



my grandma time

...doing simple things together!

Week 14, Day 1 --- Judges 8-9

Week 14, Day 2 --- Judges 10-12

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Week 14, Day 4 --- Judges 16-18

Week 14, Day 5 --- Judges 19-21

Week 14, Day 6 --- Ruth 1-4

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Day 1 --- Judges 8-9

There is a huge spiritual leadership vacuum in Israel. No one is helping the people maintain their relationship with God. The result is that the people experience periods of peace, but violence and immorality are the norm. Gideon has a brief moment when he recognizes God's rule and then he quickly forgets and makes the ephod. His prosperity and success do not result in good.

- What similarities to your own story do you see in this story?
- What seems to be the greatest danger for the Israelites?

Day 2 --- Judges 10-12

There is something unusual in chapter 10. It isn't that the Israelites turn away from God to serve idols. The unusual thing is that they actually return to worshiping God before He rescues them.

Jephthah knows his history. He seems to be a very intelligent man and makes an excellent response to the king of the Ammonites. In spite of his intelligence and the Spirit of God within him Jephthah makes a very foolish vow. Remember what God said about the foolishness of making vows. I think this story is here as a very clear reminder. Jephthah sinned in making the vow in the first place. Then, I think he sinned when he kept the vow. The Bible is unclear, but I think that Jephthah sacrificed, killed, his daughter. I am certain that God would have preferred that he break his vow rather than kill his daughter.

Keeping his vow in this way did not bring Jephthah or Israel peace. The tribes are jealous of one another and when they aren't fighting outside enemies they are fighting each other. Many from the tribe of Ephraim die as a result. There is no peace in the land and we begin to see many judges with very short times in their role.

- What could Jephthah have vowed that would have truly honored God?
- What is the worst promise you have ever made?

Day 3 --- Judges 13-15

The land is evil, but there are always people of God living in evil lands. Manoah and his wife are a couple who know God and who are doing their best to honor Him. They are told they are going to have a son. This chapter is an argument for life beginning at conception. Not only is the son to be born to be a Nazirite, but his mother is to keep the Nazirite vow from the time of conception on. The Nazirite vow

was a vow of purity and a part of it was refrain from drinking anything that had alcohol in it. (for more information return and read Numbers 6) Since any alcohol the mother drank would be passed to the baby she was not to drink either. Manoah's wife understands what God is up to. She trusts God and I suspect that this is why God chose her to be Samson's mother.

Samson is incredibly strong, but he is not a typical leader. He really has no ambition other than to satisfy his own desires. His greatest weakness is his love for women and God uses that to free the Israelites and punish the Philistines.

- Why does God use Samson to rescue the Israelites?
- How is Samson like many of the heroes of today?

### **A Simple Prayer**

NIV Judges 13:8 Then Manoah prayed to the Lord: "O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born."

One of my projects over this coming year is to document all the prayers in the Bible as I read through it. I admit that I started looking for clues to how to pray the right way. What I'm finding already is changing my thoughts on prayer. I got a late start on this project, so I'm beginning in Judges. Judges is a very discouraging book, but in between all the rebellion and disaster there are a few really positive stories. Today's prayer comes out of one of those stories.

Manoah and his wife did not have any children. They were to become the parents of Samson and God had some special instructions to give them. We often expect God to communicate to the strong and powerful, but the truth is He usually communicates to those who we least expect. In this case God sends an angel with a wonderful message for Manoah's wife. She tells her husband and that leads to this wonderful prayer.

We so often make a big deal out of forms and posture when it comes to prayer. The only thing that we find here is that Manoah addresses God in a very respectful way. I think his attitude is the key to the effectiveness of his prayer. He is a simple man who genuinely desires to do what God desires. His request is simple, direct, and specific. He is an unusual man at this time of history because he is a man of great trust. He trusts his wife and he trusts God. There is no indication in the story that the man questioned his wife in any way regarding the message from the angel. Instead, he responds immediately with this prayer.

### **Day 4 --- Judges 16-18**

As long as Samson kept the letter of his vow his strength remained. The vow of the Nazirite was supposed to indicate someone who had set himself apart for God's special use. Samson kept the letter of the vow, but not the spirit. It certainly seems that he desired women more than he desired to be used by God. Samson broke his vow and his strength leaves. In the end he dies, but the way he dies is a huge defeat for the Philistines. His time of suffering in prison brings him to the place where he finally recognizes that God is the source of his strength.

The Law is very clear about the making of idols. The next two chapters illustrate the depth to which Israel was falling. While I'm certain there were exceptions, it does seem that the majority of the people in Israel are not living according to God's instructions.

- Why did Samson let Delilah know his secret?
- How many examples can you find in just this short section of violations of God's law?

### **Prayer is not about me**

Very early on in the Bible we discover that having our prayers answered is not dependent on either proper form or our goodness. Samson is one of the most interesting characters in the Bible. His strength is tied to keeping a vow that includes not cutting his hair. However, outside the conditions of his vow he does not keep the law of God. He does have a relationship with God, but I don't think it is one I would want to copy. Here I am already focusing on Samson and I think that misses the point.

