

Dr. Elaine Phillips, OT History, Lit. and Theology, Lecture 18

© 2011, Dr. Elaine Phillips and Ted Hildebrandt

Let's take some time to pray together.

Our heavenly father we have so much to be thankful for. We're thankful that you are indeed our rock and our fortress, our refuge, our strength, our comforter, and our savior and redeemer. Father, as we gather again together this morning we are grateful for the safety that you give us, we are grateful to be waking up this morning, we are grateful to be here together. And we are thankful for the chance to study. Father, please give us spirits and hearts that are on fire for learning more about your grace and your goodness and your love for us. Be with those who struggle with health issues dear Lord, please bring restoration and healing. Be with those who need your tender comforting hand. Be with those who need your gentle prod. And father we would also pray that you be with those of us who need your disciplining hand as well. In all these things we offer you our thanks, we pray for your blessing on this hour together today. Help us to learn well the lessons you have for us this day, as we mediate them through the book of Judges and also Ruth. And we ask these things in Christ's name with thanksgiving. Amen.

Well, we're actually going to do a little bit of catch up this time because we left off slightly behind. But before we do that, just a couple review questions. And they run like this. This is an exam question, it's just a boilerplate exam question. So it's one you want to know. What cycle characterized the period of the Judges? Can you think of five things? One? Go ahead Mackenzie. Apostasy, right. So that's the first thing. They apostatized by turning to a whole bunch of gods and goddesses that are not the Israelite's. What's the second stage of this thing, Stephanie? Right, God brings upon them chastisement and oppression--so apostasy, oppression. What's the third step? Alex? Repentance, yes. Repentance and what comes next? Max. Deliverance. God raises up for them a judge and

deliverer, one who will indeed rescue them both spiritually as well as politically. And what's the final thing? Repetition. They do it all over again and all over again. One of the things we talked about last time was that they don't just go around in a circle but it's a downward spiral and we're certainly seeing that particularly as we entered into the Jephthah context. We'll see it today as we move into Samson.

Second, I've already given this away to a degree, who are the four major judges mentioned in the book of Hebrews? They shaped our study yesterday, and they will help us finish it up today. Four major judges of the book of Hebrews? Gideon, good. Just yell it out. Deborah and Barak, and Barak is of course the one mentioned in the book of Hebrews. Jephthah, and?—Samson, of course, who we are going to study in a moment.

Splendid, let's see what we can do to catch up with Samson. This is the map that we've seen multiple times as we've made our way through those four major judges and so one more time here we go. Samson is, interestingly enough, from the tribe of Dan and we'll see his name right there right next to the purple arrow. Notice where the tribe of Dan is located. Just think for a moment, you've got the tribe of Judah here in the hill country, you've got Philistines who we're going to say a lot more about in a moment to the west of them and think of Dan as being caught in between. We've seen a number of instances in the period of the judges when various tribes have been caught in between and here it's on a smaller scale. Dan is in between the people who are in Judah and the people who are the Philistines. We are going to see that impact our situation later on today. So kind of hang on to that because I don't think the map comes back at that point. For our purposes, we've got Samson here in Zorah and Eshtaol. Those two little cities there, those two little cities there, and as I mentioned a moment ago, the Philistines out to the west.

You may remember when we talked about geography, and as a matter of fact when we talked about Philistines, that whoever lives on the coastal plane is viewed as being, well, more cosmopolitan, more appealing, more stylish, and more advanced. They've got more of what some people really want, and we mentioned earlier when we were talking about this, that it's kind of like people like me from the hinterland of the Midwest being attracted to New York City and Boston. It's that draw of something that has that scintillating characteristic about it that you want to be a part of it. If you're not careful you'll get drawn into it and sucked into it. Samson does exactly that. So he's from this area between Zorah and Eshtaol and it doesn't look like it's very far away on the map. There's Timnah, it's a world away in terms of culture because Timnah is a Philistine city. And you'll see as you read chapter 13 of Judges that Samson is drawn down into Timnah. Of course, that's his first mistake, he falls for a Philistine woman who lives in Timnah. It's going to be a series of Philistine women that he falls for. He gets captured by the very culture that he's supposed to confront, and drawn into it. And of course, what's absolutely fascinating about it is, is that God uses it anyway. We'll see more about that in another moment, we need to locate two more places. Ashkelon just slightly farther south from where Timnah is right out on the coast. Next time, Lord willing, we'll talk a lot more about Ashkelon. As one of the major Philistine cities, it's important here because Samson will be involved in some of the issues with Ashkelon. And finally, Gaza, right down there.

