

Blended Week 14

March 29: Joshua 21-22 and Luke 6:1-26

The Levitical families receive their land. God has kept His promise. The land that He told Abraham would be is finally owned by his descendants. From the worldly standpoint, it took quite a while to get here. Abraham had been promised this in Genesis. There was the famine, then the oppression the Israelites faced from the Egyptians, the Exodus, and the wandering around in the wilderness. God keeps His promises. He answers prayer. Sometimes it takes a while for that prayer to be answered, but He will. Even in the waiting, God is working!

The eastern tribes are sent back to their homeland. They had requested to stay on the east side of the Jordan because of their flocks. Moses had agreed to let them occupy that land provided they fought with the rest of the tribes as they moved into Canaan. The eastern tribes upheld their end of the deal, so they are sent back to their land. When they get there, they decide to build an altar. This might not seem like such a big deal to us since Abraham built several altars while he was moving from place to place. However, it was the name of the altar that upset the western tribes and caused them to want to revolt against the eastern tribes. The altar that the eastern tribes constructed in Hebrew is “mizbeach”, a word that means slaughter. The name indicated that these tribes would be conducting animal sacrifices there. The only place that animals were to be sacrificed at was at the tent of meeting. This is what caused the uproar, the idea that they might offer sacrifices in an unauthorized place. The eastern tribes explain that they simply built the altar to show that they are united with the western tribes. The official name given to the altar is “It is a witness between us that The LORD is God.”

In the New Testament reading Jesus is out with some of His disciples on the Sabbath. The men get hungry, so they grab some grain and rub it in their hands so that they can eat it. Some Pharisees see it and become incensed that they would do “work” on the Sabbath. Jesus reminds the Pharisees of the time that David and his men were hungry, so they went and took the sacred bread, which was not lawful for anyone but the priests to eat. The Sabbath had become something that the Pharisees were serving, the Sabbath wasn’t serving them. Jesus continues to do “work” on the Sabbath. He heals a man with a paralyzed hand causing more outcry from the religious elite.

From there, Jesus goes and assembles the rest of the disciples. He continues traveling around teaching and healing. He delivers the beatitudes explaining that the poor are blessed because the kingdom of God is theirs. The beatitudes are a message of hope to the people that are struggling. They will be joyous one day. Since we know that God keeps His promises, we know that mourning will turn to joy and hunger will turn to being full.

March 30: Joshua 23-24 and Luke 6:27-49

Joshua realizes that he is getting on in years. He has lived a full life. He assembles the people to give them some final words of encouragement. He tells them to avoid falling into the trap of following the gods of the nations that surround them. He warns them not to intermarry with these other nations. This might seem odd to us, but Joshua knows that if they marry folks from

these pagan nations, it is likely that they will begin following the pagan practices of the spouse rather than bringing the spouse to faith in Yahweh. He warns them not to break their end of the covenant. As long as they continue following and worshipping Yahweh, all will be well.

Joshua then reviews the history of the Israelites from the time God called Abraham until now. He gives examples of how God has delivered them and kept His promises. Joshua challenges them, stating that if they do not want to worship Yahweh, then they should choose for themselves the one that they will worship, the gods their fathers worshipped beyond the Euphrates or the gods of the Amorites. Joshua explains that he and his family will worship The LORD. The fact is that everyone worships something. We all make sacrifices for something. In our lives is it God that we worship? Or is it something else? The people respond that they will follow God. Unfortunately, time will show that they do not continue worshipping God. Instead, they will turn from Him and to the gods of the other nations. Joshua warns them that if they turn and abandon Yahweh, He will turn against them. Throughout the Old Testament, we will see that exact warning play out.

Joshua dies and is buried. Joseph's bones are also buried. His remains were brought out of Egypt on the Exodus and now Joseph's remains rest in Shechem. This place was purchased by Jacob, Joseph's father, for 100 qesitahs (Gen 33:18-20). Unfortunately, we do not know the value of the qesitah currency.

In the Luke reading, Jesus gives practical advice on Godly living. The people are told to love their enemies, give generously, and not judge. Jesus warns them about pointing to the speck in their brother's eye while ignoring the great big log in theirs. The point is that we are all sinful. We all fall short of the glory of God. We cannot stand in judgment of someone else because we too have faults. That does not mean we should stand idly by while someone leads themselves on a path to destruction. However, we are to help that person, not judge them. Leave the judging to God. Our job as Christians is not so much to change people, but instead introduce people to the One that changed us and let Him do the work.

