographical direction of south to north, linking the gradually increasing corruption with the movement from positive southern judges (such as Othniel and Ehud) to tragic and morally questionable northern judges (Samson and Jephthah).”⁶

⁴ John Bergsma and Brant Pitre, *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible: The Old Testament* (Ignatius Press, 2018), Kindle Edition, Chapter 12, Location 6835.

⁵ Scott Hahn, ed., *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 2009), 490.

⁶ Bergsma and Pitre, *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible*, Kindle Edition, Chapter 12, Location 6837.

Probably the most famous Judge is Samson. While Samson ends up a hero, he is very flawed as an individual. Like other famous mothers of the Bible (Sarah, Hannah, and Elizabeth), Samson's mother was barren. In exchange for having a son, Samson's parents had to make him a Nazarite from birth. Numbers 6:1-6 describes what a Nazarite must do.

The LORD said to Moses: Speak to the Israelites and tell them: When men or women solemnly take the nazirite vow to dedicate themselves to the LORD, they shall abstain from wine and strong drink; they may neither drink wine vinegar, other vinegar, or any kind of grape juice, nor eat either fresh or dried grapes. As long as they are nazirites they shall not eat anything of the produce of the grapevine; not even the seeds or the skins. While they are under the nazirite vow, no razor shall touch their hair. Until the period of their dedication to the LORD is over, they shall be holy, letting the hair of their heads grow freely. As long as they are dedicated to the LORD, they shall not come near a dead person.⁷

Samson violates at least two of three of the primary requirements of a Nazarite:⁸

1. No contact with “a dead body” (Num 6:6) / Samson eats honey from the lion's corpse. (Judg 14:5-9)
2. “No razor shall come upon his head” (Num 6:5) / Samson allows Delilah to cut off his hair. (Judg 16:13-22)

Regardless of these flaws some see the story of his death as a foreshadowing of the Passion of Christ. Note at the end of his life, he defeated his captors with outstretched arms. “The Catholic apologist Cornelius à Lapide (1890), in his biblical commentary on the four Gospels, remarked that St. Gregory saw this feat as a type of Christ's work of redemption: “our Redeemer rising before it was light, not only came forth free from hell, but destroyed also the bars of hell. He carried away its gates, and ascended to the top of the mountain; for by rising again He carried away the bars of hell, and by ascending He entered the Kingdom of Heaven” (Hom. 21). As referenced in J.R. Franke's Scripture commentary (2005), St. Caesarius of Arles also wrote of Samson's feat in this way: “Moreover, he removed the city gates. That is, he took away the gates of hell. What does it mean to remove the gates of hell, except to take away the power of death? He took it away and did not return it. Furthermore, what did our Lord Jesus Christ do after he had taken away the gates of death? He went up to the top of a mountain. Truly, we know that he both arose and ascended into heaven” (Sermon 118.5).”⁹

⁷ Num 6:1-6.

⁸ Bergsma and Pitre, *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible*, Kindle Edition, Chapter 12, Location 6961.

⁹ Steve Ray, *The Book of Judges*, ed. Katie McDermott, Catholic Scripture Study (Charlotte, NC: Catholic Scripture Study International, 2012), 119-120.

After the story of the Judges, there are two epilogues, both of which outline abuses during the times of the Judges. The first (Jdg 17:1 - 18:31) outlines liturgical and theological abuses and the second (Jdg 19:1 to 21:25) outlines social and civil abuses.¹⁰ In the second epilogue, there are many disturbing aspects of the story when we view it in the context of our modern social and cultural mentality. However, based on the customs of the time, such actions would have been viewed much differently. One can go back to the discussions of how to approach the *herem* issues in the last session. However, one important issue arises (particularly in the second epilogue) that gives us a hint as to the timing of the writings. Note how the people of Bethlehem (in the land of Judah) are hospitable and the people of Gibeah (in the land of Benjamin) are wicked. When we get to the monarchy in the next three sessions, you will see that the first King of Israel is Saul. Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, is ultimately a failed king. David, however, is from Bethlehem of Judah. He is successful and brings Israel into its glory years. Some have suggested that this is a hint that Judges may have been penned during or after the reign of David.