One thing I want to notice for you is the location of Gaza, there it is. I don't have Hebron marked on the map, but here it is up here. It's in our hill country area. Do you remember when we were talking about elevation. As the Israelites were conquering the land they had to go from the Jordan Valley all the way up to the areas that they had conquered around Bethel and Ai and that that was a major uphill all-night march? Well think of the same type of thing happening, but not quite so dramatically, because Gilgal is way below sea level, about 13000 feet below sea level. Nevertheless if you've read your narrative on Samson, what does

he do with the gates of Gaza one night? He rips them out, whisks them on to his shoulders and he marches all the way on up to Hebron. That's going uphill with a far amount of weight carried along on top of your shoulders. So Samson is in that particular case demonstrating his remarkable strength that he does have. God will use that strength against the Philistines. Samson seems to use it for his own glory, which is an interesting kind of conjunction there.

Well, that's our map, let's just have a look at some of the major issues in particular regard to this narrative. If you've got your Bibles, we're in chapter 13 of Judges, and I'll just make a note of some of the major things. You can come back to them later. Judges chapter 13 verse 1, "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years." So these people who are much more, humanly speaking, powerful than the Israelites are the ones who are now their overlords. And that will come up over and over again.

You've got a very fascinating narrative about Samson's parents. An angel of the Lord comes and meets up with Samson's mother who is never named. She's called the wife of Manoah and that's all the press that she gets in terms of a name. But what's fascinating if you're reading chapter 13, this woman has a remarkable sense of, well, it's common sense, a sense of what God would indeed have them do. If you read the text you see what's happening here. She's childless, by the way that's a scene that we've seen already before and what that means is that God is going to intervene in a marvelous way here. The angel of the Lord appears and says, "Your childless, but you know what? You're going to have a son. And you know what else? He's going to be a Nazirite."

Now, let's review just a second, what were the characteristics of the Nazirites? What were the restrictions the Nazirite person had to impose on him or herself? Anybody recall? Sarah. Right, so their hair has to grow long. They are not supposed to come in contact with anything that had to do with the grapevine, wine is a big manifestation, but there are others as well, and also no contact with death.

And of course, as we see this Samson narrative unfold he is intentional about breaking through the boundaries and restrictions of this Nazirite vow, because he certainly will come in contact with death. He does it when he drags honey out of the carcass of the lion. He goes to feasts and feasts and in that context, generally speaking, there is involved a fair amount of wine. His wedding feast is the starter, it's probably not the closure and as you know he finally is captured by the Philistines because he's allowing himself to be captivated and swayed by Delilah, who persuades him to tell her the secret about the strength that's involved with his hair. So you've got that interesting narrative.

Let's just pick up a little on his mother though before we go on. She gets all these things straight and she goes to her husband and she says, "Guess what? Somebody rather remarkable appeared to me. And he said to me 'You will conceive and give birth to a son. Now then, drink no wine, no fermented drink, don't get anything unclean to eat, because the boy will be a Nazirite.'" It's fairly clear cut, but Manoah says, "Oh please Lord, come again and teach us how to raise the boy." They've got a fairly good sense already if they know anything about Nazirites, but God answers and he comes again. Manoah gets up, he inquires of this angel what he's all about, and the angel of the Lord says, "I'm the one who is talking." Manoah says, "What are the rules for the boy?" And the angel pretty much repeats what he said before. Manoah prepares a sacrifice. The angel of the Lord does something pretty dramatic, he says, "Even though you detain me, I won't eat any of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the Lord." And then Manoah says, "What's your name?" And the angel says, "Don't ask it because it's beyond understanding." And that "beyond understanding" is a very interesting term in Hebrew. It connects directly with Isaiah chapter 9, where you have a whole bunch of names that are given to this child who will be born. So it's obviously a reference to deity.

Well so, Manoah prepares this sacrifice and the Lord did an amazing thing, verse 20, "As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the

LORD ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground.” And Manoah and his wife fell down on their faces and what do they say? Well he says, “We’re going to die!” and she says, “Would he have told us all of this stuff if he was just gonna wipe us out? Have some common sense, let’s go on.” And they do indeed have a baby boy, he’s named Samson. Of course, part of the problem is, as I said earlier, that Samson is drawn to the Philistines. In chapter 14 verse 4 is an interesting commentary on his first foray down into Timnah. He sees a woman from Timnah, he likes her, he goes to his parents, and talk about audacity, he says to his parents, “Get her for me I want her as my wife”, which is a little disturbing and they say, “Can’t you find a nice Jewish girl to marry?” But then there’s a parenthesis. Verse 4 chapter 14, “His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.” So God is going to use this disobedience on the part of Samson, and it’s going to escalate and escalate and escalate, but God will use it for his purposes.