March 31: Judges 1-2 and Luke 7:1-30

We move into the period of the Judges. The lands have been allocated to the Israelites. They have their marching orders and know how they are supposed to interact with God. There were no kings during this time in Israelite history. It would make sense that they did not have an earthly king. Yahweh had delivered them to the Promised Land, so He should have been the sole authority.

In the first two chapters of this book, there are no judges. Instead, the people are just going along and doing what they feel led to do. We read about Judah fighting against Adoni-bezek. To mark the victory, the big toes and thumbs are cut off of the fallen monarch. This was to mark how dramatic the victory was since there were 70 other kings that came before Judah that were unable to defeat Adoni-bezek. His MO was to cut the big toes and thumbs off of the defeated kings. Judah also goes with his brother and defeats the Canaanites living in Zephath. They continued, capturing several towns in the hill country, but not in the valley. The reason for their inability is the fact that the valley occupants had iron chariots. Iron was relatively new at this

time. It was not just that they had the technically superior chariots, but their weaponry was probably more advanced than the Israelites. This is not to say that God could not deliver them from the hands of the technologically superior group. In this instance, God chooses not to.

Unfortunately, the people are starting to turn from their faithful ways. Joshua dies and the people begin chasing down the evil things from their neighbors. They begin worshipping Baal and Ashtoreth. Baal was the Canaanite god of storm and rain. Ashtoreth was his consort, the god of love and fertility. Many of the Israelites, some who earlier in Joshua swore they would never abandon Yahweh, leave Him to prostrate themselves before these gods. The LORD's anger burns against the Israelites and He declares that He will no longer drive out the other nations. God had not failed to keep up His end of the covenant, the people did. As a result, hard times are ahead for them.

In the New Testament reading, a centurion sends some other Jews to Jesus to ask Him to heal his servant. Jesus approaches the man's home and the centurion stops Him, saying that he is not worthy for Jesus to enter his home. All Jesus has to do is say the word and he knows that his servant will get better. Jesus remarks that He has not found faith like this in all of Israel. Jesus is already showing that He did not just come for the Israelite, but for the rest of His creation.

Jesus also heals a widow's son, bringing him back from death. John the Baptist sends some of his disciples to ask Jesus if He is the Messiah. Jesus confirms that He is the One. John the Baptist sent the disciples because he was still in prison.

April 1: Judges 3-5 and Luke 31-50

Israel is spiraling, worshipping gods that they should not. They are doing evil in The LORD's sight. They have forgotten Him and are worshipping Baal. As a result, He put them in the hands to Cushan-rishathaim for eight years. This is not the last time God will use a secular leader to execute judgment on the people. When it becomes too much, the Israelites cry out in desperation and turn back to The LORD. Othneil, the first judge, rises up and defeats Cushan-rishathaim. The land has peace for 40 years.

Old habits die hard, though, and they return to their old ways, doing evil in The LORD's sight again. The Israelites are taken captive by Eglon king of Moab for 18 years. The Israelites cry out again and God raises up Ehud. Ehud is from the Benjaminite tribe. From what we can tell, left handedness was fairly common within the tribe of Benjamin. The irony there is that Benjamin means "son of the right hand". Ehud uses his left handedness to his advantage, strapping a sword to his right thigh. When he went in to make tribute, he got Eglon to come close to him. When he was close enough, Ehud shoved the sword into Eglon's belly. Apparently, Eglon was a pretty fat guy, considering the entire sword, handle and all, went into him. The land was peaceful for 80 years.

You can guess what happens next. The Israelites fall into the same pattern of sin. Now Jabin owns them. Deborah, a woman, is the judge of the Israelites. She sends for Barak and gives him a plan. They are going to deploy with 10,000 men from Naphtali and Zebulun. Then she will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's forces and hand him over to Barak. He agrees to go, if she

will go. Deborah says she will go, but he will receive no honor because the LORD will defeat Sisera by a woman's hand. Later we see when Sisera's forces have been thrown into confusion, he makes it to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber. Jael makes Sisera feel comfortable, serving him, and getting him to fall asleep. While he is sleeping, she takes a tent peg and drives it through his temple. The interesting thing about this is that Heber and Jabin were supposed to be allies. This camp should have been a safe place for Sisera. Again, we see The LORD executing judgment on the Israelite enemy through a non-Israelite.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus goes to the house of a Pharisee to eat. While He is there, a sinful woman approaches Him with a jar full of fragrant oil. She washes His feet with her tears and anoints them with the oil. The Pharisees see it and exclaim in disgust that if Jesus was a true prophet, He would know what kind of a sinful woman she is. Jesus uses this as a moment to teach Simon. There are two people that owe money to a creditor. One only owes 50, the other owes 500. Neither of them can pay it back, so the creditor absolves the debt of both. The one that owed 500 is more grateful than the one that owes 50. We are all sinful. We all carry that burden of sin. From the worldly standpoint, some sin is worse than others. However, sin is sin is sin. We should all be grateful that God sent His Son to atone for us. By His stripes we are healed. We were all in debt to Him, but He paid the price for us.

