



Judges & Ruth

THERE IS A REDEEMER

SARAH IVILL

"Careful scholarship and sound exegesis." —Nancy Guthrie
"You will find much to treasure in this book." —Iain M. Duguid

“If you are looking for a study that highlights the attributes of triumphant heroes of the faith for us to imitate, this is not it! But if you want to be overwhelmed by God’s faithful grace in the dark times of the Judges and the difficult personal circumstances of Naomi and Ruth, you will find much to treasure in this book.”

—**Iain M. Duguid**, Author, *Esther & Ruth* (Reformed Expository Commentary) and *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*

“Sarah Ivill has done a masterful job of unpacking the message and meaning of Judges and Ruth. As voices today define freedom as ‘every man doing what is right in his own eyes,’ Sarah reveals God’s words of warning and hope found in these books. Her examination of the text is thorough, and the study questions will deepen your understanding of the Word of God. In examining this dark time in the history of God’s people, Sarah maintains a focus on the redemptive story woven through the biblical text. At the end, you, like Sarah, will be overwhelmed with God’s grace.”

—**Stephen T. Estock**, PCA Committee Coordinator on Christian Education and Publications (CEP)

“Sarah Ivill connects Ruth to Judges, allowing each book to enrich the other, and connects both of those books to the broad scope of redemptive history. She links individual texts to an abundance of scriptural passages and to systematic theology, always pointing to Christ. And she pairs Ancient Near Eastern backgrounds with plenty of contemporary application. A helpful resource for anyone studying Judges or Ruth or leading a study on them.”

—**Elizabeth Groves**, Lecturer in Old Testament, Westminster Theological Seminary

“With careful scholarship and sound exegesis, Sarah Ivill takes readers into the difficult realities of the book of Judges and the beautiful redemption of the book of Ruth so that they come away with a deeper understanding of, and a greater longing for, our great Judge and Redeemer, Jesus Christ.”

—**Nancy Guthrie**, Author, Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament Bible study series

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THERE IS A REDEEMER

SARAH IVILL

R&R
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To my kinsman-redeemer, Jesus Christ,
under whose wings I have come to take refuge.
Ruth 2:12

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Foreword

EVERYONE HAS A STORY TO TELL, for each life is a story worth telling. All of life is built around stories. We read them in novels. We watch them on the cinema screen. We tell them to one another as a vital part of everyday conversation. We memorize them as part of our cultural DNA.

When a story involves one person, we call it a *biography*. When millions of biographies are meshed together, they tell the story of a people, a nation, or a society. This we call *history*. And the overarching story to both biography and history is the *metanarrative* (a great story) of God himself. It is interesting to note that our word “history” comes from a reference to God, for our history is really *his story*. The Germans call this *Gotts spiel* (God’s play or God’s story), which became *godspell* in Old English and *gospel* today.

The gospel is God’s story that arches over each of our biographies and all our grand histories. The books of Judges and Ruth are great stories, impregnated with the story of God. Sarah Ivill has, once again, brought to life and to light this “God story” in the pages of two rather neglected Old Testament books: Judges and Ruth.

She will call the book of Judges *The Gospel According to Judges* and also *God’s Grace According to Judges*. She is correct. I might also humbly add that the book of Ruth is *God’s Story in a Young Woman’s Life*. Judges is painful history to read. But, as Sarah points out, amidst all its sin, rebellion, human failure, cycles of frustration, and human atrocities—the book can be brutal—the story of God’s faithfulness and forgiveness overrides the history of Israel’s apostasy. What God does for Israel, the Holy Spirit does for other people, throughout human history.

Ruth is a story. In fact, the literary genre constitutes a short story: a novel about a broken family, a broken old woman, and two broken hearts. But it is also a story about Jesus Christ, for he appears in the form of a noble, humble, and gracious man who becomes a *kinsman redeemer* for two helpless women. Boaz, that noble rescuer, is a type of Christ. What he does for Naomi and Ruth, Jesus does for us.

It is easy (and, I think, very appropriate) to “locate” yourself in the story of Ruth and your people or nation in the history of the judges. Although these people and this one family lived so very long ago, they are truly not so very different from you and me. Ours is a nation in distress. America is a people in decline, and our personal and family lives contain the same vortex of pain that we find in the family of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz.

Out of these painful stories—Israel’s history and Ruth’s biographical sketch—comes a most marvelous thing: the Redeemer. For Jesus Christ and his people, his family, and his story are traced through Boaz and Ruth, back through the judges and forward to us and our times.

Sarah Ivill will bring all this to life and light in this delightful and insightful Bible study by the title *There Is a Redeemer*. Sarah’s persistent and pervasive focus on Jesus our Redeemer, who is very much a part of Israel’s history and Ruth’s story, is the refreshing note in this study. As Sarah’s pastor and friend, I am happy to commend both this study and this teacher to you. For Sarah Ivill’s story is one of the Redeemer and the “God story” he brings to our broken lives.