Not only that, God will use Samson’s other weakness as well. Philistine women are one weakness, the second weakness is his vengeful spirit. Because as you read through these three chapters, what is Samson always doing? He is taking vengeance. No matter what the situation, he’s upping the ante, and then of course, the Philistines attack back and so he attacks. Yet God in his sovereignty will use this to bring about more destruction, even with Samson’s death. Because when Samson dies and pushes those pillars over, it says that he killed more people in his death than he did throughout the course of his life. Your Israeli tidbit for today is this; what happens when Samson tied the foxtails together, do you remember that little act of vengeance? Anybody remember? Yeah. I mean Samson’s cruel too, PETA would not like Samson very well. But what he does is he ties these foxtails together, lights them on fire, they go running through the grain fields and the grain fields are all destroyed. Do you know what, here’s the Israeli tidbit, do you know what the equivalent of Smokey the Bear is in Israel?--A fox, with it’s tail on fire.

You know we have all of our Smokey the Bear signs, don't burn fires. That's their sign, it's the fox, it's kind of cute.

Again, I'm trusting you to know the narratives well. Know what happens each time he goes farther and farther into Philistine territory. But also recognize the end of his life, he seems to begin to edge back towards home. If we had our map in front of us, Delilah is from a place called the Sorek Valley. So after he's gone, to the Philistine woman at Gaza, then he comes back to the Sorek Valley, which is back where Timnah is located, he seems to be moving closer to home. He doesn't ever get there, but he seems to be moving closer to home. But as I note for you the lesson here is something I said already. Samson allows himself to get trapped. God leaves it, because God is bigger than any of Samson's weaknesses and enticements. But Samson does allow himself to get trapped, and that's one of the tragedies of his life.

We're going to move on because we have to make our way through the rest of the book of Judges, as well as the book of Ruth. And this was all catch up from last time. One of the things that's important to realize as we're working our way through Judges, because we tend to read it chronologically, so Deborah/Barak happened first, Gideon happened second, Jephthah happens third, Samson happens fourth, and then all this mess at the end of the book happens last, except you know what, it's not quite that easy. I want to say just a word about the fact that Judges seems to be arranged thematically. In other words, it's got some material strategically placed in order so that they have those narratives make the most impact.

Now, the first part of our little discussion here is simply this. Judges does not seem to be chronologically relayed. Just a couple things that are part of this picture. Just watch how it happens. When you read these two incidents about a guy named Gershom, who is the grandson of Moses, and Phineas, who is the grandson of Aaron, they're at the end of the book. Note chapter 18, chapter 20, and yet stop and think for a moment. If they are indeed grandsons, and I know it might be long

descendants farther on down the line, but if they are indeed grandsons, then it's going to be a fairly short time between the time Moses and Aaron lived i.e., probably 1400 depending on our date of Exodus, and when these two were operating. And yet they're at the end of the book of Judges. Is that making sense? Am I speaking English with that? So basically, probably these incidents where these two individuals are mentioned, are earlier chronologically, even though they are included later in the book of Judges.

Secondly, in conjunction with that same incident in chapter 18, we have the naming of a place. They called it Mahaneh Dan because the Danites were migrating up there. Nevertheless, when you read the Samson narrative we've already go a place called Mahaneh Dan. So again, this incident in Chapter 18 is probably occurring earlier than the whole Samson narrative. So I'm just trying to get us to see that we're not supposed to necessarily read Judges as starting at a certain date and progressing right on to another date.

Finally, Philistines are major enemies. We see that with Samson, we also see it right when we move into 1 Samuel. And so those two things are probably chronologically continuous. Samson is really close to the end of the period of the Judges. And the Philistines are going to be his major enemy, they're going to be the major enemy for the people that are involved with Saul, David, etc. A couple other things we want to say about thematic arrangement. The chronology one is interesting but we don't want to spend a lot of time with that even though I just did. Secondly, and I mentioned part of this earlier, but at the end of the book of Judges, we have some very significant tribes noted. Alright. And these things you do have to know, unlike the chronological details. Judah, which is not been very prominent after the first couple of chapters of Judges, is now rising back onto the scene again. Now interestingly enough during the course of the time of Deborah and Barak and Gideon and Jephthah, Judah was not in a position where it was going to be attacked, and therefore it's not there very much. But now as you read these chapters, Judah shoots back up to prominence as a tribe, and that's not an

accident for reasons I hope will become apparent in just a moment. The other tribes that shot up very significantly are going to be Benjamin, and if you've read that sordid narrative at the end of the book of Judges, you know that Benjamin does not appear in a very pleasant light. In fact it's an ugly, ugly story. And then we have Ephraim, also significant in these last narratives.

Now why do you suppose that is? Well run it kind of like this. They're getting ready for a king. And we're going to see on our next point that there's no moral leadership. You have a repetition in these verses "and there was no king in Israel, everybody did what they saw fit." And it comes up again, "there was no king in Israel. Everybody did what they saw fit". The idea of being that the end of this book is preparing us for the next major, major change in Israel's history and that is the beginning of a monarchy.

