

Bible Study Lesson Summary, July 12, 2020

Today's lesson includes Days 117-123 on your reading guide.

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Jgs. 7: First God selects a small number to be His warriors. It was only the ones who weren't afraid and didn't drink like animals, but drank from their hands. Then God helps Gideon win by having the enemy have nightmares about bread. The footnotes say the bread represents the agricultural Hebrews while the tent that the bread destroys represents the nomad enemies. It's just a simple foreshadowing of Jesus the Bread of Life to save the people. It is also significant that vs. 22 tells us, "...throughout the camp the Lord set the sword of one against another." The bad guys attack each other. Good does not attack good, but evil will attack evil just as fast as it attacks good.

Jgs. 8: Gideon does the will of God and wins battles. When asked to be ruler over the Israelites he wisely responds in vs. 23: "The Lord must rule over you." He did this, for the Lord had clearly given him the victory. Vs. 27, Gideon requested gold for his reward and made it into a vestment like a chasuble. But he and the Israelites paid adulterous homage to it rather than worshipping the Lord, causing the ruin of Gideon and his family. He has a son, Abimelech, by his concubine.

Jgs. 9: Abimelech does not play nice with his 70 brothers and kills all but one of them, Jotham. Vs. 7-15 gives the great parable of kings who serve themselves. This is God's reminder that He is to be king. Abimelech is not a faithful person and accepts Baal worship, but God works through him. But even though God allows him to win a few battles, Abimelech does not live happily ever after. *This is a good time to mention the theme of kingdom. The Israelites have just started to*

want a king. God wants them in His kingdom. Disloyalty to a king is treason. Watch for this theme from now on.

Jgs. 10: Two more judges, Tola and Jair, serve the Lord but the people don't. But life becomes so unbearable that God challenged them to drive out the foreign gods. Vs. 14, God says: "Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen; let them save you now that you are in distress." Vs. 16, the people finally responded; "And they cast out the foreign gods from their midst and served the Lord, so that he grieved over the misery of Israel."

Jgs. 11: Jephthah is an interesting character. He is born of a harlot and so mocked. Then they want him to be king. Remember that Mary could have been stoned for conceiving Jesus. Then it sounds like Palm Sunday with them wanting him to be king. Jephthah makes a vow and must sacrifice his only child, a daughter. It sounds like God's Covenant that He cannot break, which can only be fulfilled by sacrificing His only begotten child. It is very important to remember the lesson of death does not equal the end or condemnation in God's eyes. So Jephthah's daughter is not lost or condemned but dies honorably and becomes a servant of the Lord.

Jgs. 12: After Jephthah's tremendous sacrifice of his daughter, he has to face more enemies. The Ephraimites now want to fight with him. They wouldn't help him earlier and Jephthah worries about their real intentions. He fights them and checks their accent to make sure whose side they are on. Ibzan had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He died after seven years as a judge. I wonder about his wives.

Jgs. 13: The birth of Samson is like the birth of John the Baptist, a barren woman, and angel, no strong drink, nothing unclean to be eaten. I love vs. 8, "...may the man of God whom you sent, return to us to teach us what to do for the boy who will be born." They know if God is giving signs that He will expect much from the son, therefore He will

expect the parents to do a good job of preparing him. This is what every parent should be thinking about.

Jgs. 14: Samson seems to be a kind of country bumpkin. He is playful but not very street savvy. He kills a lion with his bare hands, and then he wants to play a riddle game. He ends up giving his wife the answer. That is the power of a woman that men fear. She tells her family, the bad guys, the answer so they think they are okay but Samson punishes them for cheating. His in-laws, Philistines, obviously live by a different code. They marry off Samson's wife to the best man. This is the constant worry of God as he warns His people not to marry into pagan families.

Jgs. 15: Samson catches 300 foxes and ties every two of them together by their tails and adds a burning torch to each pair so they light everything on fire. Because of his great strength he is able to kill many Philistines. These bad guys seem to have no power over him. This is like Jesus exorcising demons and his light spreading like wild fire. Samson is the judge for the Israelites for 20 years.

Jgs. 16: This chapter starts with Samson visiting a harlot. The harlot story reference is to help us understand that Samson has a weakness. Then Samson falls for Delilah. Of course, she nags him until he reveals the secret of his strength, which means he loses it and is captured and blinded. Like many of the Israelites he lets a pagan wife turn him from the path of the Lord. His hair grows back and he ends up dying along with all the leaders of the Philistines when he pushes down the building on them and himself. God had to find a way of dealing with these Philistines, and Samson was His instrument. He is not perfect or always faithful, but God gives him the strength he needs to do His will. They mocked, mistreated, and imprisoned him just like they did to Jesus. Samson does die in God's grace, for he sacrifices himself. The Philistines are examples of people who are constantly looking for ways to gain power without have the true God on their side. The god of the Philistines is Dagon who can do nothing against the God of Samson.