Now Samson was very thirsty, and he cried out to the Lord, "You have accomplished this great victory by the strength of your servant. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of these pagan people?" So God caused water to gush out of a hollow in the ground at Lehi, and Samson was revived as he drank. Then he named that place "The Spring of the One Who Cried Out," and it is still in Lehi to this day. Judges 15:18,19 (NLT)

God has a plan. After 40 years of disciplining the Israelites at the hands of the Philistines God decides to send them a deliverer. That deliverer is Samson. God gives Samson great strength and with that strength Samson takes vengeance on the Philistines. Samson doesn't come to God with a request. Instead he makes a demand and God provides exactly what Samson asks for. God has a plan and it certainly won't come to pass if Samson dies, so he causes water to come out of the ground. I don't think God is even surprised when Samson names the spring after himself. God isn't looking for credit or thanks. The water flows from His power and goodness.

Then Samson prayed to the Lord, "Sovereign Lord, remember me again. O God, please strengthen me one more time so that I may pay back the Philistines for the loss of my eyes." Then Samson put his hands on the center pillars of the temple and pushed against them with all his might. "Let me die with the Philistines," he prayed. And the temple crashed down on the Philistine leaders and all the people. So he killed more people when he died than he had during his entire lifetime. Judges 16:28-30 (NLT)

Samson does pray one more time and his attitude is different this time, but I don't think it is his attitude that motivates God to answer the prayer. God's will is to destroy the Philistines and Samson's request is in line with God's will.

I think one of the first lessons we must learn is to stop trying to manipulate God through prayer into helping us accomplish our will. Instead, the more we surrender to God's will and desire to see it accomplished the more likely we are to see God at work through us and our prayers.

Day 5 --- Judges 19-21

Judges ends in a very depressing way. The writer describes the evil as being as bad as Sodom and that was very evil. (see Genesis 19 for a comparison) It was the custom in that time for travelers to stay in the home of someone in the town they were visiting. It was expected that someone would open their

house and provide food and lodging. This was true even if the person who was traveling was a known enemy. The opposite was true in Gibeah this night. The town square was a dangerous place and it is obvious that a band of bullies ruled the town. The man's wife is raped and murdered.

The man sends a very graphic message to the tribes of Israel. It draws them together as nothing else has in many years. It seems like it should be simple for the army of all Israel to destroy one town, but Benjamin pulls itself together to defend the evil town. The result is that all Israel suffers loss for allowing this evil to exist.

The tribe of Benjamin is punished for their part in the evil that occurs, but the punishment doesn't seem to make Israel better. There is no real turning toward God. The solution for preserving Benjamin is man's solution and not God's solution. When the writer tells us that Israel had no king there is a double meaning. The obvious meaning is that they did not have a physical king to rule over them. The less obvious meaning is that they did not recognize God as their king. This was the real problem.

- How did the town of Gibeah become such an evil place?
- Why didn't the people of Israel continue to seek God's direction after their victory over Benjamin?

#### Day 6 --- Ruth 1-4

For some background on the concept of the kinsman-redeemer go back and read both Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and Leviticus 25:23-28. The basic idea was that the family line was to be preserved and land kept in the family. If husbands died before they had children, then close relatives were to take responsibility for preserving the man's name and his land.

Naomi is one of the most normal people in the whole Bible. She has a relationship with God and expresses both joy and anger toward Him. In the Old Testament there are characters, events, and places that illustrate in a shadowy way something that God is going to do in the New Testament. Ruth was this kind of character. She is an Old Testament illustration of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is a poor young woman who is willing to do whatever God asks. She trusts God and gives birth to a line of kings.

This story was probably written early in the reign of King David to establish his right to sit on the throne even though he had a Moabite in his family line. It is also a good illustration of how God seems to work. Something really bad happens and God works through it for good. Remember that this story occurs during the same time described in the book of Judges. The culture overall is headed in a very bad direction, but there are still people who recognize and honor God in Israel.

- How would you feel toward God if you lost your spouse and children?
- What does God want you to remember even in the worst of circumstances?

#### Day 7 --- 1 Samuel 1-3

Once again we are reminded that there are believers in Israel. There always are believers, because God always preserves a few. Hannah makes one of the few vows in the Bible that is kept. This one faithful woman is the beginning of change in Israel.

There have been prophets in Israel before this, but this section is a good description of how prophecy works. God speaks to Samuel and then Samuel speaks to the people. The messages are clearly from God because they come true.

- How well do your desires match God's desires for you?
- How would you respond if you heard God speak to you?
- How would you know it was God who was speaking?

### **A Model of Praise**

We generally think of bargaining with God as a bad thing, yet it seems to be common in the Old Testament. In 1 Samuel 1:10-12 Hannah recognizes that only God can help her. She prays a very simple prayer in the form of a vow. She appeals to God's character by drawing attention to the misery she experiences as a childless wife and then she asks for a son. She doesn't just ask for a child, but she specifically asks for a son. If God provides her with a son, then she will give the son back to God. She has made her request to the right person and God honors her request and more. In 1 Samuel 2:21 we are told that Hannah was given 6 children, 4 sons and 2 daughters.

We can learn much from Hannah's simple prayer. It is short and specific. There was no question about who answered the prayer, at least in Hannah's mind. In response she prays one of the most eloquent prayers of praise in the Bible. The focus of the prayer is God, specifically His sovereignty. In 1 Samuel 2:1-10 she pours out her heart in praise to God who has lifted her out of her misery and provided her with a son. As eloquent as it is it is not a perfect model for what and how to pray. We don't know if she prayed this prayer in the hearing of Elkanah's other wife, but there is a line that seems directed her way.

"Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed." 1 Samuel 2:3 (NIV)

How often we use prayer to communicate to others more than to God. It seems that we think prayer gives us license to say things indirectly that we'd probably never say directly. Even Hannah's eloquent praise is diminished by a self-serving criticism. Remember her words of praise and resist the temptation to talk to others when you're talking to God.