Now you're saying, ok so what? What tribe does the first king come from? Not Judah, interestingly, hoping I would trap somebody with that. Who is the first king? Saul. Do you know what tribe he's from? Benjamin, right. So what you've got here are these tribes that are going to be ever so significant showing up at the end of the book of Judges. And isn't it fascinating folks, the tribe of Benjamin is not seen in a very pleasant light is it? That's the location where that sordid affair takes place with the Levite and his concubine, and we'll talk a little bit more about that in a moment. That's the place that almost gets wiped out in terms of the men of the tribe. That's where they had to all this legal fiction trick to get a whole bunch of women back so that the tribe doesn't die out. That tribe isn't presented very well is it? And it might be a commentary on the first king, who we're going to see is not necessarily the best king in the world, as we'll see with Saul. So we're seeing some things happening at the end of the book of Judges that are fairly important for us to understand, that it's looking forward to what's going to happen next. Was Ephraim important? Well, Ephraim once this kingdom splits, and we're going to see that happening in about two weeks as well, Ephraim is going to be the head tribe of the northern kingdom. So some interesting things are going on.

And one last thing as well, what were our Levites supposed to be doing? Remember, they got 46 cities and they are placed all around the country, what are they there for? Teaching, right. They're there to teach and instruct. But unfortunately, at least at this point in time, the Levites don't come across looking very well with two of these incidents.

So that's a little bit of background in terms of thinking thematically in terms of Judges. Now let's look at these last incidents. Chapter 17, and I'm actually going to read a significant part of this to you. By the way this is not Micah the minor prophet, some folks who are less familiar with the Old Testament hear the name Micah and they think Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk. It's not that Micah, it's someone entirely different. But let's read and you'll notice I have in quotation marks up here "spiritual illiteracy." Let's see what Micah says and does and what his family, for that matter, says and does that demonstrates a tragic lack of awareness of God's Torah. Here we go.

"Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim said to his mother, 'The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you and about which I heard you utter a curse—I've got that silver; I took it.'"

So the guy's a thief to start with. He's stolen from his mother. She wants her stuff back, eleven hundred shekels of silver is not peanuts. And so she utters a curse on whoever took this silver. And he's heard that now and he's terrified. Her words have power, at least he thinks so. So probably to counteract the curse, his mother says, "The Lord bless you my son!" And then verse 3 and following.

"When he returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, she said, [and get ready for this] 'I solemnly consecrate my silver [to Yahweh] to the LORD [did you see what comes next?] for my son to make a carved image and a cast idol.'"

Little mixed up maybe? So, she thinks she's dedicating all of this silver to the Lord. And yet what's going to happen? They're going to make a carved image and a cast idol. But that's not the worst of it. Let's keep going. "So he returned the

silver to his mother, she took 200 shekels of silver, gave it to the silversmith who made them into the image and the idol. And they were put in Micah's house. Now this man Micah had a shrine, [it's actually a house of God in the Hebrew there] and he made an ephod." Do you remember someone else who made an ephod? A guy named Abimelech? We read it last time? And it said all Israel prostrated itself before the ephod. And as they were prostrating themselves, they prostituted themselves to this thing. So he's making an ephod and he's making some idols, the word there is teraphim. And he installed one of his sons as priest. Are you rearing back on your hind legs saying "what's going on here?" He set up his own little worship center. It's got some trappings of worship, idols, etc. He's made a priest out of one of his own sons who if he's from the tribe of Ephraim he's probably not even a Levite, and we know specifically that he's not a Levite. And he probably thinks things are going fairly well, and then notice our verse that comes next, "In those days, Israel had no king. Everyone did as he saw fit." And so, we're supposed to say, "Ah, something's wrong, something's radically wrong."

Verse 7, "A young Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, who had been living within the clan of Judah, left that town in search of some other place to stay. On his way he came to Micah's house" and Micah says, "Where are you from?" and he says, "'I'm a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah,' he said, 'and I'm looking for a place to stay.'" And Micah says, "Live with me and be my father and priest, and I'll give you ten shekels of silver a year, your clothes and your food."

So Micah's now really captivated by the fact that he can buy a better priest. "I can buy a better priest. My son can do other things, I've got a better priest now." "So the Levite agreed to live with him, the young man was to him like one of his sons. Then Micah installed the Levite and the young man became his priest." Remember, Levites weren't necessarily, if they weren't of the line of Aaron, supposed to be priests. And then verse 13. Here's kind of the punch line. "Micah said, 'Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since this Levite has become my priest.'"

You got the picture? Micah's presuming, because he knows precious little it seems. He's got a superficial set of paraphernalia there and he presumes that in doing so, he's going to buy God's blessings. But he's woefully, woefully ignorant in terms of what God really wants. And of course, I don't need to spend a lot of time hammering home the lesson with this. So often we have our good set of superficial things that we consider will be just enough to keep God happy, buy him off if you will. And yet how little we know of what God really, really requires of us. And Micah seems to have that problem.