At the end of this study you will know better and hopefully love more deeply this Redeemer, Jesus Christ. He is the central man of all history; he is our kinsman—a man among humanity; and our Redeemer—the Savior of us all. And he’s waiting to change your story with God’s story. Enjoy your study, and thanks, Sarah Ivill!

Michael F. Ross
Senior Pastor, Christ Covenant Church
Matthews, North Carolina

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Thank you to Westminster Theological Seminary and the professors who have served there. The many books that have been written and recommended by the professors, as well as the many online class lectures and chapel messages, have been of tremendous benefit to me. They have taught me what it means to see Christ in all Scripture and to understand more deeply the history of redemption and the beautiful truths of Reformed theology.

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And thank you to my children, Caleb, Hannah, and Daniel, whose sweet smiles, loving hugs, prayers for “Mom’s Bible studies,” and patience as I “finish another thought” before tending to one of their many needs are a constant source of encouragement to me as I pray for the next generation of believers to love the Lord and his Word with all their hearts and minds.

Finally, thank you to my heavenly Father, to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and to the Spirit, who helps me in my weakness. To the triune God be the glory for what he has done through me, a broken vessel and a flawed instrument, yet one that is in the grip of his mighty and gracious hand.

A Personal Note from Sarah

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF when you hear the book of Judges mentioned? If you were raised in church, perhaps you remember the stories of Deborah and Barak, Gideon's fleece, and Samson's victory over the Philistines. Maybe the story ended with an exhortation, "Be like Samson!" Or maybe you started the book of Judges and never made it through because it seemed like lots of blood and gore and sexual escapades. Maybe you skip most of the book when you're teaching your children the Word of God because you are not sure the content is appropriate or you are not sure how to explain it. Perhaps the name Judges brings judgment to your mind, and you see the book as one of doom and gloom. Whatever the case may be, I want to propose that Judges is one of the books of the Bible where we see our need for a Savior the most and where we see God's grace shining the brightest. It is a book about needing a true Savior, a true Priest, and a true King. It is a book about the gospel, the gospel according to Judges. And when we are done studying the book, we will have a much deeper knowledge of the depravity of humanity and a much richer appreciation for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who took all our sin and our shame on himself on the cross, having the full wrath of God poured out on him, in our place. He has taken our sin and our shame and given us his righteousness. Martin Luther called it a "wonderful exchange."

This is that mystery which is rich in divine grace to sinners, wherein by a wonderful exchange our sins are no longer ours but Christ's, and

the righteousness of Christ is not Christ's but ours. He has emptied himself of his righteousness that he might clothe us with it, and fill us with it; and he has taken our evils upon himself that he might deliver us from them.¹

The book of Ruth shines like a diamond in the rough. Set against the dark ages of the judges, it shines brightly the light of Jesus Christ. It beautifully reminds us that God has not forgotten his promises to Abraham of land, seed, and most importantly, the blessing of all nations of the earth through his chosen family. The book of Ruth is about God's plan of redemption in his Son, Jesus Christ. But it is displayed through the lives of women like you and like me. Women who are wrought with pain, who have needs, who have desires, who struggle with faith and running ahead of God's timing, and yet who teach us what it means to live a life of faith, clinging to the promises of God and embodying his *hesed*, his covenantal lovingkindness. The book of Ruth teaches us that there is a Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who has preserved the name of those who belong to God's family and has bought back our inheritance. Let us give "thanks to the Father, who has qualified [us] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:12–14).

My love for teaching the Word of God was inspired by my own hunger to study it. Longing for the "meat" of God's Word and finding it lacking in so many churches today, I enrolled in Bible Study Fellowship after graduating from high school. It was there that I shared my desire to attend seminary and was influenced and encouraged by a strong, godly woman and mentor in my life to attend Dallas Theological Seminary. During this time I was leading women through in-depth Bible studies and caught a glimpse of how much women desired to be fed the depth of God's Word. This encouraged me even further to receive an educa-

1. Martin Luther, *Werke*, ed. J. F. K. Knaake et al., vol. 5, *Psalmenvorlesungen 1519–21* (Ps. 1–22) (Weimar, 1892), 608; quoted in J. I. Packer, "Sola Fide: The Reformed Doctrine of Justification," *Ligonier Ministries*, accessed June 20, 2013, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/sola-fide-the-reformed-doctrine-of-justification/>.

tion that would best prepare me to deliver God's Word to women who hungered for the truth.

On graduating with my Master of Theology, I took a position as assistant director of women's ministry at a large church where I served under a woman who shared my same passion to teach the "meat" of God's Word. Within the year, I had assumed the role of director and delved into teaching the Word of God in an expository and applicable manner. After three years I resigned in order to stay home with my first child, Caleb Joshua. During these years at home the Lord used my experience in seminary and ministry to lead me back to my roots and the full embracing of the Reformed faith. Raised for the first half of my childhood in conservative Presbyterian churches, I had been grounded in the Reformed faith and Reformed catechism from an early age. But from middle school on I was not in Reformed churches. The questions in my twenties then became "Who am I?" and "What do I really believe?"