Ruth

As I stated above, Ruth is not at all like Judges. However, it is the perfect bridge between the chaos of Judges and the glory of the Kingdom of Israel under David. Here we have the love story between Ruth, a Moabite, and Boaz, from Bethlehem, the great-grandmother and great-grandfather of King David. It is artfully written with a very distinct overall structure called, in literary terms, a “chiasm,” which was a common approach in ancient literature. In the Greek alphabet, the letter “chi” looks like an X. That gives you an idea of how a chiasm works. Below is the outline of Ruth in chiasm form.¹¹

- A. The Line of Elimelech (“God Is My King”) (1:1-5)
- B. Naomi and Her Daughters-in-Law: Lacking Everything (1:6-22)
- C. The Courtship of Boaz and Ruth (2:1-23)
- D. Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor (3:1-18)
- C’. The Marriage of Boaz and Ruth (4:1-12)
- B’. Naomi and Her Daughter-in-Law: Lacking Nothing (4:13-17)

¹⁰ Bergsma and Pitre, *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible*, Kindle Edition, Chapter 12, Location 6858.

¹¹ Bergsma and Pitre, *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible*, Kindle Edition, Chapter 13, Location 7292.

A'. The Line of Boaz (to David, God's Chosen King) (4:18-22)

In the first chapter we see that Elimelech is from Ephrata (translated as “the fruitful”) which appears to be the same place as Bethlehem, part of Judah. Because of a famine, Elimelech has to leave Bethlehem to find food or work. Interestingly, the term “bethlehem” is translated as “house of bread,” yet there was no food. They go to Moab and his sons marry Moabite women. Elimelech dies, leaving Naomi (Elimelech's wife) a widow. Who were the Moabites? The Moabites lived just east of Israel, seen on the map above. The Moabites were distantly related to the Israelites. Back in Genesis, we read the following:

Since Lot was afraid to stay in Zoar, he and his two daughters went up from Zoar and settled in the hill country, where he lived with his two daughters in a cave. The firstborn said to the younger: “Our father is getting old, and there is not a man in the land to have intercourse with us as is the custom everywhere. Come, let us ply our father with wine and then lie with him, that we may ensure posterity by our father.” So that night they plied their father with wine, and the firstborn went in and lay with her father; but he was not aware of her lying down or getting up. The next day the firstborn said to the younger: “Last night I lay with my father. Let us ply him with wine again tonight, and then you go in and lie with him, that we may ensure posterity by our father.” So that night, too, they plied their father with wine, and then the younger one went in and lay with him; but he was not aware of her lying down or getting up. Thus, the two daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. The firstborn gave birth to a son whom she named Moab, saying, “From my father.” He is the ancestor of the Moabites of today. The younger one, too, gave birth to a son, and she named him Ammon, saying, “The son of my kin.” He is the ancestor of the Ammonites of today.¹²

When you read the section of Judges about Ehud, you saw that the Moabites actually “conquered” Israel for 18 years. It is believed that the sons married Moabites out of necessity. The sons eventually also die, leaving three widows with no men to support them. One of Naomi's daughters-in law left and went back to her people. However, Ruth would not abandon Naomi and accompanied her back to Bethlehem. Ruth meets Boaz (a kinsman of Naomi). They fall in love and eventually marry. The book ends showing that David's lineage includes a Moabite. What we do not see until we get to Matthew is that Boaz was also the son of an Israelite and a Canaanite, Rahab.

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram,

¹² Ge 19:30–38.

and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.¹³

While it was not included in your readings for this session, if you go back to Joshua 2, you see that Rahab was the prostitute in Jericho, who hid the spies that Joshua sent. She was spared from *herem* because of the aid she provided to the Israelite spies. Rahab and Ruth are two of four women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba – “the wife of Uriah”) mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus. All of these women have something in common. “Their common quality is apparently that of alien blood: Rahab Canaanite, Ruth Moabite, Thamar probably Canaanite, Bethsabee probably ‘Hittite’ like her first husband. Their mention prepares us for an association of the Gentiles with God’s designs—an association subsequently emphasized by the incident of the Magi.”¹⁴

¹³ Matt 1:1–6.