While things go in the book of Judges from bad to worse, Micah's story continues and actually when the tribe of Dan migrates they do Micah a huge favor. Chapter 18 is talking about this. They are moving from that place that I showed you on the map, which seems to be pinched between the Philistines and the Judahites, haven't been able to really settle in there and claim a goodly amount of land. So part of them leave, I would suggest that not the whole tribe of Dan migrates. Some of them do. They send out little spying groups first to go up north, and you remember what it's like up north? There's more rain, it grows more grass, it's a much nicer place to live, a lot more water sources. And they're enticed by that and they say, "Hey you know, we can go on up there!"

So in chapter 18 you have a very interesting situation taking place. Verse 11, 600 men from the tribe of Dan set out for Zorah and Eshtaol, they come past Micah's house, and they see that he's got this stuff--the idol, the image, etc. It all looks really good. So on their way back through, they pick up the idol, they pick up the Levite for the priest, that's in verse 18, and they take them away. And Micah of course is incensed. He comes chasing after them, verse 24, "He replied, 'You took the gods I made, and my priest, and went away. How can you ask, 'What's the matter with me?'''" And the Danites say, "Don't argue, we're going." And Micah is feeling bereft, but he's actually been helped in this, because he's had the stuff taken away from him that was false to start with.

What's really unfortunate is what happens for Dan. Look at the end of the

chapter. These Danites go north, they destroy a city, they rebuild their own. They name it Dan. Then it says in verse 30, “There the Danites set up for themselves the idols, and Jonathan son of Gershom, the son of Moses, and his sons were priests for the tribe of Dan until the time of the captivity of the land.” Now just hang onto that little piece of information. Dan has idolatrous worship throughout the history of Israel in that area. Because what’s being established here is a tradition that somebody in a couple hundred years or less is going to use to reestablish as an official place of religious worship. So Dan, being established here with idols and with the priests is simply setting the stage for something even worse later on. That’s part of an important picture.

What do we have next? Oh yes, this tragic story. A couple of questions to start with. This is chapter 19 and following. What’s the irony? Do you remember the story? There’s a Levite from the tribe of Ephraim. He’s had a concubine, concubine sort of being second wives or women used as second wives, sometimes used for child bearing as we saw with Hagar. The concubine hasn’t been entirely happy with the Levite, so she runs back home to a place called Bethlehem. He decides he misses her, so he chases after her. Her father entertains the Levite lavishly, typical hospitality in the Middle East. Day after day, for four days of drinking, eating, sleeping, having a good time. On the fourth day he says, “I’d really like to go.” The father says, “No! Stay another day!” So he stays a fifth day. Then he says, “We really really need to leave.”

So he takes the concubine with him and it’s afternoon. And they start heading north, and of course, it gets dark. And there’s a little bit of a possibility that they are going to stop at a place called Jebus. But what’s the problem with Jebus? It’s right now at this time, not held by Israelites. It’s still a foreign enclave. It will become Jerusalem later on, but right now, it’s one of those foreign enclaves, it’s Jebusites in there. And the Levite says, “You know I don’t think we’d better go there. These aren’t our folk. Can’t stop in there. Might be dangerous, might be too Canaanite.” So where did they stop for the night? They go a little farther north

don't they?

They come to a place called Gibeah, not far from Jebus, maybe three-four miles or so. But Gibeah happens to be a city in the tribe of Benjamin. And what happens to them there. This is the irony. They are afraid to go to a Canaanite city for fear of the horrors that might await them in a foreign Canaanite city. But what happens to them in Gibeah? So they go to Gibeah, and you know the story. They're in the square of the city and an old man comes along and says, "You don't dare stay out here." So then they go into the house, and some men from the city come pounding on the door saying, "Let us have sex with you." Does it sound like a narrative we've seen already? It sounds like Genesis 19 doesn't it, in Sodom and Gomorrah. And of course, what does the owner of the house do? He says, "No, no, don't be so vile. This man's my guest. Look here is my virgin daughter and look here's his concubine as well. You can afflict them as you wish, but don't do such a disgraceful thing to this man."

So again you see a horrible, horrible sense of abuse of sexuality in every realm. Cause they're ready to hand their daughters over for this kind of treatment. Tragically, these men don't listen. Verse 25, and I'm reading the NIV and in a minute I'll tell you what it really says, "So the man took his concubine and sent her outside to them." No, he grabbed his concubine and shoved her outside. That's what the Hebrew says. He grabbed his concubine and shoved her outside. And as you know, she's afflicted all night long. Lands up on the door step in the morning.

