

JUDGES & ROMANS: RUINED TO RIGHTEOUS

Lesson 19: Ruined and Dark

Key Verse: In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.~Judges 21.25

This lesson contains sexual violence. For those who have journeyed towards healing from trauma, please know it may be wise to re-engage the resources and coping skills you have received. In this lesson we are NOT attempting to re-open wounds that God is healing. We are NOT asking you to re-visit your trauma. However, this lesson may trigger trauma-induced pain. Please be prayerful and reach out for help.

If you have a trauma that needs healing, know that there are godly resources. We have curated some books on a variety of topics that keep your healing and hope in Christ at the forefront of your journey in healing. In addition, you are empowered to reach out to your pastor and/or a trusted mental health professional. **If you are in crisis, please call 988.** You are a prisoner of HOPE in your *Abba, Father!* (Zechariah 9.12; Romans 8.15)

The book of Judges confirms the difficult truth that God's people are not exempt from the horrors and trauma of violence. Every staggering statistic of addiction, murder, domestic violence, physical, sexual and verbal abuse, and even spiritual abuse is found in the homes and lives of His people, His Church. This difficult truth is the result of **The Fall** where Satan attempted to destroy God by destroying *all* of His Creation through Adam and Eve's intentional rebellion and disobedience of God. But God's Sovereign authority as **King of Kings** has never been threatened by sin, even the sins of His own people!

High King of Heaven, great is Your Faithfulness! Protect each of us from the wounds of sins committed against us. Do not allow Satan to interfere with the healing You have provided for us. Thank You for giving us Hope today. Thank You for giving us a future surrounded by Your Presence. Bathe our thoughts in remembrance of Your Love and Your compassion even when they seem afar. Thank You for defeating Satan. Thank You for defeating sin. Even more, we praise Your Holy Name for healing sin's wounds through the wounds of Your Son. We commit this lesson and our time studying Judges 17-21 to Your Glory and Honor and Praise.

Judges 17.1-21.25 There was a man of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Micah. **2** And he said to his mother, "The 1,100 pieces of silver that were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse, and also spoke it in my ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it." And his mother said, "Blessed be my son by the LORD." **3** And he restored the 1,100 pieces of silver to his mother. And his mother said, "I dedicate the silver to the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a carved image and a metal image. Now therefore I will restore it to you."

4 So when he restored the money to his mother, his mother took 200 pieces of silver and gave it to the silversmith, who made it into a carved image and a metal image. And it was in the house of Micah. **5** And the man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and household gods, and ordained one of his sons, who became his priest.

6 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

7 Now there was a young man of Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. **8** And the man departed from the town of Bethlehem in Judah to sojourn where he could find a place. And as he journeyed, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah. **9** And Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I am a Levite of Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to sojourn where I may find a place." **10** And Micah said to him, "Stay with me, and be to me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of clothes and your living." And the Levite went in.

11 And the Levite was content to dwell with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons. **12** And Micah ordained the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. **13** Then Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, because I have a Levite as priest."

CH 18 In those days there was no king in Israel.

And in those days the tribe of the people of Dan was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in, for until then no inheritance among the tribes of Israel had fallen to them. **2** So the people of Dan sent five able men from the whole number of their tribe, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to explore it. And they said to them, "Go and explore the land."

And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there. **3** When they were by the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. And they turned aside and said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What is your business here?" **4** And he said to them, "This is how Micah dealt with me: he has hired me, and I have become his priest." **5** And they said to him, "Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether the journey on which we are setting out will succeed." **6** And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The journey on which you go is under the eye of the LORD."

7 Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were there, how they lived in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and unsuspecting, lacking nothing that is in the earth and possessing wealth, and how they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone.

8 And when they came to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers said to them, "What do you report?" **9** They said, "Arise, and let us go up against them, for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good. And will you do nothing? Do not be slow to go, to enter in and possess the land. **10** As soon as you go, you will come to an unsuspecting people. The land is spacious, for God has given it into

your hands, a place where there is no lack of anything that is in the earth.” **11** So 600 men of the tribe of Dan, armed with weapons of war, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol, **12** and went up and encamped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. On this account that place is called Mahanehdan to this day; behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim.

13 And they passed on from there to the hill country of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah. **14** Then the five men who had gone to scout out the country of Laish said to their brothers, “Do you know that in these houses there are an ephod, household gods, a carved image, and a metal image? Now therefore consider what you will do.” **15** And they turned aside there and came to the house of the young Levite, at the home of Micah, and asked him about his welfare. **16** Now the 600 men of the Danites, armed with their weapons of war, stood by the entrance of the gate. **17** And the five men who had gone to scout out the land went up and entered and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the 600 men armed with weapons of war. **18** And when these went into Micah’s house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, the priest said to them, “What are you doing?” **19** And they said to him, “Keep quiet; put your hand on your mouth and come with us and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and clan in Israel?” **20** And the priest’s heart was glad. He took the ephod and the household gods and the carved image and went along with the people. **21** So they turned and departed, putting the little ones and the livestock and the goods in front of them.