April 2: Judges 6-7 and Luke 8:1-21

It comes as no shock that once again the Israelites are oppressed. This time it is from the Midianites. The Israelites are forced to do things in secret so that the Midianites won't steal their crops or take other possessions. God is clear on why they are in the situation they are in. He told them not to live in fear of other gods, but they did.

The Angel of The LORD calls Gideon on while he is threshing wheat in a wine vat. He is threshing the wheat in the wine vat to hide from the Midianites. This makes the statement from the Angel about Gideon as a "mighty warrior" somewhat comical. Gideon identifies that his family is the weakest in Manasseh and he is the youngest in his family. Gideon sees himself as the weakest of the weak. God will turn him into a great warrior.

Gideon prepares a young goat for the Angel along with unleavened bread. The Angel touched the meat with the end of his staff. Fire came from the rock, consuming the meat and bread. Gideon cries out, terrified at the fact that he has just interacted with the Angel of the Lord. God calls to him and comforts him, saying that he will not die.

Gideon asks for two signs that God will really deliver his enemies. Gideon becomes more emboldened as a leader. It comes time for him to pick an army. Out of the 32,000 men that showed up as potential fighters, only 300 actually made it through the screening process. God is going to use this teeny tiny army to defeat the enemies. Further, he is going to use the youngest man of the weakest family in the tribe to lead this victorious band of soldiers.

Never underestimate what God can do with you. We might think we are weak, but if He calls us to do something, then we can rest assured that we will complete the task not because of our strength, but because of God's.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus tells the parable of the sower. He uses this parable to explain how the kingdom of God grows. Some of the seed falls onto the hard ground, it does not take root. Other seed falls in the weeds, which chokes the seed out. Other seed falls into the rocky soil, it sprouts up quick, but when it gets hot out, it withers. There still is seed that hits the good and fertile soil. That seed produces a great crop. As believers, we are called to spread the seed of the Gospel. Not everyone will come to have faith at our witness. When we are diligently witnessing and we do not see anything fruitful from it, it is okay, we are doing what we have been called to do. We can plant the seed, but we can't make it grow.

April 3: Judges 8-9 and Luke 8: 22-56

Gideon has victory. The Israelites are liberated. This summary should conclude with a statement about peace. Instead, the Ephraimites complain that they were not invited to the fight. This is surprising because in other instances it was difficult to get the tribes to unite to fight. Gideon shows incredible diplomacy in his response to them. He tells them about how great their tribe is. In fact, the weaker of the Ephraimites are stronger than the strongest of his clan.

Upon his victory, the people want Gideon to rule over them. Gideon responds properly, saying that it will not be him or any of his sons that rule over the Israelites. That role belongs to God. Though he said the right thing, Gideon immediately asks for a king's ransom, acquiring gold and pearls from the people and the prisoners. Gideon takes all of these jewels and precious metals and turns them into an ephod which is then worshipped by the Israelites. Essentially, they are back where they started, still engaging in pagan worship.

Things only get worse for them when Gideon dies. Abimelech, one of Gideon's sons born to a concubine jumps at the chance to become king. He slaughters the rest of Gideon's 70 sons. Jotham, Gideon's youngest son, is the only one to survive since he hid himself. Abimelech goes to Thebez to capture it. He sets the entrance to their tower on fire. A woman on the upper portion of the tower seized the opportunity and threw a millstone on him. The stone does not immediately kill Abimelech. He has one of his servants kill him because he does not want anyone to think he had been killed by a woman.

Notice that in these two chapters, God is not really mentioned. These people are becoming more and more reliant on themselves. Further, they are worshipping things other than God Almighty. At this point, Baal worship is relatively standard. Things will change, though.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus and the disciples are headed across the Lake of Galilee. Jesus is sleeping on the boat when a storm hits. The boat is tossed about, but Jesus' sleep is not disturbed. Instead, the disciples have to wake Him up to get His help. Jesus calms the water with His words and then asks them why they lack faith. They were with the Messiah, they should have known that they were going to be okay.