It doesn't say she's dead, but she probably is. At least, I hope she is by that time, because what does he do to her? He chops her in 12 pieces and sends those body parts around to the twelve tribes of Israel to say, "Look at this horrible thing that's been happening, what are we going to do to the tribe of Benjamin?" And of course, even beyond that, when he's asked to give a little recital of the events, he doesn't say that his culpability is quite that bad.

All the tribes are gathered together, chapter 20, "So the husband of the

murdered woman, the Levite, said, 'I and my concubine came to Gibeah to spend the night. During the night, the men of Gibeah came after me and surrounded the house, intending to kill me. They raped my concubine and she died.'" He doesn't say anything about the fact that he handed her over very forcefully, to get them off his back. And he also does say she died, then I took and cut her up. It's a gruesome scene, there aren't words to say how horrible this is.

But what we see is something that God warned about in Deuteronomy chapter 7. What did God say in Deuteronomy chapter 7? Don't sink to the level of the people around you. Don't intermarry with them. Get rid of their idols, get rid of all of this stuff, otherwise you will be like them. And notice that these Benjamites here have become tragically undifferentiated from the people around them in terms of how they are behaving.

But now of course they're faced with a problem aren't they? What are the aftershocks here? There are very interesting aftershocks. Can I just say, by the way, stepping back for a moment, this Levite probably had no idea what his crime would do in terms of the whole of Israel. But it has incredible consequences. First of all, all of the tribes gather together, they try twice to attack the Benjamites, and twice they are beaten back, and twice a number of the Israelites are killed as a result. So there's a big loss of life in that sphere. The tribe of Judah is told to go out first, they're kind of the one in the forefront of this attack and life is tough.

Finally, they go up, they beat the Benjamites, they have a few Benjamite men who are left, they're kind of hiding off in the wilderness. And then the Israelites realize something else. What's the problem? We have no means of propagating the tribe of Benjamin, what on earth are we going to do? We can't lose a tribe out of the twelve tribes of Israel. And so you have two very interesting events that are also part of the aftershocks. The first thing they do is say, "Well, what city didn't come and help us? What city didn't come and help us when we were fighting this tribe of Benjamin?" And lo and behold, they land on a place called Jabesh Gilead, across the Jordan. Turns out they didn't send anybody to help. So what happens

next? They go to that city, they wipe out the people of the city, they grab the women who are virgins and cart them back so that these remaining Benjamite men have someone they can marry and continue the Benjamite line. Can you believe this stuff? You couldn't make it up if you were writing about it for a Hollywood horrible production.

But it's not enough women is it? Still not enough women, you know, you got 400, but you've got 600 men, what are you going to do? Well, they cogitate a little bit, and they still have a problem you see, because the men of the other tribes of Israel had said, "We're not giving our daughters to a Benjamite man." And you can understand why. But they've taken a vow, not to give their daughters. And vows are taken very seriously. But you've still got 200 men who need wives. So they set up a little bit of legal fiction. Every year at the end of festival at Shiloh, there's a big celebration. And women are dancing at that celebration. And so they instruct these men who don't have wives, "Why don't you just hide in the bushes around about and when you women dancing, you go grab one for yourself. Take her, she'll be your wife." And no father will have to say, "Oh we broke our vow", because the woman has been taken. And of course, punctuated throughout this entire section, both the narrative with Micah and this narrative as well, is that refrain we talked about earlier. "Everybody did what was fit in their own eyes, there was no king in Israel." There was no moral leadership. These people had really hit the bottom of this downward spiral, they are at rock bottom, in terms of the way they're acting and the way they're thinking. And the stage is set then for, well, first I said for the book of Ruth, which is going to be a lovely counter to this, but it's also set for 1 Samuel, when we are going to see the progression and transition towards a king. The book of Judges ends in a horrifying note. It's absolutely horrifying. We are supposed to be absolutely appalled at what we read there. Because these people so desperately need what they have rejected all along, and that is a real deliverer.

Ok, are you ready for some more upbeat stories? I am. Let's talk about Ruth. What does *hesed* mean? Right, everlasting loyal covenant love, mercy, loving kindness, all those kinds of things. We see that particularly over and over again in terms of God's relationship with his people. What's fascinating is that in the book of Ruth we see *hesed* operating on the horizontal level as well. And the characters in Ruth are affirmed for practicing *hesed* with each other. At the same time being fully aware of God's overarching covenant love for them too.

A couple things we need to do in terms of the map. First of all, we have Bethlehem. I know it's hard for you beyond the second row to see the fine print here, so our red arrow is locating Bethlehem. It's in the hill country of Judah, generally speaking when it rains a lovely place in terms of producing all sort of agricultural products--olives, grapes, you know the triad of crops. The irony here, or one of the ironies, is that Bethlehem is *bet lehem* and it means "house of bread" and yet they've had a famine. And as a result of the famine, they've had to flee, and they fled to Moab right there. They crossed the Dead Sea, and I would suggest they crossed like so, this is a very narrow and quite shallow area and there were transition routes across here. So they're in Moab. And as we see the narrative unfold, they spent quite a bit of time in Moab, because Moab did not suffer the famine, the way the hill country of Judah did and the way Bethlehem did.

