



The Historical Books

Session 3 – Ruth and Judith

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So, what do you think?

- Read the Book of Ruth
 - There are 4 Chapters (no excuses!)
 - What is your initial impression of Ruth?
 - What do you think of her at the end of the book?
 - How is God involved in the book?
 - What are the signs of emptiness in the first chapter and what are the signs of plenty in the final one?
 - What are the parallels (if any) between Ruth's story and life today?

Ruth

- Ruth is the great grandmother of King David
- Her loyalty to the God of Israel is the real reason that her story is in the Bible
- Hers is a story about devotion to God and leading others to God
- How does this contrast to what we read in Judges?

Ruth

- Story begins with great sorrow – so much that it really weighs us down with grief
- Naomi and her husband traveled to Moab as a result of a famine – so they were in a foreign area
- Her husband Elimelech died and left her as a widow with her sons
- After his death, his sons both married, their wives were Orpah and Ruth

Ruth

- After 10 years, both sons died leaving Naomi, Orpah and Ruth all alone
- Naomi is destitute, living away from her native land but decides to return to Bethlehem
- Her world is deprived of all hope and all happiness
- Naomi loves her daughter-in-laws and wants the best for them – encourages them to leave her to pursue their own dreams

Ruth

- Orpah leaves but Ruth cannot do it
- She stays and expresses her devotion to her husband's family
- "Where you go, I will go / where you lodge, I will lodge / your people shall be my people, / and your God my God"
- This is the turning point – the story turns brighter from that point on
- Ruth's faith is in Naomi but also God

Ruth

- It might seem like just good fortune happening to Ruth and Naomi, but we should see more
- Remember this is during the time of Judges
- We should see the hand of God directing things for Ruth due to her devotion to him
- Ruth's great faith, casting her lot with Naomi and "her God" has turned the day

Ruth

- Ruth ends up working in a field of a man named Boaz
- He is the perfect match for Ruth
- He is devoted to God and is a man of great mercy and compassion
- He leaves his fate to God in the distribution of Naomi's field – which also mean that Ruth goes with it
- God intervenes and the relative rejects his claim

Ruth

- Ruth and Boaz marry
- God blesses them with a son
- They are in great joy in the end
- The story that began with such great sorrow now ends in great happiness
- It is all due to Ruth's great loyalty to her family and to God
- They lived happily ever after

Ruth

- Ruth has 4 chapters
 - 1 Trust in God
 - 2 – 3 Blessings
 - 4 New Life
- When does it take place
 - The days of Judges c. 1250 BC – 1050 BC
 - Rise of King David c. 1000 BC
 - Gives favorable impression to David so a date close to his reign could be argued – others place the date closer to c. 500 BC

Ruth

- Interesting points

- **Mara** – The name means “bitter” which is the name that Naomi takes for herself after her losses. That all changes because of Ruth’s faith and love. By the end of the story, Naomi has a grandson
- **Obed** – Is the name people give to Ruth’s son. He helps Naomi forget about the bitterness that filled her life. Obed was the father of Jesse who was the father of David.

Ruth

- Interesting points
 - **Boaz** – He is a person of great character. He is kind, generous, compassionate and gentle. He is perfect for Ruth. He loves Ruth dearly but only marries her when all of the legal requirements are settled – God’s hand was in that.
 - **Pentecost Connection** – By tradition Ruth is one of five books read during important festivals in the Jewish calendar. It is read during the Feast of Weeks. This feast is celebrated fifty days after Passover it is called Pentecost (meaning 50). Crops were harvested at that time – just as Ruth harvested them.

Lessons from Ruth

- God's love knows no boundaries
- Loyalty to God leads to unexpected blessings
- No hardship should lead us away from God

One more thing...

- What does “Ruth” mean?
- The definition of Ruth is:
Pity, compassion, sorrow, grief and remorse
- That is a good description of Ruth isn’t it
- What other word is related to “Ruth” that we use regularly in the English language
- “Ruthless” – the opposite of Ruth!!!
- We should pray we all have ruth!

Short Break

So What do you Think?

- Read the Book of Judith
 - Nebuchadnezzar means “May the god Nabu (god of wisdom) protect my kingdom. What does this contribute to the book?
 - What is your initial impression of Achior? Does it change?
 - How do you picture Judith?
 - What do you think about Judith’s address to the rulers in Judith 8:11-27?
 - How ironic is the dialogue between Judith and Holofernes in chapters 11 and 12?

Judith

- Artists throughout history have drawn, painted and sculpted Judith
- She is almost always depicted as a young woman, who is beautiful and with an angelic face
- She even appears in the Sistine Chapel



Judith

- Michelangelo included Judith in his great scenes from the Bible in the Sistine Chapel – these depict people at their greatest moment
- What was Judith's great moment?
- It is when she sliced off the head of her enemy – and enemy of the People of Israel
- As always, there are two themes in the book one describing actions but the other telling a spiritual story

Judith

- As the book begins, Nebuchadnezzar is planning a war against a rival – Arphaxad
- Nebuchadnezzar is the king of the ancient empire of Assyria
- Arphaxad ruled over the Medes, and he built a massive wall to protect his kingdom
- He commands the surrounding kingdoms to enter an alliance with him and go to war with him – they all refused

Judith

- Nebuchadnezzar vows to take revenge on all of those who refused – after he deals with Arphaxad
- He quickly defeats Arphaxad – running him through with spears – Arphaxad is “utterly destroyed”
- He then sets out to fulfill his vow to take revenge on those who refused his offer of an alliance – he intends to destroy them (2:2)

Judith

- Nebuchadnezzar places his army under the command of his general Holofernes with orders to destroy them
- Nebuchadnezzar isn't satisfied with simply ruling over most of the known world, he wants the world to worship him
- We already know this early in the story that his demands won't sit well with the people of Israel

Judith

- Holofernes does as he was ordered; he devastates Put and Lud; plundered those on the border toward the south of Chaldea (2:23)
- He follows the Euphrates and battered every fortified city until he reached the sea (2:24)
- He seizes Cilicia and kills all those who resist, kills the Midianites and those on the plain of Damascus (2:25-27)
- The people of Sidon, Tyre, Sur, Ocina and Jamnia, Azotus and Ascalon sue for peace

Judith

- Holofernes goes to them, and they receive him with joy and garlands – he devastated their whole territory 3:8)
- He did it to fulfill his order “so that every nation might worship Nebuchadnezzar alone” (3:8)
- He has crushed everyone in front of him, those who resist and those who have not – he is one nasty guy

Judith

- He finally arrives at the homeland of the Israelites
- He learns that they intend to put up a fight and so he wants to know what kind of people they are
- A man named Achior warns Holofernes not to engage the Israelites in battle because it is known that God protects the Israelites and not mortal army can defeat them, unless they are unfaithful to God

Judith

- Holofernes refuses to believe Achior and tells him “you shall not see my face again from this day until I take revenge on this race that came out of Egypt” (6:5)
- Achior is handed over to the Israelites in the city of Bethulia
- Holofernes then lays siege to the city

Judith

- At first, the people of Bethulia are confident that God will protect them
- After a time, their faith begins to weaken, and they consider surrendering to Holofernes
- They are in great misery, and it seems like resisting will prove to be hopeless
- It is at this point that the heroine, Judith steps forward

Judith

- Judith is a widow who was left very well off by her husband Manasseh
- She was beautifully formed and lovely to behold (8:7) and no one had anything bad to say about her (8:8)
- She challenges the elders who had said that they would give God five more days to save them, or they would deliver up the city (7:30)
- She points out that they are not to test God

Judith

- Judith asks for their prayers but refuses to tell them the details of her plan until she has finished what she intends to do
- Judith says her great prayer in chapter 9 – she affirms her trust in God (9:5), his care for the weak and lowly (9:11), and begs for his protection (9:14)
- God has given Judith great beauty and still she goes to the trouble of making herself even more beautiful to put her plan in action

Judith

- Judith uses the gift of her beauty to save her people – when the men wanted to surrender
- Holofernes cannot miss her good looks but is also so vain that he believes that Judith finds him irresistible
- In her conversation with Holofernes, Judith speaks about her profound trust in God; but Holofernes is so self absorbed he thinks she is talking about him (11:16 – 23)

Judith

- In fact, chapters 11 & 12 are filled with irony...
- Judith tells his servant “Who am I to refuse my lord? Whatever pleases him I will do at once and it will be a joy to me until the day of my death” (12:14)
- Then after a night of feasting and drinking in celebration of his good fortune he collapses on his bed dead drunk
- Judith sneaks in and quickly beheads him and carries his head back to Bethulia

Judith

- The message here is startling – a small diminutive woman defeats the general that destroyed nations
- With their leader dead, the Assyrians are easily defeated
- Achior does see Holofernes face again in Bethulia (14:6) but the circumstances are different than expected
- Judith sings a hymn of praise for the victory, and she is renowned throughout the land

Judith

- The story of Judith adheres to the Biblical theme that real security is found in a right relationship with God
- The King of the Medes built a massive wall to protect himself, but it did no good whatsoever
- Judith simply trusted in God, remained faithful and was victorious
- What was more secure, the wall or trust in God?

Judith

- The book also shows a constant contrast between earthly and heavenly resources
- Assyria trusts in military might; Judith trusts in God
- Defenders hope for safety in walls; believers find safety in God
- Some speak with arrogance; others pray humbly to God

Judith

- Judith has 16 chapters
 - 1 – 7 Assyria's impudence and pride
 - 8 – 16 Judith's humble service to God
- When does it take place
 - Nebuchadnezzar's campaign in Judea - 721 BC
 - Return from exile - 681 BC
 - Nebuchadnezzar ruled from 605 BC to 562 BC
 - Judith's victory was in his 18th year or in 588 BC
 - Precision wasn't the goal – some verses allude to a time after the return from Exile in 537 BC

Judith

- Interesting points
 - **One Day's Effort** – St. Jerome created a translation of the Bible in Latin called the Vulgate. He said he translated Judith from Aramaic in one night.
 - **Silly Boast** – Holofernes asks in 6:2 “What god is there except Nebuchadnezzar?” The rest of the book answers that question.
 - **Lost City** - Bethulia is described on the high ground overlooking the valley of Esdraelon (east to west just below Nazareth). The site of the city has never been found.



Judith

- Interesting points
 - **Judith's Generosity** – Before dying at 105, Judith set her servant free and gave away her belongings. She shares both her physical and spiritual wealth.

Lessons from Judith

- We can accomplish great things when we rely on and trust in God
- Earthly obstacles are no match for the will of God
- True strength and honor is found in a right relationship with God

For Next Week

- Read the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel
 - There are 55 chapters (only few excuses!)
 - How would you describe Samuel's mother Hannah?
 - How did the Israelites lose the ark and why could the Philistines not keep it?
 - What is your first impression of Saul as king?
 - Does 1 Samuel 15 change your impression of Saul?
 - What does Samuel learn in 1 Samuel 16?
 - What is your first impression of David as a potential King?

For Next Week

- Read the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel
 - How loyal to David is Saul's son Jonathan?
 - In 2 Samuel is David loyal to Saul's family?
 - How does Nathan get a candid response from David in 2 Samuel 12?
 - How does David show devotion to God in the last part of 2 Samuel?