¹⁴ A. Jones, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to St Matthew,” in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, ed. Bernard Orchard and Edmund F. Sutcliffe (Toronto; New York; Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1953), 855.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 4

The Kingdom of Israel – Part 1

Day 1 – Scan the lecture notes. Write down one or two points that you consider most interesting.

Day 2 – Read “The Books of Samuel,” attached. Write down one or two points that you consider most interesting.

Day 3 – Read 1 Samuel chapter 2 and Luke 2. Write down similarities between Hannah’s prayer and Mary’s Magnificat. What are some explanations for these similarities?

Day 4 – Read Chapter 5 of 2 Samuel. Why would David choose Jerusalem as the capital of Israel? (Hint – Read Genesis 14:18-20, Genesis 22:1-18, 2 Chronicles 3:1, and Psalm 110:4)

Day 5 – Read 2 Samuel 7:8-16. David wants to build a *house* for God and God wants to build a *house* for David. What do you think is going on here? (Hint: Read Genesis 12:1-3)

Day 6 – Read Chapter 11 and 12 of 2 Samuel. What do you think about David's actions?

THE BOOKS OF SAMUEL¹⁵

These books describe the rise and development of kingship in Israel. Samuel is a pivotal figure. He bridges the gap between the period of the Judges and the monarchy, and guides Israel's transition to kingship. A Deuteronomistic editor presents both positive and negative traditions about the monarchy, portraying it both as evidence of Israel's rejection of the Lord as their sovereign (1 Sam 8:6–22; 12:1–25) and as part of God's plan to deliver the people (1 Sam 9:16; 10:17–27; 2 Sam 7:8–17). Samuel's misgivings about abuse of royal power foreshadow the failures and misdeeds of Saul and David and the failures of subsequent Israelite kings.

Although the events described in 1 and 2 Samuel move from the last of the judges to the decline of David's reign and the beginning of a legendary "Golden Age" under Solomon's rule, this material does not present either a continuous history or a systematic account of this period. The author/editor developed a narrative timeline around freely composed speeches, delivered by prophets like Samuel (e.g., 1 Sam 15:10–31; 28:15–19) and Nathan (2 Sam 12:1–12), who endorse Deuteronomistic perspectives regarding the establishment of the monarchy, the relationship between worship and obedience, and the divine covenant established with the house of David.

These books include independent blocks (e.g., the Ark Narrative [1 Sam 4:1–7:1], Saul's rise to power [1 Sam 9:1–11:15], David's ascendancy over Saul [1 Sam 16–31], the Succession Narrative [2 Sam 9–20; 1 Kgs 1–2]), which the editor shaped into three narrative cycles, the last two marked by transitional passages in 1 Sam 13:1 and 2 Sam 1:1. Each section focuses on a major figure in the development of the monarchy: Samuel, the reluctant king maker (1 Sam 1–12); Saul, the king whom the Lord rejects (1 Sam 13–31); David, the king after the Lord's own heart (2 Sam 1–24). A common theme unites these narratives: Israel's God acts justly, prospering those who remain faithful and destroying those who reject his ways (1 Sam 2:9). Along with the rest of the Deuteronomistic History, the Books of Samuel become an object lesson for biblical Israel as it tries to re-establish its religious identity after the destruction of Jerusalem and the loss of its homeland (587/586 B.C.).

¹⁵ *New American Bible*, Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Introduction to the Books of Samuel.

The contents of the Books of Samuel may be divided as follows:

- I. The Last Judges, Eli and Samuel (1 Sam 1:1–7:17)
- II. Establishment of the Monarchy (1 Sam 8:1–12:25)
- III. Saul and David (1 Sam 13:1–2 Sam 2:7)
- IV. The Reign of David (2 Sam 2:8–20:26)
- V. Appendixes (2 Sam 21:1–24:25)