As always, you'll want to know the major characters, let me talk our way through the most significant events that affected them. First of all you have a man named Elimelek, who's name by the way means "my God is king." And I'm just going to suggest to you, and we've see the importance of names all along, and I have a suspicion that this is a fairly godly family. And I'm going to use that Elimelek name to be the jumping off point for that. But the way that Naomi acts and the way that she conducts herself in general, seems to be so attractive to at least one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth, that that daughter-in-law is attracted to Naomi's whole world view. And if you read chapter 1 you know what that's all about. I think we can, without venturing too far into imagination, construct a fairly

godly family. Elimelek and Naomi go to Moab.

Their sons are Mahlon and Kilion. There aren't too many other Israelites over there so Mahlon and Kilion marry two Moabite women. Now this is an interesting phenomenon. You may remember that back in the book of Deuteronomy it said something along the lines of no Moabite down to the tenth generation, or Ammonite for that matter, should come into the congregation of Israel. And yet we're going to see these men marry Moabite women, and also we will see that Moabite women come into the congregation of Israel. Now she's going to come, when she does, not as a Moabite, but she's going to come as one who affirms the God of Israel himself.

All the men die. Elimelek dies. Mahlon dies. Kilion dies. The years have gone by. The famine seems to have stopped, and by the way one of the things we need to keep in mind is that when you're a widow in that social and economic culture, you have father to take care of you, you have no husband to take care of you. If you have no sons, you're basically destined for starvation. Just recognize again, her husband has died, her sons have both died. We have three widows here, and all of them pretty much destined to starve unless she can go home and perhaps go home and be embraced again by this larger clan to which Elimelek had belonged. That's the thing that she faces, she's got to go home because there's nothing else for her in her adopted country of Moab.

Well if you notice chapter 1, let's see if I can get there. She says in verse 8, "Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show *hesed* to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me.'" Why is she telling them to go back? And basically she's saying, "Go back to your people, go back to your gods." Good, she's thinking on a very pragmatic structure, she can't take care of them, maybe just if she goes back, they can go back to their families too. Anything else that might have been part of that? They could possibly get married again, although it wouldn't be an easy prospect. Widows you know, hard to think about marrying a widow in that context.

How about ethnic tension? Bringing Moabite women back to Bethlehem, Bethlehem the tribe of Judah? How are they going to look on these foreigners? We get a little hint of that in chapter 2 when Boaz says, “Stay here in my field so that you don’t get harmed.” So there may have been in her mind a very real understanding of what might happen to some Moabite women coming into that particular context. So she urges them to go back. Notice that Orpah does go back. But Ruth says, verse 16, “Don’t urge me to leave you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” Naomi has just said, “Go back to your people, go back to your gods” and Ruth is saying, “No, they’re no longer mine. I’m going to adopt your people, Naomi, and your God, Naomi.” Which as I said a moment ago, suggests to me that she has seen something in Naomi that has been very compelling for her. In spite of what Naomi has been through, in spite of not having an easy life in the hands of God, she sees something in Naomi that she wants in herself, and so she’s going to go with her.

This brings us to this next thing, what does the book say about God? End of chapter 1, “Praise to the Lord, he’s my *hesed*, he’s my savior, he’s the tent over my head,” is that what she says? Let’s look at it. They get to Bethlehem, and she says in verse 20, “Don’t call me Naomi, call me Mara.” It means “bitter,” remember the bitter waters in Exodus 15, “because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but he has brought me back empty. He has afflicted me; and he has brought misfortune upon me.”--four accusations. He’s made my life bitter, he’s emptied me of everything I have, he’s brought evil upon me, and he’s afflicted me. She tells it as it is. And yet she still has a profound trust in God. That doesn’t waver. In a moment, we’ll talk about Ruth’s going into the fields but of course, in God’s sovereign providence, she ends up in the fields of Boaz, and our other major character is here an elderly relative of Naomi’s who’s called a valiant man. He’s a good man, and he’s a fairly rich landowner as well. And he also apparently like Elimelek is a godly man. When he comes out to the fields, he

blesses his workers, and the workers in turn bless him. That's a good relationship. And he will also serve as the kinsman redeemer.

Now just as a quick note, we always think of redeemer probably with it's religious overtones, but here it really referred to the socio-economic position of buying somebody back, or buying something back, or buying slaves back out of slavery. That's what this person who was nearest of kin would do. They were charged with purchasing, paying a price, in order to buy someone back and redeem them. Boaz is going to serve as that for the whole family. Naomi, Ruth, bringing them back to family property and of course, adopting Ruth's son who she will have back in this family and raising that to keep the family line going.