One of the first steps on my journey was contacting a Reformed seminary and asking them to give me a book list of everything I would have missed by not attending a Reformed seminary. That began my journey of reading some of the most renowned Reformed theologians in the world. It was during those days that the question, "Who am I?" was finally answered, and I began teaching women from the historic Reformed tradition. In fact, that is how my first Bible study came to be published. I had the incredible privilege of teaching my first study to a wonderful group of women for a morning Bible study at our PCA church. And it was from their encouragement and exhortation that I submitted it for publication.

I know it is difficult to pick up a Bible study written by another author and teach or study it. It is for this reason that I offer you the following suggestions as you prepare to teach or study *Judges and Ruth: There Is a Redeemer*. It is my practice that before I ever begin to study a book of the Bible I sit down to read it several times first as if I were reading a letter from a personal friend through for the first time. It is enjoyable reading to get a feel for the "big picture" of the book and how it fits into the rest of the books of Scripture. Then with my own pen,

paper, and Bible I divide each chapter (or sometimes half a chapter or two halves from two different chapters) into my own divisions.

Next I try to grasp what the divisions are saying in a nutshell and write that down. From that point I move to writing application questions appropriate for each division, at least one if not several for each division. This gives me “ownership” of the passage. Before going to read what anyone else has to say, I have studied it by myself and allowed the Holy Spirit to speak to my own heart about it. This adds “uniqueness” to your teaching or studying. You don’t want to regurgitate what someone else has said. You want to make it your own.

Following this, though, it is important then to study what others have learned from the book. So I try to have at least three good, solid Reformed commentaries for the book I am studying as well as other study tools such as a Bible dictionary, concordance, and an Old Testament or New Testament theology. One of my favorite tools for this study was *Judges: Such a Great Salvation* by Dale Ralph Davis. As I studied the commentaries chapter by chapter, I would highlight what I felt was important for the women to know in this study. Then I would begin writing the lesson notes, using my own outlines and notes, as well as what I had learned from others.

The final step was writing the questions for the women to answer. The study is organized so that the women will read and work on the questions for the passage that will be covered in teaching the following week. This gives the women the opportunity to “own” it for themselves before they ever hear the teaching.

If at any point of the study you grow weary or overwhelmed, I want to encourage you to press on until the very end. As you read, let your heart and mind go where the Word of God takes you, to the depth of sin and judgment and to the heights of grace and salvation. On every page keep your eyes on Jesus, the One to whom all Scripture points, and worship him for the work of salvation that he has accomplished for you through the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Soli Deo Gloria



Introduction to Judges

AT THE BEGINNING of every lesson we will identify the aim of the lesson concerning our:

- *Mind*: What do we need to know from this passage in Scripture?
- *Heart*: How does what we learn from this passage affect our internal relationship with the Lord?
- *Hands*: How does what we learn from this passage translate into action for God's kingdom?

INTRODUCTION

Laurie¹ stared down at her hands. Her fingers twitched nervously. She felt sick inside. Her leg bounced up and down from nervous energy. Her whole body felt like it had been run over by a truck. She was seated in a clinic's waiting room to have her follow-up exam from the abortion she had a couple weeks earlier. No one had told her how bad it was going to be. Not one nurse had told her how sick the abortion pill was going to make her. But she had spent days in agonizing physical pain, not to mention the emotional and spiritual pain on top of it. She couldn't bear to look at a mother with her baby. She had once heard a pastor say that

1. Laurie represents a number of women who are sitting in our churches today, hurting from the past shame of having an abortion.

women who had abortions were murdering their babies. At the time she had thought that offensive and rather extreme. But now she felt like she had committed a crime that could never be washed away.

Twenty years later . . .

Laurie stared down at her hands again. The Bible study leader was talking about how often women with dark pasts carry that shame around with them for years, never accepting Christ's forgiveness or sacrifice on their behalf, but instead always living in guilt and depression. Tears stung Laurie's eyes as she tried to keep the waterfall from coming before she could get to her car. But they came faster than she could control them. A couple of the women from her small group asked if she wanted to stay after and talk, but Laurie declined. How could she tell these sweet women who seemed to come from such pure backgrounds about her past? She just knew that they would judge her for the abortion, even if they pretended differently. So Laurie left that day without divulging her secret, stuffing it inside for it to erupt another day.

