

Norwood's Notes: Brief Summaries of Bible Stories

These "notes" are intended to provide a general overview of the basic stories of the Bible in the hope of building greater biblical knowledge and encouraging Bible reading and study. For more information, visit www.UjimaChurch.org

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13 - Highlights from Judges 17 – Ruth 4, “Lawless Israelites & a Faithful Foreigner”

The sinful ways of the Israelites continued in spite of the Lord's warnings and punishments. A man named “Micah,” of the tribe of Ephraim made idols for his household and then set up one of his own sons to serve as his priest. He later recruited a traveling Levite to stay with him and to be a priest in his idolatrous household. Considering the offer of money, clothes, and comfort, the Levite agreed and Micah ordained him, assuming that because he now had a Levite as his own personal priest, God of Israel would bless him even though his house was also full of idols. This outrageous behavior was because, “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6 ESV).

Warriors from the tribe of Dan came upon the home of Micah to take his idols and his priest for themselves, which after threatening Micah's life they were successful in doing. The Danite warriors then attacked the city of Laish, killing the peaceful inhabitants of that place and burning the city. They claimed the land for themselves and renamed the place, “Dan,” after their ancestor. They continued their idol worship in their new city and established Jonathan, the grandson of Moses, to be their priest (Judges 18). In those days, the people did whatever they wanted, without regard to the law of God.

Sin filled the land, and not even the Levites, the people of the priestly tribe, lived as examples of righteousness. A Levite who was returning from his journey to bring his unfaithful concubine back from her father's house to his own home stopped to spend the night in the town of Gibeah, where many of the people of the Israelite tribe of Benjamin lived. An elderly man of the city hosted the Levite and his concubine so that they would not be accosted on the violent city streets (Judges 19). Yet, when the worthless and drunken men of the city surrounded the house and demanded that the Levite be turned over to them to do with as they pleased, the Levite actually sent his concubine out instead. The men abused her all night long. When the unconcerned Levite found her dead by the door of the home where he had slept in safety, he summoned the other tribes of Israel to punish the people of Gibeah. War broke out between the tribe of Benjamin and the other tribes of Israel. The tribe of Benjamin was defeated, and lost so many of its people that it was almost

destroyed. The tribes and clans that had fought against the warriors of Benjamin had vowed to never give their daughters in marriage to any man of Benjamin. After the war was over, remorse over the potential loss of one of the 12 tribes set in. To provide wives for the survivors of the tribe of Benjamin, they attacked the city of Jabesh-gilead, which had not responded to the call to muster against Benjamin in the war, and gave the young women of that city to the remaining men of Benjamin. After finding that there still were not enough women for the men of Benjamin who were left, in order not to break their vow to not give them their daughters in marriage, they set up a ruse so that the men of Benjamin would be allowed to capture some of the young women from the town of Shiloh as they danced by a vineyard during an annual festival. In this way, their parents would not break the vow to not give their daughters to the men of Benjamin, but rather they simply would allow them to be captured instead (Judges 21). Sadly, in those days there was little regard for the law of God, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

In the days of the judges, a couple from Bethlehem sought to escape the famine that had come upon the land. They moved with their two sons to the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelech and the woman was Naomi. While in the land of Moab, Naomi's husband died, and then her sons, who had married Moabite women, died also. When Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, both of her daughters-in-law clung to her. She was able to convince one to go back to her own family, but the other, whose name was Ruth, refused and, instead, vowed to stay with Naomi and to be faithful to the God of Israel (Ru 1).

Still grieving over the loss of her husband and sons, Naomi returns to Bethlehem with Ruth at her side. Ruth's loyalty to her mother-in-law becomes known among the people of Bethlehem. One day as Ruth gathered leftover grain to feed Naomi and herself, she was noticed by the owner of the land who knew of her good reputation and told her that she could gather grain in his field whenever she needed it. He also gave her even more grain to take back to Naomi. The landowners name was Boaz, the son of Salmon and Rahab (the woman of Jericho who had protected the Israelite spies in the days of Joshua), who was a relative of Naomi's deceased husband (Ru 2), which meant that he had the right to redeem the lands Elimelech had lost due to the famine.

Naomi advises Ruth that Boaz is a potential “kinsman redeemer” and tells her to quietly go to him at night, after the men finished celebrating the harvest, and lay at his feet to signify that she wanted to come under his protection as his wife (Ru 3). When she does, Boaz is overwhelmed with joy, but must first convince another relative, who has a stronger claim on Elimelech's land, to let him have it and Ruth instead (Ru 4). Ruth and Boaz are married, and they have a son, named Obed, who becomes the joy of Naomi's life. Through all of this, God was working his plan... Obed was the grandfather of King David, the ancestor of Jesus Christ.