

## **Read Through the Bible**

**Week 14, April 5 - 10, 2010**

**Readings:** Judges 10 – 21; Ruth; 1 Samuel 1 – 3; Luke 9 – 12

### **Reflections and Questions**

**By Dan Olsen**

#### **Judges 10 - 21**

Judges is a book about 12 men and women, heroes that delivered Israel from its oppressors. However, these judges were not perfect, but they were submissive to God, and God used them. It is also a book about sin and its consequences. Over and over again, we read about the nation of Israel sinning against God and God allowing suffering to come upon the land and the people.

Just as it was then for the nation of Israel, it is the same for us in our time on this earth. When we sin, we can expect suffering for sin always has its consequences. Therefore, rather than living in an endless cycle of abandoning God and then crying out to Him for rescue, we should turn from sin and seek to live a consistent life in Christ.

The judges of Israel made valiant efforts to turn the people wholeheartedly to God. However, they resisted and did whatever they thought was best for themselves. This resulted in a spiritual, moral, and political decline of the nation.

Our lives will follow the same path as Israel if we do not live by the guidelines that God has given us. We must reject temptations that come from Satan, control our thoughts that lead us into sin and turn to God's unfailing wisdom.

Judges also speaks in many ways to how difficult it can be to follow God over the long haul. The Israelites always seemed to forget God when all was well. However, despite being rejected over and over by his own people, God never failed to rescue them when they called out to him repentance. God never fails to rescue us either. When we put God outside of our daily events instead of in the center of them, God feels great rejection. We should strive to stay close to God rather than see how far we can go before judgment comes.

#### **Ruth**

Ruth loved her mother-in-law Naomi and she begged to stay with her wherever she went even though it would mean leaving her homeland. Ruth pleaded with Naomi saying, "Your people will be my people and your God my God." Ruth was drawn to Naomi because Naomi's life was a powerful witness to the reality of God and this led to God. God led Ruth to a man named Boaz, who she eventually married, as a result she became the great-grandmother of King David and an ancestor in the line of the Messiah.

The book of Ruth is also a story of God's grace in the midst of difficult circumstances. Even in times of crisis and deep despair as we are in now there are always people who follow God, just as Naomi and Ruth did. God works through these people. No matter how discouraging the world may seem, God will use anyone who is open to Him to achieve His purposes. The book of Ruth encourages us. God is at work in the world and he wants to use us to achieve His purposes. Are you open and willing?

#### **1 Samuel 1 – 3**

In the first three chapters of 1 Samuel we are shown a vivid contrast between young Samuel and Eli's sons. Samuel was kind and helpful and grew in wisdom, giving the people messages from God. Samuel was called by the Lord and was dedicated to God's service by his mother, Hannah. Hannah prayed to God for a son and praised Him when her prayer was answered. Her poetic prayer in

Chapter 2 shows her confidence in God's sovereignty and her thankfulness for everything he had done. Like Hannah, by praising God for all good gifts, we acknowledge His ultimate control over all the affairs of life. God is always present, hope in Him. He will never fail.

## **Luke 9 – 12**

During this part of the Gospels of Luke, Jesus commissioned the disciples and sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God. When they returned, Jesus revealed to them His true identity, His mission and what it meant to be His disciple. His mission would take Him to Jerusalem, where He would be rejected, tried and crucified.

As He traveled, Jesus taught great crowds of people, especially through parables. Through these stories of great truth, only those with ears to hear will understand what Jesus was teaching. When we read these parables in the Bible, we should pray that The Holy Spirit of God would help us understand the implications of these truths for our lives so we can become more and more like Jesus.

Jesus' love for us is good news for everyone. His truths and messages are for all people in every nation. All of us have the opportunity to respond to Him in faith. Are you?

## **Introduction to Ruth**

**By Eugene Peterson, *The Message***

As we read the broad, comprehensive biblical story of God at work in the world, most of us are entirely impressed: God speaking creation into being, God laying the foundations of the life of faith through great and definitive fathers and mothers, God saving a people out of a brutal slave existence and then forming them into lives of free and obedient love, God raising up leaders who direct and guide through the tangle of difficulties always involved in living joyfully and responsively before God.