Perhaps you can relate to Laurie. Perhaps you have a dark past and are carrying around shame from years ago, never embracing Jesus' work on the cross for you, always living under guilt and shame. Maybe you remember the night that you lost your virginity to a boyfriend. Perhaps you remember all the times you were bent over a toilet making yourself throw up because you were ensnared in bulimia or the times you starved your body because you were trapped in anorexia. Maybe you remember the smell of the abortion clinic and the physical, emotional, and spiritual pain it brought and still brings. Perhaps you flirted with lesbianism in college and you still carry guilt around about it. Maybe your dad or uncle or brother, men that you thought you could trust, sexually or physically abused you when you were younger and you've never told anyone in order to keep your family's reputation "pure." Perhaps you were addicted to drugs or alcohol in high school and you have faced infertility issues because of it and feel like you've ruined your dreams of motherhood because of poor choices. Maybe your disrespect that you showed your mother in high school and college still forms a breach in your relationship with her today. Perhaps you have "killed"

your husband and children with words, looks, or actions that you have done against them. Maybe you are enslaved to gossip or perhaps you are always looking at what other women have and wanting it.

If you can relate to any of the things in the previous paragraph, then you will relate to the tribal leaders² in the book of Judges. And if you can relate to the tribal leaders in Israel, which we all can, then you will be overwhelmed with God's grace as you move through the book. Go ahead and read that again. *You will be overwhelmed with God's grace as you move through the book.* That's right. I know the book records many of the faults and failures of the tribal leaders, and it is true that we will see God's judgment of man's sin in the book—we really wouldn't want it any other way. God is a God of justice and that is a good thing. But it is also true that God's grace shines in the book, and I would say that his grace shines far brighter. God loves his people. He is committed to their preservation. He knows we are sinners and have gone astray. His wrath is turned toward us. And he cannot dismiss our sin. But he has poured it out on his Son instead. The gospel is this: God the Father sent his Son into the world to seek and to save the lost. Jesus Christ lived a life of perfect obedience on our behalf. He died on the cross in our place, exchanging our sin for his righteousness. He was raised by the power of God and ascended to the right hand of God the Father where he was crowned with glory and honor and is now our King and High Priest, ruling over the affairs of this world and interceding on our behalf. And he is coming again to save those who are eagerly waiting for him and to make all things new. Now that is good news! And we will see this gospel, although in a less clear way than we see it in the New Testament, in the book of Judges. In fact, we could call this study *The Gospel According to Judges*.

We could also call it *God's Grace According to Judges*. After reading through the book of Judges, make sure you turn to the book of Hebrews and read what God has to say about these men. In one of the greatest chapters on faith in the Bible, some of these weak-willed, idolatrous, personal revenge taking, reluctant to obey God's call, rash

2. The Hebrew words used to describe the judges give us meanings such as "deliverers" or "saviors" or those who "rule, govern, exercise leadership." See Daniel I. Block, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 6, *Judges, Ruth* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 23–24.

vow making, self-serving, sexually immoral tribal leaders are listed as men of faith. And do you know what is written down? Not one of their failures! Instead we read,

For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah . . . who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (Heb. 11:32–34)

Now that is what I call grace, God’s grace, grace that is greater than all our sin! And don’t think that God’s record is any different for you. If you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, there are no marks against you. None of your sins are written down either. The blood of the Lamb has washed them away forever. You stand before the Judge of the universe “not guilty.”

AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF REDEMPTION AND REVELATION

The history of God’s works is never divorced from the history of his Word that interprets those works. It does not take us very long to discover that the Bible does not read as a history textbook, but rather as an account of God’s works to redeem his chosen people and God’s works to rule his chosen people, often summed up in four words—*creation*, *fall*, *redemption*, and *restoration*. Revelation is progressive. As we move through God’s Word, we see that God unfolds his plan of redemption over different periods of history. Although some scholars do not begin the history of redemption until Abraham, I think that Genesis 3, the place where we see the curse on the covenant of works/creation³ simultaneously with the inauguration of the covenant of grace, is the most appropriate

3. The Westminster Confession of Faith uses the phrase “covenant of works,” but to avoid confusion I have used both terms together, especially since I am indebted to O. Palmer Robertson’s descriptions of the covenants throughout this overview (i.e., the “covenant of preservation” with Noah, the “covenant of promise” with Abraham, the “covenant of law” with Moses, and the “covenant of the kingdom” with David. For a fuller and excellent explanation of these covenants, see

place to start. The gospel is given in seed form, as God states that he will put enmity between the serpent's offspring and the woman's seed, Jesus Christ and his church (Gen. 3:15).

But before we speak of the covenant of grace, there are two other covenants that we need to understand: the covenant of redemption and the covenant of works/creation. The covenant of works took place in eternity past. It was initiated by God the Father with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. It had the express purpose to save a remnant from sinful humanity to be the people of God for all eternity.

The covenant of works/creation took place in the garden of Eden at the time of creation. It was initiated by God with Adam and Eve and was conditioned upon perfect obedience. The reward was life, and the penalty was immediate death. Since Adam and Eve failed to obey, the penalty of death was applied, not only to Adam and Eve, but also to all mankind, since Adam acted as the representative of all.

The covenant of grace took place after the fall. It was initiated by God with sinful human beings and is conditioned upon faith in Jesus Christ. The reward is spiritual life and the penalty is spiritual death. The covenant of grace includes the covenant with Adam (Gen. 3:15), the covenant with Noah (Gen. 6:17–22; 8:20–22; 9:1–17), the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3, 15; 17:1–2), the covenant with Moses (Ex. 19–24), the covenant with David (2 Sam. 7), and the new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 37:21, 26). The covenant of grace is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:20, “All the promises of God find their Yes in [Christ Jesus].”

All through the book of Genesis we see that the author is concerned with the generations of the godly seed. We also have the covenant of preservation with Noah recorded in Genesis 9 and then the tower of Babel in Genesis 11 where God scatters humanity across the face of the earth and confuses their languages so that they will not rise up to be gods (this event is reversed at Pentecost in Acts 2). In Genesis 12 we meet Abraham (at that point still “Abram”). With Abraham, we see

O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1980).

the covenant of promise, which is renewed with Isaac and Jacob in the patriarchal period.

When we come to Exodus, we meet Moses, the mediator of the covenant of law. This is the beginning of the theocratic nation of Israel. God brought them out of slavery in Egypt and into a relationship with him as servants of the Holy God. As such, they were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6). We learn in both Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 that if they were obedient, they would receive blessings (Lev. 26:1–13; Deut. 28:1–14), but if they were disobedient, they would receive curses (Lev. 26:14–46; Deut. 28:15–68). One of these, and the greatest of these curses was exile from the land. But even toward the end of Deuteronomy we see that God made provision for restoration after the exile, which involved the new covenant (Deut. 30:1–10; see also Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 37:21, 26).

In fact, Deuteronomy 28–30 is the story of the rest of the Old Testament in miniature form. First, comes blessing, climaxing in the reign of King Solomon (1 Kings 8:24). Then come curses, ultimately resulting in exile from the land (2 Chron. 36:17–21). All the prophets refer to the covenant blessings and curses as they prophesy to Israel and Judah, giving them messages of judgment, as well as holding out hope. They declare that exile is inevitable, yet they also declare God's faithfulness to his covenant, keeping the promise of the new covenant (Deut. 30:1–10; Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 37:21, 26) before them.

After Moses died, the Lord raised up Joshua to lead the people into the Promised Land, which was the place where God would dwell with his people in the temple. Up to this point in redemptive history, the garden of Eden and the tabernacle had been the place the Lord had temporarily dwelt with his people. The entire book of Joshua centers around the entry and conquest of the land.

But then we read that Joshua died, and in the book of Judges we see that the people failed to conquer the land as they should have. Instead, they did what was right in their own eyes because there was no king in Israel. The book of Judges anticipates the beginning of the monarchy in Israel with King Saul and King David, the latter of whom God makes a covenant

with concerning the kingdom (2 Sam. 7). The period of the monarchy climaxes in King Solomon when we read that the promises have been fulfilled in Solomon's prayer of dedication (1 Kings 8:24). Sadly, it didn't take long (within Solomon's own reign) until the monarchy took a turn for the worse (1 Kings 11). Following Solomon's death, the country actually divided into the northern kingdom, Israel, and the southern kingdom, Judah (1 Kings 12:16–24) in 931 B.C.

Elijah and Elisha preached to the northern kingdom during this time. Although there were a few good kings, the majority of kings in both Israel and Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord and led the people into rebellion as well. In God's grace and mercy, he raised up prophets during this time (known as the preexilic prophets) to prophesy to the people of coming judgment so that they would turn and repent of their wicked ways. Hosea and Amos preached to the northern kingdom, while Isaiah and Micah preached to the southern kingdom. Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah also preached their messages during this time. The northern kingdom, Israel, did not listen and was taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

A little over one hundred years later the southern kingdom, Judah, followed suit. Jeremiah was prophesying during this time. Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians through three deportations in 605, 597, and 586 B.C. The second of these, 597 B.C., took Jehoiachin, the last true Davidic king on the throne, along with the royal family and all the leading classes in Israel, to Babylon. Ezekiel was included among these since he was the son of a priest.

Again, in God's mercy, he raised up both Daniel and Ezekiel to prophesy to the people during the exile. Daniel and Ezekiel spoke messages of both judgment and restoration to the exiles. God would still be faithful to his covenant promise; he would be their God and they would be his people. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke of the promised new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 37:21, 26), which would find its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Following the exile, we see the postexilic prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) raised up by God to continue speaking to his people.

Though there is a small fulfillment of a restored temple, people, and land under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, the promises of God would not be fulfilled until Jesus Christ came. Jesus came as both the Lord of the covenant (the one who extended grace and mercy to rebellious covenant servants) and as the Servant of the covenant (the true Israel who obediently fulfilled what the nation of Israel could not fulfill, who bore the curse on our behalf, and who rescued us out of slavery to sin into a life of truth, knowledge, and righteousness in him).⁴ He came that “all the promises of God [would] find their Yes in him” (2 Cor. 1:20).