22 When they had gone a distance from the home of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah’s house were called out, and they overtook the people of Dan. **23** And they shouted to the people of Dan, who turned around and said to Micah, “What is the matter with you, that you come with such a company?” **24** And he said, “You take my gods that I made and the priest, and go away, and what have I left? How then do you ask me, ‘What is the matter with you?’” **25** And the people of Dan said to him, “Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows fall upon you, and you lose your life with the lives of your household.” **26** Then the people of Dan went their way. And when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his home.

27 But the people of Dan took what Micah had made, and the priest who belonged to him, and they came to Laish, to a people quiet and unsuspecting, and struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. **28** And there was no deliverer because it was far from Sidon, and they had no dealings with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth-rehob.

Then they rebuilt the city and lived in it. **29** And they named the city Dan, after the name of Dan their ancestor, who was born to Israel; but the name of the city was Laish at the first. **30** And the people of Dan set up the carved image for themselves, and Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. **31** So they set up Micah’s carved image that he made, as long as the house of God was at Shiloh.

CH 19 In those days, when there was no king in Israel,

a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. **2** And his concubine was unfaithful to him, and she went away from him to her father’s house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there some four months. **3** Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys. And she brought him into her father’s house. And when the girl’s father saw him, he came with joy to meet him. **4** And his father-in-law, the girl’s father, made him stay, and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and spent the night there.

5 And on the fourth day they arose early in the morning, and he prepared to go, but the girl’s father said to his son-in-law, “Strengthen your heart with a morsel of bread, and after that you may go.” **6** So the two of them sat and ate and drank together. And the girl’s father said to the man, “Be pleased to spend the night, and let your heart be merry.” **7** And when the man rose up to go, his father-in-law pressed him, till he spent the night there again. **8** And on the fifth day he arose early in the morning to depart. And the girl’s father said, “Strengthen your heart and wait until the day declines.” So they ate, both of them. **9** And when the man and his concubine and his servant rose up to depart, his father-in-law, the girl’s father, said to him, “Behold, now the day has waned toward evening. Please, spend the night. Behold, the day draws to its close. Lodge here and let your heart be merry, and tomorrow you shall arise early in the morning for your journey, and go home.”

10 But the man would not spend the night. He rose up and departed and arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). He had with him a couple of saddled donkeys, and his concubine was with him. **11** When they were near Jebus, the day was nearly over, and the servant said to his master, “Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it.” **12** And his master said to him, “We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel, but we will pass on to Gibeah.” **13** And he said to his young man, “Come and let us draw near to one of these places and spend the night at Gibeah or at Ramah.” **14** So they passed on and went their way. And the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, **15** and they turned aside there, to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. And he went in and sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night.

16 And behold, an old man was coming from his work in the field at evening. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was sojourning in Gibeah. The men of the place were Benjaminites. **17** And he lifted up his eyes and saw the traveler in the open square of the city. And the old man said, “Where are you going? And where do you come from?” **18** And he said to him, “We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to the house of the LORD, but no one has taken me into his house. **19** We have straw and feed for our donkeys, with bread and wine for me and your female servant and the young man with your servants. There is no lack of anything.” **20** And the old man said, “Peace be to you; I will care for all your wants. Only, do not spend the night in the square.” **21** So he brought him into his house and gave the donkeys feed. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

22 As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house, beating on the door. And they said to the old man, the master of the house, “Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him.” **23** And the

man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing. **24** Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out now. Violate them and do with them what seems good to you, but against this man do not do this outrageous thing." **25** But the men would not listen to him.

So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go. **26** And as morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, until it was light.

27 And her master rose up in the morning, and when he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, behold, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. **28** He said to her, "Get up, let us be going." But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey, and the man rose up and went away to his home.

29 And when he entered his house, he took a knife, and taking hold of his concubine he divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. **30** And all who saw it said, "Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day; consider it, take counsel, and speak."

CH 20 Then all the people of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, and the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah. **2** And the chiefs of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 men on foot that drew the sword. **3** (Now the people of Benjamin heard that the people of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.)