Very impressive. So impressive, in fact, that many of us, while remaining impressed, feel left out. Our unimpressive, very ordinary lives make us feel like outsiders to such a star-studded cast. We disqualify ourselves. Guilt or willfulness or accident makes a loophole and we assume that what is true for everyone else is not true for us. We conclude that we are, somehow, "just not religious" and thus unfit to participate in the big story.

And then we turn a page and come on this small story of two widows and a farmer in their out-of-the-way village.

The outsider Ruth was not born into the faith and felt no natural part of it—like many of us. But she came to find herself gathered into the story and given a quiet and obscure part that proved critical to the way everything turned out.

Scripture is a vast tapestry of God's creating, saving, and blessing ways in this world. The great names in the plot that climaxes at Sinai (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses) and the great names in the sequel (Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon) can be intimidating to ordinary, random individuals: "Surely there is no way that I can have any significant part on such a stage." But the story of the widowed, impoverished, alien Ruth is proof to the contrary. She is the inconsequential outsider whose life turns out to be essential for telling the complete story of God's ways among us. The unassuming ending carries the punch line: "Boaz married Ruth, she had a son Obed, Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David."

David! In its artful telling of this "outsider" widow, uprooted and obscure, who turns out to be the great-grandmother of David and the ancestor of Jesus, the Book of Ruth makes it possible for each of us to understand ourselves, however ordinary or "out of it," as irreplaceable in the full telling of God's story. We count—every last one of us—and what we do counts.

## Introduction to 1 & 2 Samuel

By Eugene Peterson, *The Message*

Four lives dominate the two-volume narrative, First and Second Samuel: Hannah, Samuel, Saul, and David. Chronologically, the stories are clustered around the year 1000 b.c., the millennial midpoint between the call of Abraham, the father of Israel, nearly a thousand years earlier (about 1800 b.c.) and the birth of Jesus, the Christ, a thousand years later.

These four lives become seminal for us at the moment we realize that our ego-bound experience is too small a context in which to understand and experience what it means to believe in God and follow his ways. For these are large lives—large because they live in the largeness of God. Not one of them can be accounted for in terms of cultural conditions or psychological dynamics; God is the country in which they live.

Most of us need to be reminded that these stories are not exemplary in the sense that we stand back and admire them, like statues in a gallery, knowing all the while that we will never be able to live either that gloriously or tragically ourselves. Rather they are immersions into the actual business of living itself: this is what it means to be human. Reading and praying our way through these pages, we get it; gradually but most emphatically we recognize that what it means to be a woman, a man, mostly has to do with God. These four stories do not show us how we should live but how in fact we do live, authenticating the reality of our daily experience as the stuff that God uses to work out his purposes of salvation in us and in the world.

The stories do not do this by talking about God, for there is surprisingly little explicit God talk here—whole pages sometimes without the name of God appearing. But as the narrative develops we realize that God is the commanding and accompanying presence that provides both plot and texture to every sentence. This cluster of interlocking stories trains us in perceptions of ourselves, our sheer and irreducible humanity, that cannot be reduced to personal feelings or ideas or circumstances. If we want a life other than mere biology, we must deal with God. There is no alternate way.

One of many welcome consequences in learning to "read" our lives in the lives of Hannah, Samuel, Saul, and David is a sense of affirmation and freedom: we don't have to fit into prefabricated moral or mental or religious boxes before we are admitted into the company of God—we are taken seriously just as we are and given a place in his story, for it is, after all, his story; none of us is the leading character in the story of our life.

For the biblical way is not so much to present us with a moral code and tell us "Live up to this"; nor is it to set out a system of doctrine and say,

"Think like this and you will live well." The biblical way is to tell a story and invite us, "Live into this. This is what it looks like to be human; this is what is involved in entering and maturing as human beings." We do violence to the biblical revelation when we "use" it for what we can get out of it or what we think will provide color and spice to our otherwise bland lives. That results in a kind of "boutique spirituality"—God as decoration, God as enhancement. The Samuel narrative will not allow that. In the reading, as we submit our lives to what we read, we find that we are not being led to see God in our stories but to see our stories in God's. God is the larger context and plot in which our stories find themselves.

Such reading will necessarily be a prayerful reading—a God-listening, God-answering reading. The story, after all, is framed by prayer: Hannah's prayer at the beginning ([1 Samuel 2](#)), and David's near the end ([2 Samuel 22–23](#)).