Jesus also drives Legion out of a man. The horde of demons that left the man enter a herd of pigs which then runs into the water, drowning all of them. Jesus has a crowd pressing against Him. He feels power go out of Him when a woman touches his garment. She had been suffering

from bleeding and she knew that if she could just touch the hem of her garment, she would be healed.

April 4: Judges 10-11 and Luke 9:1-36

After the reign of Abimelech, Tola becomes judge and begins to deliver Israel. Jair followed his lead and judged Israel for 22 years. Things were going well for the Israelites again and they once again forgot The LORD and began doing evil in His sight. We see this trend quite often in the history of the Israelites. One thing to keep in mind is that years and years go by between the periods of occupation and freedom. When things have been going well for them for a while, they forget where their blessings come from and abandon The LORD. The descent into rebellion was relatively gradual, with one or two leading the way until the majority were involved in it.

Once again the Israelites cry out asking who will deliver them. Enter Jephthah, the rejected son of Gilead. He was rejected because his mother was a prostitute. He spent the majority of his life on the run and with lawless men. However, he was a great warrior. Knowing this, the Gileadites that had previously rejected him, approach him asking to lead. Jephthah agrees and takes up his sword. Prior to entering the Ammonite territory, Jephthah prays that The LORD will deliver his enemies. If God does that, then he will offer the first thing that greets him on his return home as a burnt offering. The LORD delivers the Ammonites to Jephthah. Unfortunately, his vow comes back to haunt him. His daughter is the first to greet him. Jephthah is distressed, but she is obedient. Her only request is that she be allowed to travel with her friends to mourn for two months.

We should be careful what kind of vows we make to The LORD. Further, when we make a vow to God, we should be careful to ensure we fulfill it. How often do we promise to do something for God if He blesses us in some way?

The New Testament covers a lot of ground. Jesus commissions the 12 disciples to go into the towns, proclaiming Messiah. Jesus tells them not to take any extra things with them. They are leaving with what they are wearing with no provision. God is going to provide for them on their travels.

Peter confesses Jesus as Messiah and Jesus predicts His death. Peter, John, and James witness Christ's transfiguration after Jesus teaches the disciples about taking up their crosses. We are in the Holy Week, preparing to celebrate Christ's resurrection. However, we will mourn His death on Good Friday. As believers, we are called to take up our crosses and die to self. Our call is to follow Christ and be His hands and feet, acting as living sacrifices for Him.

April 5: Judges 12-14 and Luke 9:37-62

The Ephraimites are again upset that they were part of Jephthah's victory over the Ammonites. Unlike Gideon's response the first time they were upset about this, Jephthah is not diplomatic at all. He calls them out for not coming when he requested help. Jephthah gathers his fighting men and they defeat Ephraim. To ensure they have not missed any Ephraimites, any time a fugitive came across the fords of the Jordan, they asked the fugitive to pronounce "Sibboleth". If they

pronounced it correctly, they were Gideonites, if not, they were deemed Ephraimites. This shows us that there are differences in dialects amongst the tribes. They all speak the same language, but their pronunciation is different.

We read about the birth of Samson, the last judge. The Israelites have been taken captive by the Philistines because of their evil. The Angel of the Lord approaches Manoah's wife, explaining that she will conceive a son. He will be a Nazirite all of his life, so it is important that she avoid eating or drinking anything derived from the grapevine. When she takes this news to her husband, they consult The LORD and ask what they are supposed to do to properly raise the child. Since he is a Nazirite, he cannot consume anything derived from grapes and he cannot cut his hair. When Samson grows up, he wants a wife from the Philistines. His parents disagree with his choice, but we see that God had ordained this marriage so that Samson could be used to defeat some Philistines. He marries the woman and places a bet with some men at the marriage festival. If they can solve his riddle, he owes them. If they cannot, then they owe him. When no one can figure out the meaning, his wife nags him to the point that he gives up the answer. The Spirit of the LORD takes control of him and he kills 30 men, returning in a huff back to his father's house.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus again shows His power over a demon. The disciples had been unable to drive it out, but Jesus got rid of it quickly. Jesus again predicts His death, but the disciples have no clue of what He is talking about.

Several come to Jesus asking to follow Him. When Jesus tells one man to follow him, he replies that he wants to bury his father first. The man's father was not dead. We know this because the man would have been involved in the burial rites and unable to talk to Jesus at this time. The man simply wanted to delay following Jesus. Another comes and wants to follow after he goes back and says goodbye to his family. He wants to look back and say goodbye to the old life. If we want to follow Jesus and feel so inclined to, we should jump at the opportunity ASAP. No need to waste time with the trivial things of the world. No sense in looking back at the old life. If we keep looking back, we won't move forward.