In the time that we have left, we just want to poke at the story a little bit more to see how God is working faithfully through the whole thing. Right from the get-go there's a famine in the land. That's because the people have been disobedient. This is a response to what's been going on in the book of Judges. What does the covenant say? When they forsook God and worshipped other gods and did all those other things, God is going to hand them over to things, and one of those things will be famine. And so this is one of God's ways of keeping his covenant. Famine in the land. No early rains, no later rains, no rains at all.

Once Naomi hears that there is now bread back in Bethlehem, they head back, and notice they head back just at the time of the barley harvest. Verse 22 of chapter 1, "So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning." It's springtime. Barley is not your best of the grains, but it's something they could get started on, and Ruth will be out there gleaning in the fields. Do you remember what gleaning was all about? It was the way for providing for those who were disenfranchised. And after the harvesters had gone through once, the people who were orphans, widows and aliens could come in and they could pick up the leftover stocks of grain or barley. And this is what Ruth is doing. But let's keep reading a little bit. She by the way is sort of assertive to Naomi, "Let me go to the

fields and pick up the leftover grain.” Verse 3. So she goes and she gleans in the fields, and then it says, “As it turned out, she found herself working in Boaz’s field.” The Hebrew there is fascinating; “it happened a happening.”--the NIV translates it “as it turned out.” Just so happened to be in God’s providence that she lands up in Boaz’s field. And of course, Boaz is sensitive enough to protect her, provide for her, care for her, and also recognizes what she has done to serve her mother-in-law Naomi. Verse 12 of chapter 2, this is Boaz speaking, “May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” He knows, I mean the story gets around, Bethlehem isn’t big, but he knows what Ruth has done in order to provide for her mother-in-law. Ruth is going to work hard. As you read chapter 2, you see her working really hard.

As you read chapter 2 and chapter 3, we see Naomi, I think working hard too. Because I think there’s been some conversations between Naomi and Boaz, because she’s the one who tells Ruth where to go, when to go, how to go about doing what she does when she goes to the threshing floor. So Naomi’s very carefully made some arrangements I suggest to make sure this thing works out well.

Once she gets to the threshing floor, and by the way, threshing floors were not places for women. These were places where the men were, and you get the picture of that when it says at the end of chapter 3, well not the very end but verse 14, Boaz suggests that she leaves before it turns light, “Don’t let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor.” It’s almost like it’s like she’s invaded that male territory. But she’s gone, and when she’s been there, and has been lying at his feet, a very important exchange takes place between them. She says, “I am your servant Ruth. Spread the corner of your garment over me because you are indeed my kinsman redeemer.” And he says, “Alright, I’ll take care of it. There’s one more person who’s closer than I am in terms of this whole status of near kinsman. I’ll take care of it. If he will not redeem your mother-in-law’s field, then

I will and I will marry you as well.” And of course, that happens the next day at the city gate.

We see two aspects of redemption here. One is the one I’ve been talking about all along, and that’s that socio-economic thing. Boaz redeems the property, he takes Ruth to be his wife in order to raise up descendants in the family line. This is going to cost him, because remember he’s going to adopt that child and yet it’s going to carry on the line of the other family name. So there’s some cost and honor in all this. But of course, this has a picture for us and it’s a much bigger picture, and that is this is going to be in the line of Christ as well, who is the greater redeemer.

When you read the very end of this book, it says in verse 16, “Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, ‘Naomi has a son.’ And they named him Obed.” And then we have the family line. Judah, Perez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David. And of course, David is our key figure here, and Jesus is going to be in that particular line, so we obviously have a very significant thing happening with what Boaz does on behalf of this tiny family.

One last thing to say, and then we’ll stop for today. And I said at the start, that we often think of *hesed* as God’s covenant love abiding for us, but in this book, we see the human dimension of it as well. Because we certainly see that God doesn’t just impose things on us, he uses us as we practice *hesed* to move his purposes forward. And it’s through faithful people, like Ruth, like Naomi, like Boaz that he will indeed do this.

And I’ve just given this little quote for you, we often think of our lives as just so dull, collecting barley probably wasn’t awfully exciting, and even that mundane task of collecting barley was part of a much bigger fabric of what’s going on here. It becomes sacred. And each one of us, no matter what we’re doing, are contributing, I would suggest, to God’s covenant plan to his kingdom work, in ways that you and I might never be aware on this side of glory. But I hope you’ll

take it as an encouragement that faithful living is so eminently important in this whole process.

One last thing, people in body, Torah righteousness, Ruth did, Boaz did. And they did what the Torah told them to do and they were blessed for it.

Transcribed by Caleb Owen
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt