

# The Compass

Week 18

OT Readings – Judges 11:1-Ruth 4:22

NT Readings – John 1:1-4:54

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## Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

### Old Testament

- This week completes Judges. The stories of Sampson and Jephthah take up a large portion of the narrative; notice how God works with them even with all of their flaws.<sup>1</sup>
- Judges 17-21 tell two stories that illustrate just how far the culture has disintegrated. The final verse of Judges summarizes the situation: everyone “did what seemed right in their own eyes” and “Israel had no king” thus preparing us for the coming of a king to Israel in the book of Samuel.
- Ruth is a relief after reading the final chapters of Judges! Yet to be found in Israel are people with moral character, loyal to YHWH. It is important to understand that the story of Ruth is in the same time period as Judges.

### New Testament

- John is fascinating reading and presents a picture of Jesus quite different (though complementary) from what we have seen in the other Gospels. See “How to Read John”.
- John 1:1-18 is the prologue to the book and prepares us for John’s account of Jesus, “the word made flesh.”
- John the Baptist’s testimony (John 1:19-34) presents Jesus as the “lamb of God” and the One who “baptizes in the Holy Spirit” foreshadowing significant aspects of Jesus life and ministry.
- The familiar stories of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman at the well are found in these early chapters. Read as John intended for his readers - to see Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God being made known to the world. (Jn. 20:30-31)<sup>2</sup>

## Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

John 1:14-18. You would think that centuries of rejection would make someone more than a little hesitant to go looking for more; yet not God. So concerned is He to be with us and to draw near to us, so concerned that we know Him for who He really is, He did something radical – He became one of us. No one in 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism could have imagined such thing. Yes, “God with us” because this was true throughout the OT; but God incarnate? No.

John 1:14 says that the Word became human and “dwelt among us.” (NASU) The word for “dwelt” is “tabernacled.” As He was present with His people in the OT tabernacle, now He came to be present with us in human form. What kind of a God would do such a thing? Who would be so desperate for us that He refuses to leave us alone and comes into *our* space to make Himself real to us: “But the one and only Son is Himself God and is near the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us.” (John 1:18) We need never question whether or not God wants us to know Him. If He would leave the safety, security and comfort of heaven and enter into the darkness and tragedy of our world, then we can be assured He will make Himself *real* to us **IF** we desire it.

## Application: “What about me? How does this apply?”

John 3:36. The book of John has a great deal to say about *life* and how to experience it.<sup>3</sup> In this passage John draws a close connection between believing and obeying - he sees them as one and the same. To believe is to obey; to disobey is the evidence that a person does not believe. One of the greatest fallacies of American Evangelicalism is that believing is some sort of mind game where if someone agrees to the facts of the gospel it gets them a ticket punched into heaven. Believing is far more.

What we *do* reveals the condition of our hearts, what we truly love.<sup>4</sup> If we truly love Him and are committed to Him, obeying is easy. Obedience, simply put, is “a reasonable response to a love relationship.”<sup>5</sup> If we are not continually obeying<sup>6</sup> Him, then we really do not believe in Him; the “believer” is an “obeyer.”

There are then two mutually exclusive ways of life, believing and not believing, and each has a very well defined and awesome consequence. One brings life, the other death (to “remain under God’s judgment”). To believe is to totally immerse our lives in His, to totally surrender all to Him by *actively* seeking His will and doing it. Nothing less is believing and nothing less brings life.

### **Difficult Question of the Week**

#### **Judges 11:29-40. Q. “Did God approve of Jephthah’s sacrifice of his daughter?”**

There is some debate as to whether Jephthah literally sacrificed his daughter or if perhaps she lived out her life in some sort of seclusion, “died a virgin.” Even given the worst case scenario of her being sacrificed, several things are important to consider.

While the text is clear about Jephthah’s vow, it should not be assumed that there is a cause-effect relationship between the victory and the vow. The text does not say that God gave the victory because of the vow. In fact, this kind of vowing is more consistent with the ANE practices of magic and manipulation which was *not* how God’s people were to relate to God.<sup>7</sup>

Also, when the Bible gives an account of an event, we must read carefully to see whether God approves or disapproves. If there is no direct statement of God’s mind on a matter, then we must think about what the Bible says on this issue in other places as well as whether or not this is consistent with God’s character. Jephthah’s vow tells us something important about how far away the Israelites were from God and His ways; it certainly gives no indication of God’s approval. Given God’s clear injunctions against child and human sacrifice, we can be sure that God was horrified.

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that God’s Spirit “comes upon” them (Judges 11:29, 15:14) should not be taken as approval of the behavior of any one of the judges. God must necessarily work with what is available to Him.

<sup>2</sup> We tend to read familiar stories through our own “evangelical” lenses and at times miss the point.

<sup>3</sup> We would be mistaken to understand eternal life as meaning “heaven” in John’s writings. Life is what happens when we live in relationship with God and that life just so happens to go on forever. For John, eternal life is NOT to be understood as a *place*.

<sup>4</sup> Mk. 7:14-23.

<sup>5</sup> Jn. 14:15.

<sup>6</sup> The Greek verbs for both “believing” and “obeying” are present tenses, indicating continuous action. To continue to believe is to continue to obey with the result being that we will experience the fullness of His life in our life.

<sup>7</sup> The peoples of the ANE sought to manipulate their gods in order to get things from them; this involved even sacrificing the lives of their own children. God specifically and absolutely forbade any form of human sacrifice.