After Jesus came to earth as a baby, lived a life of perfect obedience, died for the sins of God’s people, was raised as the firstfruits of the resurrection, and ascended to the Father, the Holy Spirit was sent on the Day of Pentecost to renew the church and establish it by his power (Acts 2). The new age was inaugurated through Christ and his church, but it awaits its consummation until Christ returns to bring the old age to a complete end by the final judgment and usher in the new heaven and the new earth. In the meantime, the church is to fulfill the great commission to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that [Christ has] commanded [her]. And behold, [he is] with [her] always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20; see also Luke 24:47–49).

As we study Judges, it is important for us to keep this overview of the history of redemption and revelation in mind. We must first ask the question, “How does this text relate to the history of redemption?” In other words, where is it placed in progressive, redemptive history? And we must ask, “How does this text relate to the climax of redemptive history: the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?” The latter question leads us to the next section we need to consider before studying the book of Judges.

4. Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 261.

CHRIST-CENTERED INTERPRETATION OF JUDGES

Evangelical Christians will be the first to heartily agree with 2 Timothy 3:16–17, that

all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

But sadly, many seem to have no problem neglecting portions of Scripture that seem difficult in their messages. Judges seems to have been one such book that has been neglected by many Christians. The meanings of the stories of the tribal leaders seem full of blood and gore, sexual immorality and indecency. We too often hurry back to books like the New Testament Epistles that seem less offensive to our minds. But this is a great mistake!

When Jesus appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus,

he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25–27)

In John 5:39 Jesus tells the Jews, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.”

When Peter spoke in Solomon’s portico he said, “But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:18). At the very end of Stephen’s speech to the Jews, he said, “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One” (Acts 7:52). And, when the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip about whom Isaiah 53:7–8 was written, Philip “opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus”

(Acts 8:26–40). So if we do not understand how Christ relates to all the Scriptures, we have not yet seen the truth of the Scripture.

We have looked at some key texts; now let's look at some key phrases for identifying the continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. We might say that we go from Old Testament promise to New Testament fulfillment; or from Old Testament problem (sinners in need of a Savior) to New Testament solution (the Savior comes); or from Old Testament anticipation to New Testament realization, but not just a realization—a far surpassing realization. For example, Jesus Christ is not just a greater Moses, Samson, prophet, priest, or king, but the greatest and final Moses, Samson, prophet, priest, and king. Furthermore, the Lord of history designs historical persons, offices, institutions, and events to foreshadow the full redemption to come. Thus, he foreshadows his great work of redemption in both words and works (events).⁵

The climax of all Scripture is the gospel—the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. All the Old Testament writers look toward this climax. All the New Testament writers look both back to this climax and forward to the consummation of the kingdom, Christ's second coming, which was inaugurated at his first coming. The question when we are studying Scripture then is always threefold: (1) "Where are we in the history of redemption in this text?" (2) "How does this text relate to the gospel?" and (3) "How do I apply this text to my life in light of where I am in redemptive history?"

As we study the book of Judges, we will see Christ's work anticipated on every page. Through the failures of God's people, as well as their faith, through the lack of a true king, as well as through the deliverance of those tribal leaders that God raised up to deliver Israel from her oppressors (whether from within or without), we will be pointed to Jesus Christ.

THE AUTHOR AND DATE OF JUDGES

The author of the book of Judges remains unknown. While certain material within the book (ch. 1, 5, 17–21) is said by most commenta-

5. *Ibid.*, 225–26.

tors to have originated closely after the time that the events occurred (1382–1063 B.C.), other material (namely 18:30) suggests that it was put in its final edited form as late as the eighth century B.C. (the exile of the northern kingdom to Assyria) or the sixth century B.C. (the exile of the southern kingdom to Babylon).⁶

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF JUDGES

We must remember that the book of Judges is part of the progressive revelation that God has given to his people. The book does not stand outside of history; it is given to God's people at a specific time in history for a specific purpose. Yet we must never forget that the message is also for the church today.

The word “judges” is not new to us in the book of Judges. It was used under the Mosaic institution. Moses acted as a judge for the cases brought to him by the people. In fact, you may remember that his father-in-law, Jethro, advised him to appoint other leaders to judge regular cases, and to leave only the most important cases for Moses (Ex. 18). The book of Deuteronomy allows for judges to be appointed and gives specific instruction for doing so (Deut. 1:16; 16:18–19; 24:17; 25:13–16). The priests were also involved with the judges on more difficult cases, so that the people would go to both of them for consultation and a final decision (Deut. 17:8–13). But the meaning of the word takes on a different nuance in the period of the judges. The word means more of a leader in times of battle, a ruler in times of peace, a governor, or a tribal ruler.⁷

The period of the judges is usually reckoned by commentators to have been between 1220 (or 1200) and 1050 (or 1045) B.C., although some date it from 1382 to 1063 B.C.⁸ In the book of Deuteronomy we learn that the Israelites were commanded by God to destroy the

6. Barry G. Webb, “Judges,” in *New Bible Commentary*, 4th ed., ed. by G. J. Wenham, J. A. Motyer, D. A. Carson, and R. T. France (1994; repr., Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 263.

7. J. B. Payne, “Judges,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed., ed. I. Howard Marshall et al. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1996), 627.

8. *Ibid.*, 631.

Canaanites when they took possession of the land for two main reasons. First, the Lord was using the Israelites to judge the Canaanites for their immorality. And second, the Lord knew that their influence on his people concerning idolatry would be great if they were allowed to remain in the land (Deut. 7). Under Joshua's leadership, Israel had subdued the whole land, but the nature of the conquest was gradual (Ex. 23:28–30; Deut. 7:22), and there were still many Canaanites in the land (Josh. 13:1) that had the potential to lead Israel astray if Israel did not obey the Lord and continue the conquest after Joshua's death. As we will see, this potential became reality because of Israel's failure to drive the Canaanites out of the land.

At the time of the judges, Israel was divided into tribal areas (Josh. 13–21). Nine and a half were located in the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean coast. The other two and a half were located in the plateau area east of the Jordan. Conquests by surrounding people, such as the Midianites, Moabites, Ammonites (to the east), and the Philistines (to the west), usually were against one or two tribes, leaving the other areas unaffected.⁹

Since there was no king in Israel yet, the tribes were loosely held together by two main things. First, they shared a common history. Second, they were God's covenant people. But as we will learn, during the period of the judges this common history and place as God's covenant people were not enough to keep intertribal fighting from occurring. Israel needed a king, and not just any king. They needed a king anointed by God. But even a king anointed by God would not prove to be the answer. Ultimately they needed the perfect King, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

During the time of the judges, the Israelites most likely gathered at Shiloh. It was centrally located and the place where the Tent of Meeting had been set up on Israel's arrival in Canaan. They gathered at least one time a year in order to be reminded of their covenant obligations, give thanks, pray, and offer sacrifices.¹⁰

9. Webb, "Judges," 261.

10. *Ibid.*, 262.

During this period there was no national army organized under a king, so volunteers had to be assembled anytime a threat of war arose. Usually it was the leader with the greatest charisma and strength who was nominated as a leader. Since areas of Canaanites that had yet to be conquered separated tribes from each other, there was little unity and help from other tribes during times of battle. These pockets of Canaanites that separated them also led to Israel's syncretism (worshiping both Yahweh and the pagan gods). However, we must not get the picture that the entire period of the judges was fraught with conflict. As we will learn in the book of Ruth and from the narrator's comments throughout the book of Judges concerning long periods of peace, there were times when a normalcy of life occurred and people could flourish.¹¹ As we study, it will become clear that the Lord was at work just as much in the times of conflict as in the times of peace, preserving his people and moving the history of redemption forward toward the rise of the monarchy.

As far as the broader historical background with regard to what was going on in the world outside of Israel, it was a period of great ethnic migration in the ancient Near East. It was a time that witnessed the collapse of great cultures such as the Hittites, Minoans, and Mycenaeans. It was also a period that witnessed the onset of the Iron Age in the ancient Near East, and a time when Crete fell, which led to the Philistines fleeing east to the coastal plains of Palestine.¹²

THE PURPOSE OF JUDGES

At the beginning of the book (1:1–2) the question is asked, “Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?” And the answer comes from the Lord, “Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand.” The same question is asked at the end of the book, except now it does not pertain to their enemies but to their own brothers (20:18), “Who shall go up first for us to fight against the

11. Ibid.

12. Tremper Longman III and Raymond Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 135.

people of Benjamin?” And the answer comes from the Lord, “Judah shall go up first.” We must always remember that the Israelites were God’s covenant people, and as such had the responsibility to obey him. But the book of Judges informs us that they fell far short of this obedience. From Judah to Dan (1:1–34) and from Othniel of Judah (3:7–11) to Samson of Dan (13–16), Israel sinned and fell short of the glory of God. In this way, the book speaks to all of us. It is the same message that the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 3:23, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

But we would be wrong to assume that this is the central message of the book. The central message of the book points to God’s grace. The downward spiral of Israel and Israel’s judges in the book certainly justifies God’s wrath against his people. It explains why his promises to the patriarchs to fully possess the land never came true. Israel had disobeyed, and because of their disobedience they were brought under God’s curse. Yet he did not leave them alone. Marks of his grace resound throughout the book, as we read of him raising up deliverer after deliverer on his people’s behalf despite their sin. He would not let his people go. On behalf of his Son, Jesus Christ, he would preserve his chosen people.

In the climax of redemptive history, the question “Who shall go up first for us to fight against the enemy?” is finally answered. The Lion of Judah, Jesus Christ, went up first for us to fight against the enemy. He went to the cross and conquered death. He took our sin on himself and bore our shame so that we could have his righteousness.