And the people of Israel said, "Tell us, how did this evil happen?" **4** And the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "I came to Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night. **5** And the leaders of Gibeah rose against me and surrounded the house against me by night. They meant to kill me, and they violated my concubine, and she is dead. **6** So I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel, for they have committed abomination and outrage in Israel. **7** Behold, you people of Israel, all of you, give your advice and counsel here." **8** And all the people arose as one man, saying, "None of us will go to his tent, and none of us will return to his house. **9** But now this is what we will do to Gibeah: we will go up against it by lot, **10** and we will take ten men of a hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred of a thousand, and a thousand of ten thousand, to bring provisions for the people, that when they come they may repay Gibeah of Benjamin for all the outrage that they have committed in Israel." **11** So all the men of Israel gathered against the city, united as one man.

12 And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What evil is this that has taken place among you? **13** Now therefore give up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and purge evil from Israel."

But the Benjaminites would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the people of Israel. **14** Then the people of Benjamin came together out of the cities to Gibeah to go out to battle against the people of Israel. **15** And the people of Benjamin mustered out of their cities on that day 26,000 men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who mustered 700 chosen men. **16** Among all these were 700 chosen men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.

17 And the men of Israel, apart from Benjamin, mustered 400,000 men who drew the sword; all these were men of war. **18** The people of Israel arose and went up to Bethel and inquired of God, "Who shall go up first for us to fight against the people of Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Judah shall go up first." **19** Then the people of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah. **20** And the men of Israel went out to fight against Benjamin, and the men of Israel drew up the battle line against them at Gibeah. **21** The people of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and destroyed on that day 22,000 men of the Israelites.

22 But the people, the men of Israel, took courage, and again formed the battle line in the same place where they had formed it on the first day. **23** And the people of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until the evening. And they inquired of the LORD, "Shall we again draw near to fight against our brothers, the people of Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Go up against them." **24** So the people of Israel came near against the people of Benjamin the second day. **25** And Benjamin went against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed 18,000 men of the people of Israel. All these were men who drew the sword.

26 Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. **27** And the people of Israel inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, **28** and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days), saying, "Shall we go out once more to battle against our brothers, the people of Benjamin, or shall we cease?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand." **29** So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah.

30 And the people of Israel went up against the people of Benjamin on the third day and set themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times. **31** And the people of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city. And as at other times they began to strike and kill some of the people in the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, and in the open country, about thirty men of Israel. **32** And the people of Benjamin said, "They are routed before us, as at the first." But the people of Israel said, "Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways." **33** And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place and set themselves in array at Baal-tamar, and the men of Israel who were in ambush rushed out of their place from Maareh-geba. **34** And there came against Gibeah 10,000 chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was hard, but the Benjaminites did not know that disaster was close upon them.

35 And the LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel, and the people of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day. All these were men who drew the sword. **36** So the people of Benjamin saw that they were defeated.

The men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin, because they trusted the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah. **37** Then the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush moved out and struck all the city with the edge of the sword. **38**

Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in the main ambush was that when they made a great cloud of smoke rise up out of the city **39** the men of Israel should turn in battle.

Now Benjamin had begun to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel. They said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle." **40** But when the signal began to rise out of the city in a column of smoke, the Benjaminites looked behind them, and behold, the whole of the city went up in smoke to heaven. **41** Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were dismayed, for they saw that disaster was close upon them. **42** Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel in the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them. And those who came out of the cities were destroying them in their midst. **43** Surrounding the Benjaminites, they pursued them and trod them down from Nohah as far as opposite Gibeah on the east. **44** Eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell, all of them men of valor. **45** And they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon. Five thousand men of them were cut down in the highways. And they were pursued hard to Gidom, and 2,000 men of them were struck down.

46 So all who fell that day of Benjamin were 25,000 men who drew the sword, all of them men of valor. **47** But 600 men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon and remained at the rock of Rimmon four months. **48** And the men of Israel turned back against the people of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, the city, men and beasts and all that they found. And all the towns that they found they set on fire.

CH 21 Now the men of Israel had sworn at Mizpah, "No one of us shall give his daughter in marriage to Benjamin."

2 And the people came to Bethel and sat there till evening before God, and they lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. **3** And they said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, why has this happened in Israel, that today there should be one tribe lacking in Israel?" **4** And the next day the people rose early and built there an altar and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. **5** And the people of Israel said, "Which of all the tribes of Israel did not come up in the assembly to the LORD?" For they had taken a great oath concerning him who did not come up to the LORD to Mizpah, saying, "He shall surely be put to death."

6 And the people of Israel had compassion for Benjamin their brother and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel this day. **7** What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them any of our daughters for wives?" **8** And they said, "What one is there of the tribes of Israel that did not come up to the LORD to Mizpah?"

And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead, to the assembly. **9** For when the people were mustered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there.

10 So the congregation sent 12,000 of their bravest men there and commanded them, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword; also the women and the little ones. **11** This is what you shall do: every male and every woman that has lain with a male you shall devote to destruction."

12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him, and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

13 Then the whole congregation sent word to the people of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon and proclaimed peace to them. **14** And Benjamin returned at that time. And they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh-gilead, but they were not enough for them. **15** And the people had compassion on Benjamin because the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel. **16** Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?" **17** And they said, "There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe not be blotted out from Israel. **18** Yet we cannot give them wives from our daughters."

For the people of Israel had sworn, "Cursed be he who gives a wife to Benjamin."

19 So they said, "Behold, there is the yearly feast of the LORD at Shiloh, which is north of Bethel, on the east of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah." **20** And they commanded the people of Benjamin, saying, "Go and lie in ambush in the vineyards **21** and watch. If the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances, then come out of the vineyards and snatch each man his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. **22** And when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, we will say to them, 'Grant them graciously to us, because we did not take for each man of them his wife in battle, neither did you give them to them, else you would now be guilty.'"

23 And the people of Benjamin did so and took their wives, according to their number, from the dancers whom they carried off. Then they went and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the towns and lived in them.

24 And the people of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and they went out from there every man to his inheritance.

25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Diamonds: Judges 17-21 do not begin in the same format as Judges 3.7 (Othniel) to Judges 17 (Samson). There isn't a statement declaring that the people have committed evil against God, nor that they are being oppressed under an enemy for a period of time. Finally, there is no mention that God is raising up a judge, or military commander, to deliver them. As such, Judges 17-21 stand out as a unique vignette, or account, of how deplorable Israel's society and situation had become. Thus, scholars inform that there are two unique formats to read the book of Judges.

The first format is as we have done this year, keeping the chapters as canonized. In this mostly chronological reading (excluding the summarizing narrative in Judges 1-3.6) the tie between Samson's gruesome end to this unique vignette is

Samson's parental lineage through the tribe of Dan. The mention of Moses (Judges 1.16, 18.30) and the tribe of Dan's persistent wandering with no established inheritance (Judges 1.43, 18.1) bring an inclusio, or connection from the first page of the story to the final pages of the story.¹ In addition, elements of the sins of prior judges and/or God's people are found threaded throughout this final horror in Judges 17-21. These very broad elements are most likely why the author placed this vignette at the end of the book of Judges.

However, it is also possible to read Judges 17-21 directly after the summarizing narratives of Judges 1-3.6. In this reading format, the author would communicate: "Things got SO bad after the death of Joshua. God's people entered this horrendous downward spiraling pattern that led them into total anarchy and moral filth (Judges 1-3.6). In fact, here's a story of how collapsed their society became and how deplorable their morality became (Judges 17.21)." The reader would rightly clutch their pearls while reading the horrors in Judges 17-21 and would be forced into wondering: "How did God's own people devolve into total anarchy and moral filth?" The answer to that great question is found in the stories of the judges and God's people in Judges 3.6 through Judges 16.

1. You can answer the question of how God's own people devolved into committing the horrors in Judges 17-21! Read Judges 2.6-13, 3.5-6, and then Judges 1.27-36. What did God's people do, and/or not do, that led them to committing the horrors of Judges 17-21?

Judges 17-21 is unique because the story isn't about Israel's external enemies. This is a story about our shared internal enemy: sin. This is why there is no exemption even among God's people from the crisis and trauma of sin. This is why we long for heaven, our home², where we rest secure in the one realm where sin and its consequences cannot violate us, destroy our body, make our hearts palpitate with anxiety and fear, fracture our mind, shred our dignity, nor remove us from our physical and actual presence with God! (Revelation 7.9-17, 21.1-5)

Yet here we are now, today, in Judges 17-21.

2. What is the common refrain in this story? (Judges 17.6, 18.1a, 19.1a, 21.25)

In Judges 17, we are introduced to a cast of characters whose mindset reveals their understanding of God. In Romans 12.1-3, we studied how imperative our mindset is to living as God's servant, in accordance with His commands. Paul's commands in Romans 12-15.13 teach us that our knowledge of God, and our knowledge of what He has done for us, is revealed in how we behave and treat one another.

In Micah's mother we see a mind set on self and personal prosperity by sprinkling religion and God's (holy) name into her worldview. The only consistency in her mind and actions is her inconsistency. Rather than carry through with her promised "curse" for the thief, she blesses the thief when it turns out to be her son. Rather than follow through with her oath to the LORD to dedicate the 1,100 pieces of silver, she provides only 200 to the silversmith. And even more egregiously, she believes that the LORD will be thrilled with her dedication of a carved and metal image added to her son's already overly abundant shrine conveniently located at his home. After all, her own grandson was the ordained priest of this shrine! What a godly family indeed.

Micah's "honesty" of his theft reeks of the stench of his manipulations, distortions, and self-righteousness. Rather than calling his actions theft, his mother's silver is (magically) "with" him. His search for personal prosperity through godly manipulations permits him to not only build a shrine in his home, but even more, to ordain his own son as priest. He cannot contain his excitement at his good fortune when a real Levite priest shows up at his home.³ Now he can elevate his personalized priest with a *real* Levite priest! In an act of cruelty in the name of God, Micah had to demote (or un-ordain?) his ordained priest – his son (17.5, 10-11). Imagine the envy Micah inspired among his neighbors.

3. Choose one of the characters introduced in Judges 17: Micah, Micah's mother, or the Levite priest. Each of their actions reveals their knowledge of God, or what they believe about God. Their actions and thoughts also reveal what they believe about themselves. What does your chosen character in Judges 17 believe about God? What do they believe about themselves?

¹ There are more inclusios than the two mentioned here. Experts in Biblical history and middle eastern history chase this rabbit down a deep hole!

² Mikie Bellis shared this thought while she and I (Dmel) talked through the truths and format of this incredibly challenging lesson.

³ The Levites were to be God's priests. Their inheritance was the LORD Himself. See Joshua 18.7.

In Judges 18, the pattern of manipulations, self-preservation through half-truths, self-interest, and cruelty shifts its focus from Micah's dysfunctional family to the tribe of Dan and the Levite priest. The ears of the leadership within the tribe of Dan perked as they listened to the inflection of the voice of the Levite priest (18.3). They knew he wasn't from around the area. Their decision to consider themselves in Divine good fortune allowed them to dwell securely in an echo chamber of their own sin-filled thinking (18.3-7, 10). As such, God's people became comfortable taking the LORD's name in vain, or using God's name and/or Holy character for selfish gain, or treating God like a commodity. This sin robs God of His Glory and steals His Holy character. The irony of this sin is found in the Levite priest's response in Judges 18.6: "...The journey on which you go is under the eye of the LORD." Indeed, God had been, was, and continued to be with and watch His people!

The tribe of Dan's conquest of the unsuspecting people of Laish was cruel. The people of Laish were collateral damage of the tribe of Dan's idolatrous, blended religion (syncretism) and sin against God's Holy name. Scholars note that the repeated information of the people of Laish's safety, security and peaceful isolation (Judges 18.7, 28 "had no dealing with anyone" means no treaties) conveys the tribe of Dan as cruel, reckless, having lost dignity for others and in violation of God's commands. However, the tribe was not naive, so after having stolen Micah's idols and ephod, they intentionally placed the most vulnerable and valuable in the front of their caravan (18.20). This unusual structure to their caravan indicated that they expected Micah to respond to their theft of his idols, as well as to the poaching of his Levitical priest (18.13-20). The irony of Micah's grief-filled reply to Dan's sly question (18.23) reveals the dark and sick heart of God's people (V 24): "You take my gods that I made and the priest [that I bought for me], and go away, and WHAT HAVE I LEFT?..." Ugh. 🙄

4. Syncretism is not only the worship of other gods, "but the worship of Yahweh in a wrong way."⁴ There are lots of examples of syncretism in Judges 17-18. From these two chapters what two or three examples of syncretism shine like a neon flashing sign?

5. Dr. Davis exposes places within God's people where syncretism and "magic" creep into our minds. He explains that "sacramentalism", where "religious externals will surely draw down the divine approval", can cause God's own people to engage in superstition, or "thinking we can switch God's grace on automatic." (i.e., infant baptism, attending Christmas/Easter services, Lord's Supper, baptism) Where do you struggle with syncretism? Using Paul's writing from Romans 12-15.13, what do you think Paul would say is the antidote to the temptation toward syncretism? (There isn't a perfect answer to this question!)

The real heartbreak found in Judges 18 is buried in the end of this storyline. The author shocks us by revealing that this unfaithful, law-breaking, profiting Levitical priest "is a direct descendant of Moses, the great lawgiver of Israel!"⁵ Even worse, the false temple the tribe of Dan set up (V 30-31) existed for 450 years!!! Historians and Bible scholars teach us that Micah's house of god was in direct violation and competition to the "house of God" established through Joshua by God Himself in Shiloh (Joshua 18.1-2, 8; 19.51). Micah's local house of god contaminated and polluted God's people for 450 years until God destroyed it in judgement against His people, documented in 2 Kings 17! 🙄

Chapter 19's first sentence introducing a different Levite wandering the back country of Ephraim (Judges 19.1b) could be read like, "Meanwhile, back at the ranch...."! Again, the pattern of manipulation, self-preservation through half-truths, self-interest, and cruelty resume. Initially, the reader is stunned that she has an affair with another man and has left her husband. The four-month timeline of his return to retrieve her is strategic in discovering whether she is pregnant.⁶

The status of the nameless woman is first identified as the Levite priest's "concubine" which is confusing because a legitimate wife is never identified. Additionally, throughout this story transliteration reveals that the author intentionally refers

⁴ Davis, p. 205

⁵ Webb, p. 224

⁶ Ancient Jewish tradition reveals that "four months would be the amount of time to determine, for certain, at least for those without modern medicine, whether the woman was pregnant." Schneider + Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education, p. 253

to her as “a young girl”, “a female slave”, and “woman” (Judges 19).⁷ Even more surprising is the author's intentional use of a nebulous word to describe the role and relationship of the male servant to his master as perhaps even having a sexual possibility (Judges 19.12-13).⁸ The author's intention is to highlight the rampant identity confusion within this society. No longer were roles and relationships straightforward and in accordance with God's plan and purposes. God's people had strayed far from the simplicity of the marriage of Othniel (“husband”) to Achsah (“wife”) in Judges 1.12-14. Paul speaks of such uncomfortable realities in Romans 1.21-32.

The Levites' decision to stay in an Israelite town (Gibeah) rather than a “city of foreigners” (19.11-15) should have been a safe decision. However, Judges 19.16-30 is considered the most brutal story found in the Bible. In fact, God's prophet Hosea, whose prophecies warned of God's coming judgment against His people, referenced “the days of Gibeah”. Hosea intentionally references Gibeah in his prophecies to remind God's people of the “abyss of moral rot” found within them (Hosea 9.9, 10.9)!⁹

Judges 19.16-28 is meant to remind God's people of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19.1-29. Rather than dwelling on the cruel gang-rape and humiliating murder of the unnamed woman, our focus will be on addressing a few uncertainties in this story. First, the text is unclear as to when she died. It is clear that she was alive when she made it to the door, “with her hands on the threshold” (19.26-27). It is possible the cruel Levite could have murdered her when he mutilated her body (19.29). It is clear that the Levite did not honor, value, nor cherish her. While her unfaithfulness to him is not justified (Judges 19.2), his unwillingness to protect her reveals him as an abusive man and husband. His continued treachery in Judges 20 reveals him as totally depraved. Judges 19 impacts women differently than men. Again, we encounter men (the Levite and the old man) abdicating their responsibility for the safety and security of a woman, reducing her to disposable chattel.

6. Jesus knew what He was doing when He used a feminine word, Bride, to describe the collection of all His people (Revelation 19.6-10, 21.1-2). In addition, Jesus did not emphasize blame nor shame when he interacted with a woman from difficult circumstances (John 4.16-19). What does Jesus call the woman he heals in Matthew 9.20-22? What is revealed about God's view of women through Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman in John 4.1-43? What more is revealed about God when you consider all the passages (Revelation, John, Matthew) referenced in this question?

The pattern of manipulations, self-preservation through half-truths, self-interest, and cruelty continue in Judges 20. However, now these sins contaminate all but one tribe of Israel (Judges 21.8-9). The Levite changes his story for at least the second time, confirming he is a malicious liar (compare 19.3 with 19.18-19 and with 20.4-7). It is difficult to understand his motivation for working hard to inspire a civil war (20.6-7). Dr. Barry G. Webb notes that Israel responds to this Levite's call to war “in far greater numbers than for any of the judges in the previous chapters”.¹⁰ What is clear is that the tribe of Benjamin will not turn over the “worthless fellows” (20.12-13).

7. Again, irony is used to reveal the obscene. God's people ask the Benjaminites, “*What evil is this that has taken place among you? Now therefore give up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and purge evil from Israel*” (20.12). How do these questions reveal the obscene perversion of the truth in their society? How do these questions reveal that God's people “have exchanged the truth about God for a lie” (Romans 1.25)?

The Benjaminites proved to be a well-trained army (20.16) who handily “destroyed” 22,000 fighting men on day one of this civil war (20.19-21). Day two proved to be just as costly, with the Benjaminites destroying an additional 18,000 men (20.24-25). However, on the third day the “LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel” (20.35). The people's inquiry of God three times is intriguing (20.17, 23, 26-28). It is assumed that God commanded this civil war when He repeats His instructions given after the death of Joshua in Judges 1.1-2. In comparing the inquiry in Judges 1.1-2 with this inquiry in Judges 20.17, we

⁷ Davis, p. 210; Schneider pp. 254-255, 259, 263

⁸ Schneider, p. 257

⁹ Davis, p. 211

¹⁰ Webb, p. 233

notice key differences that reveal the broken relationship God's people have with God. Rather than ask God how He wanted them to unify as a nation under His Kingship, they ask Him about their strategic plans in a battle they were going to wage. In other words, they revealed *their will* to God and asked Him to bless it. Rather than paying attention to His answers (they were not promised victory until the third inquiry, 20.28), they misinterpreted His replies as permission. When their circumstances did not give them the outcome they felt God had promised (He didn't!), they tried God again, adding tears, offerings, and finally a Levitical priest (another irony!) in a strategy to get God to be on their side of this civil war. Again, God's people are using His Holy Name in vain!

The people commit a terrible act of cruelty against the Benjaminites in their intentional pursuit of them to the point of annihilation (20.47). This is revealed by the author's repeated description of the Benjaminites as "men of valor" (20.44, 46) at the end of this war.¹¹ Rather than turn away and end this civil war once the Benjaminites had been defeated (20.40-42), they chose the cruelty of total destruction of "all they found" (20.48).

8. We, too, are tempted to set our agenda for our days and then ask God to bless it. We, too, become frustrated with God when He doesn't bless our agenda the way we believe He should. Paul teaches us a better way to serve God, but it requires faith in God, not in the quality, or righteousness, of our agenda. What does Paul teach us in Romans 12.1-2? Why is this surrender to God in faith so difficult?

Judges 21 exposes the foolishness of making vows without prayerful consideration before God. God's people make two vows that they cannot keep and that lead them further into committing sin (21.1, 4). In addition, their decision to make these vows and the methods by which they contort their obedience to them, in God's (holy) name, reveals the same pattern of manipulations, self-preservation through half-truths, self-interest, and cruelty. ♡

Irony again reveals their stupidity¹² as they weep "bitterly" before God and ask God, "Why did YOU let this happen?" (21.2-3)¹³ Rather than waiting for God to respond, they solve their own problem through another illegitimate vow (21.5). Scholars note that the absence of Jabesh-Gilead in this civil war is remarkable for its insight¹⁴. While their motivation is not known, they were wise in not joining the rest of Israel in sinning against God and one another.¹⁵ God's call for unity is not for unity in sinning against one another! Paul teaches us the same in his commands to unity through love for God that overflows into words and actions of love towards one another (Romans 12.-15.3). Thus, Israel's decision to take vengeance against them is really in the interest of solving a problem that they believe God isn't solving for them.

Finding that they still need more Israelite daughters, they kidnap and force into marriage another group of young women in Shiloh (21.19-21). Their justification and pre-planned argument to deal with the justifiably angry fathers and brothers of these women proves how deplorable and disgusting these crimes are against these women and their families (21.22). Dr. Dale R. Davis is helpful in his rephrasing of Israel's justification: "Look, it's legal! You didn't *give* your girls to Benjamin – or you'd be guilty of breaking your oath; but you can't help it if they were *stolen*. Now, c'mon, go along with this, because we didn't get enough girls when we attacked Jabesh-gilead."¹⁶ 🙄

Scholars point to the hope found in the first words of Judges 21.25: "In those days...". The past tense is used and implies an era or time period in the past, not in the present. In Romans 8 (Lesson 14), we had you develop three sentences meant to remind you of your Hope in God secured through Jesus Christ:

- a. "There is therefore now no condemnation for _____ who [is] in Christ Jesus (Romans 8.1)
 - b. "You, _____, however are not in the flesh but in the Spirit (Romans 8.9)
 - c. "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are daughters of God. For _____ did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but _____ has received the Spirit of adoption as a daughter, by whom _____ cries, *Abba! Father!*" (Romans 8.14-15)
9. How do these three sentences help you reconcile moments when sin's destruction disorients your faith, when God feels distant, or when hope in your future is swept away by chaos in the present moment? What steps have you taken, or will you take, to tether yourself to God's Love for You, secured in Christ, even when you are a victim? How

¹¹ Davis, p. 221, Schneider, p. 277

¹² Davis repeatedly uses this term to describe God's people and their actions in his chapter covering Judges 17-21!

¹³ Webb, pp. 237-238

¹⁴ Davis, p. 221, Schneider, p. 280, Webb. p. 239

¹⁵ Interestingly, this story explains Saul's ancestry and hints of a hometown affection when the residents of Jabesh-Gilead were threatened by the Ammonites in 1 Samuel 11. "...all descendants after this time had on their paternal side an inhabitant of Benjamin, but their maternal side descended either from someone...in Shiloh, or Jabesh-Gilead. Saul's ancestress must either have been from Shiloh or Jabesh-Gilead." Schneider pp. 279-280, 283-284

¹⁶ Davis, p. 220

do these three sentences guard you from unintentionally becoming a perpetrator of sin?

Deity: King of Kings~ (Judges 21.25) “God has always been King over His creation, whether in heaven or on earth (1 Chronicles 29.11). Yet some of His creatures in both realms have rebelled against Him, leaving destruction in their wake (Genesis 3, 6.1-8; 1 Samuel 12.10-15). To restore His broken world, God promised a King who would deliver His people and restore all of creation (Psalm 10.16-18). The promise of a coming King finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and looks forward to its perfection when Jesus returns for His bride, the church (Hebrews 12.2).”¹⁷

As we think about Jesus as the King of kings in heaven, it is wise to also consider Jesus as King over Satan and his demons here on earth. Often, we feel good about God as King, and Jesus having been crowned King of kings when He ascended back to heaven. But this incomplete understanding prevents us from applying His truth as we wait to experience His rule in heaven. You see, this title carries great significance for His children right now!

Satan is the current ruler (or “god”) of earth, as well as both king and prince over demons.¹⁸ (Matthew 12.24; John 12.31; John 14.30; John 16.11; 2 Corinthians 4.4; Ephesians 2.2; Ephesians 6.12; 1 Peter 5.8; 1 John 5.18-19; Revelation 9.11).

But even today, God is King over Satan’s temporary kingship and authority! We see this over and over with the demons’ responses to Jesus’ presence and to their unavoidable obedience to His commands. Jesus’ intellectual and spiritual defeat of Satan’s temptations confirms and establishes Jesus as King over Satan, even though God has allowed Satan to currently reign as king of the earth (Luke 4.1-12). While it is beyond comprehension to know we will one day behold Jesus as King of kings in heaven, we must also behold Him *today* as King of kings over our sin, temptations, and the current ruler of this earth. Hallelujah!

10. The common refrain in Judges 17-21 is that “In those days there was no king in Israel” and that His people “did right in their own eyes” (Judges 17.6, 18.1a, 19.1a, 21.25). But God’s people did have a King and they did have the law, or a moral standard established and secured in the Holiness of their King (Exodus 20, Leviticus)! You, too, have a similar choice in submitting to a kingship over your life. The evidence of that choice will show up in your morality, just as it did in God’s people in Judges. How does your life reflect your choice of submitting to a king of your own making, or the King of Kings? In other words, according to your actions and mindset, which king has authority in your life? (Romans 12-15.13 may be useful tool to honestly evaluate yourself)

Doctrine: The Fall~ (Judges 21.25) “The Fall” is the event in which Adam and Eve, the first humans God created, rebelled and disobeyed God’s command (Genesis 3). The corruption of the human race, or “original sin”, began as a result of their rebellious disobedience. Now, we live with sin as our natural state, or within our “sin nature” (Psalm 51.5).

Sin’s consequences falling on both His Kingdom people and the world does not prove God as incapacitated, cruel, distanced, or silent. Instead, God’s covenant faithfulness in the Old Testament reveals Him as a compassionate, intimate, loving, redeeming God (Hosea 2.19; Psalm 18.1-2, 34.18, 147.3) In the New Testament, God’s faithfulness is revealed in the security of His Son, Jesus, the Messiah, whose life proves God’s compassion, intimacy, and tender-hearted care for His people (Matthew 9.36, 14.14, 15.32; John 3.16-17). Even more, His crucifixion and resurrection reveal God’s faithful salvation and redemption of His people who are secured eternally in His presence (Romans 5.8; Colossians 1.13-14; Hebrews 6.19-20).

11. As you ponder the whole book of Judges, where do you see God’s compassion, mercy, faithfulness, intimacy, love, drive for redemption, and/or tender-hearted care for His people during that time period? What would you say to encourage others to study the book of Judges?

¹⁷ The Gospel Project, *The 99 Essential Doctrines*, LifeWay Christian Resources (2018), #54

¹⁸ MacArthur & Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Biblical Truth*, pp. 680-681

Your Scripture-Soaked Prayer:

Lecture Outline:

Aim: Only King Jesus can overcome the darkness of the Fall.

- I. Fallen Worship (Judges 17-18) **T1:** Jesus is the King of kings and must be worshipped as He commands.
 - a. What does your worship of Jesus look like from Monday to Saturday?
 - b. How are you worshipping Him each day in Spirit and in truth? And how might that worship infuse your weary soul with hope?
- II. Fallen World (Judges 19-21) **T2:** Jesus is the King of kings, and His Light is the only antidote for the darkness of this fallen world.
 - a. How have the sin-soaked pages of Judges affected how you see Your Savior?
 - b. How have they fueled your desire to make your home with Him, now and for eternity?

Davis, Dale Ralph, *Judges: Such a Great Salvation* (Great Britain: Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, 2000) pp. 195-223
Schneider, Tammi J., *Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry* (Collegiville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2000) pp. 229-285
Van Pelt, Miles V., *Judges: ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2021) pp. 647-674
Webb, Barry G., *Judges and Ruth: God in Chaos* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015) pp. 217-243