But realize how Samson's death is the salvation of the Israelites from the Philistines (temporarily).

Jgs. 17: Micah is not a holy person in our perspective but the excuse that is given in vs. 6 is "that there is no king in Israel; everyone did what he thought best. But he wanted to be legitimate so he hired a Levite priest. In other words, there was no temple or church so they made do. Obviously the Ark of the Covenant was not in focus as the presence of God during this period of Jewish history.

Jgs. 18: The tribe of Dan or the Danites are having a hard time holding their land because of the Philistines. So they went in search of a better spot. This will lead to one tribe of Israel attacking another family of Israel and ends up taking the unfaithful Levite who had been working for that family. Notice that the family, they wiped out, were idol worshippers. The barbarous attitude of these people should give us an idea that God's law is still not firmly planted. The other sign of this is that the Danites ended up with the idols and worshipped them with the help of that unfaithful Levite.

Jgs. 19: There is still no king in Israel, which includes God. *I hope you are remembering my push for you to keep the concept of kingdom in mind as you read all of this.* This chapter is a story like the story of Lot. All of these sexually perverted men end up abusing a concubine to death. They were of the tribe of Benjamin, so are not pagans. Thousands are killed because of this incident. Following the commandments would have saved these Israelites. For me, this answers a question I was asked recently. Were the Ten Commandments really from God or was Moses just a really smart guy. I have a hard time believing the smartest one of this group would be wise enough to come up with the commandments and the other laws that came with them.

Jgs. 20: Some of the men of the tribe of Benjamin had done evil and raped and killed the concubine. The other tribes of Israel were called to provide justice. There was no other way of making this happen since

there was no king. The tribe of Benjamin is like Judas in going against God and not being willing to repent but even though it seems that they are winning they still end up losing. Judas probably thought he was going to be the hero but he lost.

Jgs. 21: This whole battle with the tribe of Benjamin has created many problems that must be fixed. (Judas had to be replaced by Matthias.) These guys did not come up with a simple answer, but the reality is expressed in the last verse of the Book of Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what he thought best.”

The Book of Psalms

Psalms 118: According to some Protestant preachers Ps. 118 is the middle of the Bible if you are just counting words. They make a big deal about how it is also between the shortest and the longest psalms. The problem is that they have cut certain books out of the Bible so it doesn't work with the Catholic Bibles. But this psalm contains a passage that is mentioned in Acts 4:11 and repeated by many early Church Fathers. Vs. 22, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” So the Son may be a servant to the Father but the Father made His Son to be the foundation stone for building the kingdom on earth, the Church.

Psalms 119: 1-96: This one would be more fun if you knew Hebrew. Its twenty-two stanzas are in the order of the Hebrew alphabet. The

eight verses that make up each stanza each begin with the same letter. Each verse contains one word for “instruction.” My favorite line is in vs. 9, “How can the young walk without fault?” Very few kids can say they like laws. It is only when we get older that we learn to appreciate laws. It is good to know that Jesus understands this.

I don’t know if you have caught on to the theme of this psalm. It is all about the love of the law. It is a main part of the mid-day prayer for clergy. The church probably thinks that we need to remember that when we have had a hard morning or maybe it is because we might get in trouble during siesta time if we are in Rome or another siesta climate. If you think in terms of Jesus as the primary person praying these words, you hear him wanting to know what the father desires. Vs. 33, “Lord, teach me the way of your laws; I shall observe them with care. Lead me in the path of your commands, for that is my delight.” But it doesn’t just worry about not breaking the law but knowing the will of the Father. That involves staying out of trouble and doing what is right. It also involves helping others follow the law and those who are victims of those who break the law.

Vs. 53, “Rage seizes me because of the wicked; they forsake your teaching.” Again, you have to think of the Father as the king for this to make sense. Otherwise, why would Jesus be outraged. Vs. 64 is a key to how Jesus feels about the will of the Father: “The earth, Lord, is filled with your love; teach me your laws.”

Vs. 67 is an early mention of His taking on our sins; “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I hold to your promise.” This makes me think that this is a part of his Garden of Gethsemane prayer as He is taking on our sins and realizing the pain they have caused. Or it might be His prayer as He was in prison awaiting the trial with Pilate.

Vs. 92 could be Jesus holding on to what is right so he does not get pulled down into the filth of sin; “Had your teaching not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.”