The book of Judges shows us that judges cannot save Israel. And though it prepares us for the time of the monarchy, which climaxes with King Solomon, we learn in 1 and 2 Kings that kings cannot save Israel either. It is only one King, the perfect God-man, Jesus Christ, who can save God’s people from their sin. And he has done so victoriously. While the book of Judges may seem dark (and it is), we must not miss the brightness of God’s grace that shines through every page, pointing us to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

AN OUTLINE OF JUDGES

While several detailed outlines of Judges can be found in commentaries, I have tried to keep it simple yet thorough for our purposes in this study.

Downward Spiral of Israel's Military (Introduction I in 1:1–2:5)

Downward Spiral of Israel's Spirituality (Introduction II in 2:6–3:6)

Downward Spiral of Israel's Leadership (3:7–16:31)

Othniel (3:7–11)

Ehud (3:12–30)

Shamgar (3:31)

Deborah and Barak (4:1–5:31)

Gideon and Abimelech (6:1–9:57)

Tola (10:1–2)

Jair (10:3–5)

Jephthah (10:6–12:7)

Ibzan (12:8–10)

Elon (12:11–12)

Abdon (12:13–15)

Samson (13:1–16:31)¹³

Downward Spiral of Israel's Religiosity (Conclusion I in 17–18)

Downward Spiral of Israel's Morality (Conclusion II in 19–21)

THE USE OF JUDGES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The book of Hebrews contains the best-known reference to the book of Judges in the New Testament.

13. The twelve tribal leaders listed correspond to the twelve tribes of Israel, from Judah to Dan.

What more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (Heb. 11:32–34)

We will learn at the end of our story how amazing it is that these men were recorded here as men of faith with a seemingly wonderful track record! None of their faults or failures are mentioned, only their faith. This is truly amazing grace!

There are other allusions though in the New Testament. John the Baptist (Luke 1:15) follows in the footsteps of a Nazirite like Samson (Judg. 13:4–5). The angel’s visit to Samson’s mother (Judg. 13:3) finds a comparison with the angel’s visit to Jesus’ mother, Mary, in Luke 1:31. The blessing given to Mary by Elizabeth, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” (Luke 1:42) finds a comparison with the blessing given to Jael by Deborah (Judg. 5:24). When Paul stood up and addressed the crowd in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, he made mention of the “judges until Samuel the prophet” (Acts 13:20).¹⁴

However, lest we think that the New Testament only has scattered references to the book of Judges, we must step back and look at the theological themes of Judges and how the New Testament develops these. First, Jesus and the apostles are those to whom the Spirit of God has been given. This is true of the deliverers in the book of Judges as well. Second, the theme of covenant obedience or disobedience, which is so prominent in the book of Judges, is also prominent in the New Testament. For example, 1 John 5:21 says, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols,” which essentially means “worship God alone,” the summation of covenant obedience. Third, Jesus Christ is not only the final and perfect fulfillment of the office of judge, but is the final and perfect King (the office that the book of Judges anticipates), anointed by the Holy Spirit of God.¹⁵

14. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 69–70.

15. C. E. Armerding, “Judges,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 175.

CONCLUSION

You won't find Laurie staring down at her hands and nervously fidgeting today. Instead you will find her working at a Crisis Pregnancy Center, walking with women through the journey of accepting their pregnancies, having their babies, and either keeping them or giving them up for adoption. She is able to share with them her own story and, more importantly, she is able to share the story of redemption through Jesus Christ. Though her past was dark, she knows Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 by heart:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. *And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

IDEAL *for* GROUPS *or* INDIVIDUALS

In its tales of gore, rebellion, sexual escapades, and fleeting victory, Judges is one of the books of the Bible in which we most see our need for a Savior and in which God's grace shines most brightly. Meanwhile, the book of Ruth beautifully reminds us that God has not forgotten his promises to Abraham. His plan of redemption is displayed in this book through the lives of hurting women who cling to his covenantal lovingkindness.

Following her **mind-heart-hands** model of application, Sarah Ivill's gospel-centered Bible study provides questions and commentary to accompany a careful, redemptive-historical reading of these books in eighteen weeks (thirteen for Judges and five for Ruth). Readers will be both helped and challenged, emerging from their study with both a mastery over the subject matter and new ways to live a gospel-focused life.

"With careful scholarship and sound exegesis, Sarah Ivill takes readers into the difficult realities of the book of Judges and the beautiful redemption of the book of Ruth so that they come away with a deeper understanding of, and a greater longing for, our great Judge and Redeemer, Jesus Christ."

—**Nancy Guthrie**, Author, *Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament Bible study series*

"If you are looking for a study that highlights the attributes of triumphant heroes of the faith for us to imitate, this is not it! But if you want to be overwhelmed by God's faithful grace in the dark times of the Judges and the difficult personal circumstances of Naomi and Ruth, you will find much to treasure in this book."

—**Iain M. Duguid**, Author, *Esther & Ruth* (Reformed Expository Commentary) and *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*

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