



SESSION OBJECTIVE: JUDGES 20:8-21:25

To understand the depth of civil failure in Israel after the judges.

All's Well That Ends Not Well

In this final portion of Judges we have seen not only the spiritual failure of Israel (Micah, the Levite, and Dan) but also the moral failure as well (the crime in Gibeah). Now, the book closes with the aftermath of Gibeah in what results in civil war and more inequity towards the women of Israel. Israel began the book of Judges after Joshua died with a new generation that did not know Yahweh nor keep His commandments. Though they had dominion over Canaan, they quickly lost ground over and over again every time God judged them for their sin. By the end of the book of Judges, they look no different (if not worse) than Canaan, and are in desperate need of a king to unify them and lead them in Godliness.

Judges is *not* an enjoyable study, but it is a crucially important one. It is important for two reasons. One, it demonstrates the sovereignty of God over even the worst individuals. It is easy to become discouraged when ungodly people fall into leadership positions, and Judges reminds us that God will not be thwarted by any of it. Two, it is in a lot of ways a story of hope. Because God is not thwarted by foolish people, we can rest in knowing that His plan will come to fruition. Even when the world seems to be falling apart or led into ungodly behavior, God is on His throne, unhindered by even the worst of us.

War!

Verse 8 picks up directly where last week's study left off. The Levite has testified against the tribe of Benjamin and the city of Gibeah for what the men of their city did to his concubine. The effects of her dismembered

body accomplished what was likely intended; to stir up outrage. Each individual tribe gathers men who are capable of fighting to go to Gibeah and demand the guilty party be surrendered for execution (Jg. 20:8-12). However, Benjamin does not comply, but instead “the people of Benjamin came together out of the cities to Gibeah to go out to battle against the people of Israel” (Jg. 20:14). Benjamin rallies 26,000 ordinary soldiers, and among them a contingency (think: special forces) of 700 left-handed, extremely skilled marksmen. That they were left-handed is a nod to another Benjaminite, *Ehud*, from Judges chapter 3.

Their numbers seem impressive until we find out what they are up against: “And the men of Israel, apart from Benjamin, mustered 400,000 men who drew the sword; all these were men of war” (Jg. 20:17). Even with the substantial advantage over Benjamin, the war does not go as expected. The first day, Judah is instructed to fight and they suffer the loss of 22,000 men (Jg. 20:21). During the second battle, another 18,000 casualties come at the hands of Benjamin, and strangely, no Benjaminite deaths are recorded. It isn’t until the Israelites appeal to God “at Bethel and wept” (Jg. 20:26), and the LORD said to them, “Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand” (Jg. 20:28). After an elaborate ambush is set, the men of Israel strike at Benjamin for a third time, but this time the LORD gave Israel victory, and Benjamin was defeated: “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” (Jg. 20:48).

Bad Vows and Worse Solutions

In the aftermath of this horrendous civil war, chapter 21 opens with a vow: “Now the men of Israel had sworn at Mizpah, “No one of us shall give his daughter in marriage to Benjamin” (Jg. 21:1). This sets up a massive problem, expressed in verse 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?” The problem that Benjamin now faces is survival. With the destruction of the city and the subsequent killing of the women living there, the remaining men in the tribe of Benjamin had no wives to reproduce with, and given the vow that the rest of Israel made, it seems as if Benjamin’s days are numbered.

These two chapters really highlight the flagrant lack of faith and conviction that the Israelites possess. It seems genuine when they worship and cry out to God in Bethel as they ask Him to fight for them against Benjamin, but it doesn’t take too long after the events of the battle that they begin to actually blame God for the aftermath (Jg. 21:15). They are no more committed to the LORD than they have been in the entire book of Judges. They are directionless and always taking matters into their own hands; “everyone did what was right in their own eyes” (Jg. 21:25).

The solution to solving Benjamin’s destitution is two-fold. They will first go and attack Jabesh-Gilead on account of they were the only tribe not there to fight against Benjamin (Jg. 21:8). They instituted the harsh plan to kill “the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead with the edge of the sword; also the women and the little ones” (Jg. 20:10). The only ones left alive were the virgin women, who were then to be given as wives (against their will, mind you) to the men of Benjamin (the bad ones who managed to survive the war). However, this only provided about “400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him,” and so another plan was hatched to take in the rest of the women needed for the Benjaminite men.