THE LETTER OF ST. JAMES

There is no agreement on which St. James wrote this letter. Some say it was St. James the Less or the Apostle that wasn't the brother of St. John. Others think it was another James that was in charge of the Church in Jerusalem for a while. I just worry about what it says. I see the letter as halfway between how Paul writes and how the book of wisdom is written. Either way it is straight forward and blunt. You also need to know that this Letter of St. James was one that Martin Luther really wanted out of the Bible because it doesn't fit his "Sola fide" motto. James is obviously clarifying that faith alone is not enough for salvation.

James 1: The first thing to note is how James identifies himself in the first verse, "a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ..." He does not see himself as a brother or a son. This will set a tone as to how he identifies the will of God for himself and us. In vs. 3, he is not looking at this life as a walk through a rose garden, but testing. In vs. 5, if you don't know what the master wants, you better ask him. In vs. 6, just don't doubt the boss, for there is no other right one. He levels the playing field in vs. 9-11 for we are all nothing compared to the master. Vs. 12-18 remind us to not think that God is trying to tempt us away from Him. That temptation is from ourselves in our weakness. If you stay with the idea of slave you will realize how he understands that we must do the will of the master and not just hear it.

James 2: Vs. 1-13 goes back to the idea that we are all equal before the master so we must treat each other as equals and not play favorites. He ends that section with the idea that we shouldn't be proud that we didn't break all the commandments. One is enough for us to lose the freedom of a merciful master. Then he gives another take on doing more than hearing or having faith. You have to do the will of the Father. Vs. 20 is

emphasis of his point, “Do you want proof, you ignoramus, that faith without works is useless?” He gives examples of Abraham and Rahab had to actually do something for them to be saved.

James 3: Vs. 1-12 are a very pointed clarification of the power our tongues have to do evil or good. Notice that in the rest of the chapter he is not putting down ambition, but selfish ambition and jealousy. Think in terms of the difference between a slave that wants to be his best for his master and a slave that is trying to make other slaves look bad by showing off.

James 4: He then links this bad attitude towards others as evil because it causes divisions between us and other slaves or servants of the Lord. He is not saying we shouldn't have a division between good and bad. He already clarified that. He wants Christian unity. Sin or allowing sin creates division. Think King Henry VIII and St. Thomas More. Vs. 11-12 are making sure that we know that God is the judge and not us. Vs. 13-17 explain that boasting is evil, especially false bragging. Again, we are expected to make the connection that this behavior will harm other workers and not help the master's plan. Just realize that anything we accomplish is because the Lord made it possible for us to do it.

James 5: At the end of vs. 3 he says “You have stored up treasure for the last days.” That is different than storing up treasure in heaven. What ill-gotten wealth we have stored for our retirement on earth will not provide a good retirement in heaven. Vs. 7-12 are about being faithful slaves. If we think of ourselves as servants of the Lord this makes sense. If we think we are on our own, it doesn't. Vs. 13-15 is the basis for the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Vs. 16-18 is not necessarily talking about the Sacrament of Reconciliation but could just be meekness, but if you look at it as a part of Jesus telling the Apostles that they have the power to forgive sins, then we have a full picture of Reconciliation. I think vs. 20 is very hopeful; “He should know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul

from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” Save a soul and you are saved is not a guarantee but a possibility.

THE GOSPEL OF ST. MARK

Some think Mark was the first Gospel written. Later Church Fathers seemed to think Matthew was the first. It doesn't matter. It's God's word. John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas may be the author. It seems to be geared to teach Gentiles because it explains Jewish customs.

Mk. 1: Mark gets right into the story. John the Baptist is at work preparing the way of the Lord. Jesus comes and is baptized in the Jordan River. He is anointed by the Father and the Holy Spirit. There is lightning, a dove, and the voice: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” John is arrested so now Jesus goes out preaching: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” Sounds like Ash Wednesday. Jesus recruits Peter, Andrew, James, and John right away. He is preaching in the synagogue and drives out a demon. He cures Simon's mother-in-law and many others and moves on to cure more. Do you get the feeling Mark is not going to waste papyrus?

Mk. 2: His next healing involves the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is upping the stakes as to who He is because only God can forgive sins. Levi is called and follows Jesus. This eating with sinners worries the Pharisees. Jesus lets them know that is what a spiritual doctor is for. In the question of fasting Jesus refers to Himself as the bridegroom. The Jews would have known that image. The people of Jerusalem and the people of Israel have been referred to as the bride of God. He then equates Himself with King David. Now they have to think about all that David did.