

The Compass

Week 17

OT Readings – Judges 1:1-10:18

NT Readings – Luke 21:29-24:53

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- Judges 1 describes Israel's successes and failures in dispossessing the Canaanite peoples following the death of Joshua.
- Judges 2:1-3:7 serves as an introduction to the book of Judges. It explains the "why" of the events recorded in the book by revealing Israel's unfaithfulness to God in following after the gods of the Canaanites and the consequences that follow.¹
- We meet the first of the judges (leader-deliverers) in these first chapters. Gideon is perhaps the most familiar. His insecurity and reluctance, his "fleece,"² the battle with the Midianites, all make for good reading. Notice his insight about God as King (8:22-23), but then his failure to act upon what he knows; (8:24-27) clearly his son Ambilech didn't have any reservations about seeking to rule. (Judges 9)

New Testament

- Luke takes us through the Passion events in these last chapters. Of all the Gospels, Luke contains the longest resurrection narrative.
- Again, Luke has included information that is not to be found in the other Gospel accounts; watch for them.
- Following His resurrection appearances and commission to His disciples, He ascends. They return to the city with "great joy" and wait to be "filled with power from heaven." The story continues in Acts.

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Judges 2:10-19. 10:16. Judges 2:16 (NASU) reads, "The Lord was moved to pity by their groaning..." Like a Father with wayward children, He grieved over them, the mess they were making of their lives. We tend to miss what sin does to *Him*. If we think of Him as an angry and vengeful God, we would be very wrong. (See Difficult Question below) Freedom must really be free to be free. Without freedom there can be no authentic relationship and no genuine love and it carries the risk that people will misuse it. He lets them go their own way because He must, but the very real consequences of their sin hurt Him as He suffers in their misery. So why doesn't He just stop it? Because choices always have consequences and a wise and a loving parent knows that to suspend the consequences only invites more future misery. Yet, Judges 10:16 (NASU) reads, "He could bear their misery no longer." At the first glimmer of repentance (10:15-16), He comes to their rescue! At the first hint of return, of them "coming to their senses." There is no "I told you so" attitude in God's heart; only a desire to renew, to heal and bring life.³

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

Luke 22:24-27. On the very eve of the greatest act of sacrificial service ever rendered, the disciples fall into an argument about who among them is the greatest. Status and position was a big deal in their day as it seems to be in any day, including our own. It may shape itself slightly differently, but it's all the same stuff – comparison and evaluation with others based upon some culturally accepted standard of what is valuable. Before we look down our self-righteous nose at them, how superficial is a culture that touts as some of its greatest values, having a "hard body," the best abs and backside?⁴ The kingdom Jesus rules over will have none of this nonsense. The "upside down kingdom" operates in a radically different way than the world's systems and its values are "upside down" in comparison.⁵

Greatness is found in serving and Jesus Himself is our great example. Servanthood is an end in itself, not a means to some other end, because when we choose to be servants we are most closely emulating God who Himself is the greatest servant.⁶

The disciples come to understand. They come to call themselves “slaves” of Jesus (Phil. 1:1. 2 Peter 2:1. etc.) and of one another. (Gal. 5:13) Their hearts were thoroughly broken and humbled by the cross of the servant God. What about our hearts?

Difficult Question of the Week

Judges 2:10-23. Q. “Why is God so angry all the time?”

Simply put, God’s anger and human anger are not the exactly the same.⁷ Human anger can be expressed as irrational rage, vengeful and filled with hatred. God’s anger has none of these things. In fact, anger for God is not who He *is* (in contrast to love⁸), but anger is a deliberated and calculated response to evil and injustice in the world. John Sanders says it like this, “*God’s wrath concerns Divine displeasure at a particular situation in history, not an essential attribute. It is not the Creator’s fundamental stance toward His creation...God is a judge who loves His creatures and desires their well being.*”⁹ If God was never frustrated, disgusted, pained and *angry* over the tragedy of the world, we would have to ask why not! Abraham Heschel grasped this truth, God does not display “*anger for anger’s sake...(but) free and deliberate reaction of God’s justice to what is wrong and evil.*”¹⁰

A Father who loves His kids could never be apathetic or indifferent to evil and pain. God’s anger then must be about the *emotional direction* of His energies as He seeks to put things right. I am glad He gets angry because I know then that He cares deeply; deeply enough to act for positive change in a very dysfunctional world.

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¹ The Bible picture of how the world “works,” its worldview, is inherently religious, meaning that people are presented as necessarily looking beyond themselves to discover their meaning and purpose. “Atheism” was unknown in the Biblical world. Everyone worshipped something greater than themselves, something transcendent. The argument can be made that atheism and its cousin, agnosticism, are *religious* concepts. The secularism of American culture is a form of “human-worship” and is another religious worldview. Everyone holds something of supreme value, even if it is “I don’t believe in anything.”☺ For Israel, in Judges, we see the destructive consequences of abandoning God and we see His incredible grace in rescuing them when they didn’t deserve it. (Judges 2:18, 10:16) It matters what/whom we worship.

² “Fleecing” shouldn’t be held up as a means of seeking God’s direction. After all, when Gideon used the fleece he already had a clear word from God and His actions with the fleece were less an act of faith and more an act of fear. Judges is “historical narrative,” it tells what did happen, not necessarily what should happen or be repeated. We will read of Jephthah’s vow in Judges 11 next week. No one takes that account to be something we should repeat today. For more help with understanding historical narrative and how to apply it to our lives today, see Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (3rd edition), chapter five.

³ Repentance means that we no longer choose to walk in our own ways and be our own god. We were created to live for Him and with Him and when we choose to do so He is lavish in His love and blessing! When we are our own god and living selfishly, He cannot wisely bless us because it will only hurt us in the end.

⁴ Have you ever stopped to think about how absolutely stupid all of this really is? What ever happened to character, moral integrity, self-sacrifice for a greater good? Well, those virtues are attached to Biblical thinking. When a culture abandons God, it abandons the values that are associated with Him. When a culture abandons God, they are only left with the best “beach body.”

⁵ Ever wonder where the idea of “serving the customer” came from?? Biblical truth has shaped our culture, but we are moving away from it.

⁶ Read Phil. 2:5-11 again. He didn’t serve so that He could be exalted, He *is* a servant. God is a servant God! See also Jesus words in Matt. 20:20-28.

⁷ The term *anthropomorphism* is used when we talk about God having human characteristics. However, we must be careful and clear. Because we are created in God’s image, it might be more accurate to say that we are “*theomorphic*” beings – *we* have certain characteristics because we are *like* Him. God does have emotions and they are real, not simply a human attempt to describe God. BUT they are not exactly like ours. For more on this and related issues, see John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*.

⁸ 1 John 4:8.

⁹ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 76-77.

¹⁰ Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, 286.