The next plan involved going to Shiloh, waiting for the women of Shiloh to come out and dance in a special ceremonial festival outlined originally in Deuteronomy 16. The quality and integrity of this festival was likely very far from the original intent of it, but they nonetheless complied. While the women were dancing, the

Benjaminite men were to hide, and abduct the women one by one until each of the 200 remaining men had wives. This whole segment further demonstrates the complete loss of morality. This plan, to hide in wait and kidnap unsuspecting women and force them into marriage, was proposed by the elders of Israel! It displays the total loss of morality among the people of God. And this, believe it or not, is how the story ends.

What About Now?

One major theme throughout the entire book of Judges is how sin begets deeper sin. The people of Israel begin in the book of Judges in a bad spot; they are a generation removed from Joshua and this new generation did not know the LORD. By the end of the book, however, they had moved into full on debauchery and looked as bad (if not far worse) than the Canaanites that they were supposed to run out of the land. This principle so clearly seen throughout the scope of Judges is true today as well. When you give yourself over to sin, it will only continue to birth new and far more insidious sin in your life. If you follow the spiral long enough, you end up looking unimaginably horrendous. The spark of hope that we enjoy on this side of the cross, however, is that no matter how far down the rabbit hole of sin you go, the blood of Jesus can conquer all of it. Judges reminds us not only of how awful the destruction of sin is, but how powerful the grace of Jesus Christ is as well.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Judges 20:8-17. What did the people do after hearing the Levite's testimony? How many fighters did Benjamin gather, and what was special about the 700 select fighters? How many fighters did the other tribes gather?

2. Read Judges 20:18-23. Where did the people go to inquire of the LORD? Which tribe did the LORD send first to fight Benjamin? How many did the Benjaminites kill during the first battle? How did the Israelites respond to this?

Day Two

1. Read Judges 20:24-28. How many did the Benjaminites kill during the second battle? How did the Israelites respond to this? What did they do differently this time? What did God say He would do during the third battle?

2. Read Judges 20:29-36. In your own words, describe the ambush that Israel sets against Benjamin.

Day Three

1. Read Judges 20:37-48. Again, describe the events in this passage in your own words.

2. Read Judges 21:1-7. What vow did the people of God make? Why? What problem does this create for Benjamin? How do the people of Israel feel about Benjamin?

Day Four

1. Read Judges 21:8-15. What actions do the men of Israel take and who do they take it against? Who do they keep alive, and why? Who do they blame for the consequences that Benjamin was facing (v.15)?

2. Read Judges 21:16-25. What actions do the remaining wifeless Benjaminites take at Shiloh? In your own words, describe these events. What does the last verse of Judges reemphasize?

Week 17 Discussion: Painful Choices

The Benjaminites suffered a great number of losses in these last two chapters, and overwhelmingly it was because of the ill-advised and foolish choices they made. First, they perpetrated harm against the Levite's concubine, and then when they were called to task, they doubled down and protected the perpetrators. They went to war against the remaining tribes, and though they were strong, they were eventually destroyed. If they had simply surrendered the wicked men in the beginning, they would not have ended up in half the trouble they found themselves in. Their choices did not help, but harmed them. Talk as a group about how the choices you make bring consequences (both good and bad) into your life.

1. Icebreaker: Give an example of a choice you have made, good or bad, and the consequences you faced.
2. Do you think you suffer more because of circumstances outside of your control, or choices you've made?
3. Read Galatians 6:7-9. What does it mean to reap what you sow?
4. Talk about a time when have you been unexpectedly blessed by a wise choice you've made.
5. Talk about a time when you faced unexpectedly harsh consequences from a choice you've made.
6. How can the church become a safe place for people to talk about their choices without shame, but also speak clear truth to error?

Takeaways:

1. Benjamin is eventually destroyed by the 11 other tribes of Israel because of the sin in Gibeah.
2. Benjamin takes wives from Jabesh-Gilead and Shiloh by force, further highlighting the immorality of God's people.

PRAYER REQUESTS: