

Judges 19-21

"Everyone Doing Their Own Thing - Part 2"

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Judges 19. I warned you not to come, so here you are.

The first sixteen chapters of this book are really preoccupied with one sentence: "They did evil in the sight of the LORD." This generation, and the generations that followed after Joshua's death, really were folks who had written God off. In God's eyes, it was evil. What they did was wrong. And God, in His goodness, dealt with their sinfulness in ways that would bring them back time and again, generation after generation, back to their knees. And eventually these judges, for the most part, were deliverers that God would send as a result of the repentance of the people.

By the time we get to the next chapters, beginning in chapter 17 to the end, the characterization of the chapters is driven by another verse, "Everyone did that which was right in his own eyes." In contrast, they did wrong or evil in the sight of the LORD. This looks at life from the stand point of the people. They believed everything that they were doing was fine. You can read about it there in chapter 17:6, chapter 19:1, chapter 21:25, which I believe is the last verse of the book. "There was no king in those days; everyone did that which was right in his own eyes."

And the focus in the first sixteen chapters was on the judges because all you read was, "They did evil in the sight of the LORD." A lot of times you weren't even told what that evil was but that it went on for a long time, and then the focus was upon the deliverer. Here towards the end, beginning in chapter 17 and then through what we will look at tonight, are five chapters of very random stories, some of them kind of knit together because of the characters that are in them. But it is not intended to be chronological; in fact, it is not. You won't find chronology again until 1 Samuel 2 (as far as these historical books go). But this is not only the longest book of history coverage in the Old Testament, it takes us within just a few years of the silence from heaven for those 400+ years before the LORD sends John the Baptist to announce the coming of a Savior. So this epitomized, if you will, in many ways the life that is found amongst people who have decided that they

want to do evil in the sight of the LORD, but they want to do (from their perspective) what is good in their own sight. "We do what we feel like doing."

In chapters 17 and 18, which we took before last week, we went to the house of a fellow named Micah who lived up in the Ephraim hills, and we looked at how the corruption of one household, led by one man, led to the downfall of an entire tribe, the tribe of Dan.

Tonight, in the three chapters that we hope to finish, there is a city and a tribe that are defective and defect away from the LORD in a horrible way. It drives the nation to civil war, to horrible suffering. But it is a national outcry from folks who've had a history of godliness but now find themselves driven by secular, religious moral relativism, and they are reaping what they have sown. We mentioned (you may remember), in chapter 8 and in chapter 12 as well, that we ran into men of Ephraim who, at both places, went to war with their own brethren because they felt like they were left out of the glory of a victory. They did it with Gideon; they did it later on in chapter 12 as well. They threatened to kill their own people because, "Hey, you left us out." Even though when they were called, they didn't come; when they were called to walk with the LORD, they didn't. But those are the men that we will run into again, and it is in their territory that these last five chapters take place.

I don't know if you can imagine a football game without any rules. We used to play that in high school once in a while at PE. And it was fun for a minute. But it didn't last very long, and it was totally anarchy, and someone, it seems to me, always got hurt. Play jungle football. You know? It's kind of like having an intersection without a street light. Gridlock followed by anger followed by road rage.

Well here, in these three chapters, we have a people who've decided that they can just go it alone. "We don't need rules. We don't need your stinking rules. We don't need God's guidance. We don't need God's ways. We don't need the history that God has brought us through." It is just a life without God. "We don't need His blueprint for life." And, like I said, in chapter 17:6, chapter 19:1 (here), the end of the book as well, "Everyone was doing what was good in his own eyes." It sounds like it would be freedom, but it is anything but freedom. And so these last couple of chapters characterize the random kinds of examples of pure existentialism, if you will. By that, I mean there's no moral law, there's no absolute truth, there's no basis, there's no objectiveness, there's not a law apart from you. You're the law.

You're the one who decides what is right and what is wrong. These are little cameos, and they're placed together at the end of the book because the writer wants you to look and say, "Here's life without God amongst people that once knew the LORD, and this is how bad it can get. Here's what happens to men who are established and founded upon the principles of God but leave those principles behind to do their own thing." It is probably the best book Americans could read. We had a good history, but we are reaping what we are sowing. And if we continue down that road, you might find good justification for realizing that there is very little said about America in Bible prophecy in terms of nations.

So, it all comes down to this - everyone's going to do what is right in his own eyes. It's almost like reading a soap opera. But God help us to take the big picture and look at it because it isn't just the story, it's the setting in which the story is taught. It really is the environment from which these stories come forth.

Verse 1, "And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote mountains of Ephraim. He took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. But his concubine played the harlot against him, and went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there four whole months. Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back, having his servant and a couple of donkeys with him. So she brought him into her father's house; and when the father of the young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him." Again, that phrase that begins in verse 1, "no king," which characterized the last five chapters. It is almost written (because we don't really know who wrote the book) by implication that the fellow who wrote it was writing at a time that there was a king, there was some kind of structure, so that this wouldn't have happened; there was a central or an objective truth that guided people's lives. This sin wouldn't have happened had there been some good oversight. In a big sense, obviously we need King Jesus to rule over our hearts, or the sin that is in our lives is going to destroy us as well.

Well, we are introduced to this Levite (in verse 1) that is in the same area as chapters 17 and 18. If you weren't with us, you can go back and read it. But this guy decided that he would move away from his place of ministry to live alone in a remote part of the mountains of Ephraim because he wanted to do his own thing. That's what everyone was doing. He took a concubine, a wife of sorts. It's a pagan practice. It should have sent up a red flag. This is a corrupt priest. This is not a godly man who you would look to for godly advice. A concubine was kind of a slave

almost, a servant, a wife of sorts, that didn't have all of the privileges of being a wife. And you could have a concubine to clean your house, or a concubine for business affairs or sexual relationships. There were all kinds of reasons that you may have a concubine, but it wasn't the way of the LORD. But then this was a society when everyone was doing what they wanted. Even the priests were out there, far away from the will of God. The Levites were supposed to be an example of godliness to Israel. They weren't given land. They were to live around the people so that they could reflect the law of God. They were supposed to be a positive influence in the society that would draw people to the LORD. But this guy wasn't there. God's original plan was pretty clear in the Bible - one man, one woman for life; a marriage partnership, cleaving one to another. They were hardly there now. He had a concubine. He was just like the world around him. And she had been unfaithful to him and decided she didn't want to be with him, and so she moved back to Bethlehem outside of Jerusalem, moved in with her dad. And, for four months, I don't know what the guy was doing, but he finally decided he needed her back, and so he went to get her back; made the trip from the hills of Ephraim to Bethlehem. And we're told (in verse 3) that when the father met this young man, he was glad to meet him. Nothing bad about the father here in terms of what is said. But the dad was impressed with the guy - maybe because he was a priest, and, "My girl married a priest! There's a priest, a holy guy, living in my house!" But that's that religion that suffers so much and gives such false hope but not a relationship to the LORD at all. So it might very well have been the first time that they met, this priest and this young woman's dad.

Verse 4 tells us, "Now his father-in-law, the young woman's father, detained him; and he stayed with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there. Then it came to pass on the fourth day that they arose early in the morning, and he stood to depart; but the young woman's father said to his son-in-law, 'Refresh your heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way.' So they sat down, and the two of them ate and drank together. Then the young woman's father said to the man, 'Please be content to stay all night, and let your heart be merry.' And when the man stood to depart, his father-in-law urged him; so he lodged there again. Then he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart, but the young woman's father said, 'Please refresh your heart.' So they delayed until afternoon; and both of them ate. And when the man stood to depart - he and his concubine and his servant - his father-in-law, the young woman's father, said to him, 'Look, the day is now drawing toward evening; please spend the night. See, the day is coming to an end; lodge here, that your heart may be merry. Tomorrow go your way

early, so that you may get home.' However, the man was not willing to spend that night." So, not sure what's going to happen here. The dad is certainly impressed with a priest, a holy guy, like I said, in the house. He persuaded him to stay three days, got him to stay all day by offering him breakfast on the fourth day - pushed it out until dinner came. On the fifth day, got him to stay for breakfast and lunch, and the guy finally just said, "I gotta go." This is day five now. And it does seem like his father-in-law was genuinely interested to get to know his son-in-law. There's really no malice here. It's just he seemed to be concerned, as his daughter was a concubine, and this was a priest. "Maybe you'll have a good influence on her."

By the end of the fifth day, however, this man decided he could stay no longer. And so verse 10 tells us, "However, the man was not willing to spend that night; so he rose and departed, and came opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). With him were the two saddled donkeys; his concubine was also with him. They were near Jebus, and the day was far spent; and the servant said to his master, 'Come, please, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and lodge in it.' But his master said to him, 'We will not turn aside here into a city of foreigners, who are not of the children of Israel; we will go on to Gibeah.' So he said to his servant, 'Come, let us draw near to one of these places, and spend the night in Gibeah or in Ramah.' And they passed by and went their way; and the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin." So the Levite, because he's a religious guy, doesn't want to go into a pagan town. Jebus will become Jerusalem, but for now it was inhabited by the Jebusites which meant that the Benjamites never did really clear the town out. In fact, this place won't get, really, redeemed, if you will, to God's people until David comes around. So these guys had been parked here for hundreds of years, quite against God's will. But that's four miles up the road from Bethlehem. Now, three more miles they get to Gibeah - it's a Benjamite town. The priest thinks to himself, because he's a Jew and these are Jews, "This is going to be safer and wiser, and we'll be amongst God's people, and we won't be dwelling amongst those crooked pagans" (the Jebusites).

So, "They turned aside," verse 15, "there to go in to lodge in Gibeah. And when he went in, he sat down in the open square of the city, for no one would take them into his house to spend the night. Just then an old man came in from his work in the field at evening, who also was from the mountains of Ephraim; he was staying in Gibeah, whereas the men of the place were Benjamites. And when he raised his eyes, he 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?' So he said to him, 'We are

passing from Bethlehem in Judah toward the remote mountains of Ephraim; I am from there. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; now I am going to the house of the LORD. But there is no one who will take me into his house, although we have both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and bread and wine for myself, for your female servant, and for the young man who is with your servant; there is no lack of anything.' And the old man said, 'Peace be with you! However, let all your needs be my responsibility; only do not spend the night in the open square.' So he brought him into his house, and gave fodder to the donkeys. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank." Very unusual in Middle East cultures that you wouldn't have a place to stay. But here's the culture, again - everyone's doing what they want. And so Mideast cities, even to this day, have rooms oftentimes set aside for strangers. If you happen to be in Jerusalem on Shabbat, you might very well be invited, if you're in the right place, to someone's house (for dinner) that you've never met because that's just the hospitality that's kind of built into the culture, into the practice. But there's no hospitality found amongst the Benjamites. And even though God had delivered the Jews, and they were to be a haven for strangers - ((that's how God wanted them to be, "You set a table before me in the midst of my enemies; my cup runneth over with oil, my cup is just overflowing" (Psalm 23:5); the idea was, "God's blessed us, we can bless those who come to us")) - that wasn't happening here. But there's one guy. He wasn't from the city. He was working there at the time. He was from the place that this Levite was staying. He's coming home late. He saw them sitting out in the open. He was worried about them. The guy made an argument, "Hey, we haven't found a place to stay though we have everything we need. We're not going to be a liability to anybody." And the fellow said, "It doesn't matter who's feeding you. Just come in. You need to get out from where you're at."

Verse 22, "As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house and beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, 'Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally!' But the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, 'No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act so wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage.'" We read that they are called "perverted men," the literal translation "sons of Belial." It's a euphemism for drunk or idolatrous or immoral. It's the word, in Hebrew, for worthless. Judges 19 is almost the update to Genesis 19 as Lot, in Sodom, received the two angels of the LORD, and you remember that the men of Sodom came banging at the door looking for these men. But here's the same moral decay in this

generation that was found in that generation right before the LORD destroyed it with a flood. So, same issue. That's how bad things had gotten again. "Everyone was doing that which was right in his own eyes." So now the men come to the door, looking for the man so they might have sexual relationships with him.

The homosexual movement is not new. It's been with us since *Genesis*. And I would hope that just a casual reading of the Scriptures would convince you that God's against that kind of behavior, that it is the mark of a society where God has been set aside when "everyone is doing that which is right in his own eyes," the old Romans 1 argument. What is new is that the push today is that we have redefined sin as civil rights. We have redefined homosexuality as a choiceless choice. "I was born this way." That's new. But there isn't one perversion in our culture that doesn't have some supporters rallying behind it and calling it personal freedom. Just step back from the argument. This is the life of people that have decided, as a culture, God doesn't need to be a part. That's the lesson from these awful chapters. God doesn't need to be a part. And so we find ourselves facing these kinds of difficulties. The first fourteen out of the fifteen Roman emperors were practicing homosexuals. To the Greeks and to the ancient Romans, homosexuality was the purest form of love. That's what they taught. Pop culture in different generations has always reacted to the homosexual push in different ways. The church, the body of Christ, has always been at the forefront of standing against it because the Bible is so unmistakable and clear. You will never be popular to take that position. There will always be an outcry against your position because you want to live in a generation where God is LORD, and this is the consequence of a generation where He is not. Paul wrote to the Romans and said, "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting" (Romans 1:26-28). Well this is not fitting, but it is a reflection of a culture that has decided that we don't want God in our lives. We don't recognize Him.

But even the Levite, in his sin, even this old man in the culture, defines this as "wickedness," verse 23, and "outrage." This is purely wicked, this is outrageous, this isn't acceptable at all. Verse 23 you'd say, "Well, good for him!" Well, just wait. Because verse 24 says, "Look, here is my virgin daughter and the man's

concubine; let me bring them out now. Humble them, and do with them as you please; but to this man do not do such a vile thing!" Here's the sewer of the culture. This old man, in the name of hospitality, is willing to protect his male visitor while not at all willing to protect the weak and to protect the defenseless - this concubine and his own virgin daughter. Somehow, in his perverted thinking, heterosexual rape is far better than homosexual rape. It is beyond imagination. And what we read is, in the midst of this night of horror for this poor girl, this poor concubine, the Levite sits in the home of an old man, eating and drinking and sleeping while the woman he puts out of the door is repeatedly raped and left outside for dead. Horrible. "In the days when there was no king and everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

Verse 25, "But the men would not heed him. So the man took his concubine and brought her out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until morning; and when the day began to break, they let her go." The debasing of women found in ancient cultures, and even some Mideastern cultures to this day, there is a root that is just sinfulness. And I think that, if you will look at history, when Christianity grips a culture women find their rightful place. When it does not, because they are weak from a physical standpoint, they suffer. And it has been that way. It's not God's design. God's design is we're equal in His sight - there is no male or female, there is no anything other than we are one in Christ. It's His design. But if Jesus is put out of the culture, the role and the status of women falls. The strong dominate. It is always so. Look at the way women are treated in prostitution and in pornography and in human trafficking and the abuse of women. You don't find a lot of men abused. But if you set Jesus aside, the culture falls apart in that direction. "You may do with her as you please." Can you imagine?! This is life without a king. This is life without absolutes. This is a guy who really thinks he's making a good choice here. And people really believe, sometimes, that they're doing the right thing, and they call it freedom. And they don't see for a minute how horrible what they are doing is and what the consequences are. "All night they abused her until the morning."

"Then the woman came as the day was dawning," verse 26, "and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, till it was light. When her master arose in the morning, and opened the doors of the house and went out to go his way, there was his concubine, fallen at the door of the house with her hands on the threshold." Left to die on the porch. Heartless. He walks out, "And he said to her," verse 28, "'Get up and let us be going.' But there was no answer." (She had

died). "So the man lifted her onto the donkey; and the man got up and went to his place. When he entered his house he took a knife, laid hold of his concubine, and divided her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. And so it was that all who said it said, 'No such deed has been done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it, confer, and speak up!' " Arriving home with the body of his concubine, this man pretends to have been so incensed. I would say he was very guilty. He sends her body parts to the twelve tribes, sending with it the story of what happened to her; although, as we'll read, he colors the story so he, himself, looks like a hero and not the jerk that he is. And he says, "Consider this, and speak up about this, and confer about this!" Keep in mind this is a nation that God has been set aside from, a nation that had his Law, that had His Spirit, that had His blessing, that had the testimony of the richest history of any group of people known to man. They had once lived with the principles of God, but now they had set them aside for personal rights. Now, "It's what I want, it's what I think, it's why I want to do things, it's right in my own eyes." Look what you get when you pick that kind of life. It is a template for what can happen when you set God aside. You'll end up with a society that will not give any rights to an unborn child but will give every right to the one who wants to destroy its life; a society that, without God, has no moral restraints. It won't be long before we say to the elderly, "You're a real tax on our health care system. Maybe you need to be eliminated." It's a society where Jerry Springer can make money, and "Game of Thrones" can make millions because that's what we believe in, without God at the center. So, we don't have the will of God. We have our own will and whims and personal desires. I think Nietzsche said, "God is dead." And he believed it. But then he said this, "If God is dead, everything's permitted. If God's dead, we do whatever we want." And they did.

Chapter 20. We're going to get to the end of this. "So all the children of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba," (from the north to the south) "as well as from the land of Gilead, and the congregation gathered together as one man before the LORD at Mizpah." So, this brought the nation together - let's say that - for the first time in a long time. "And the leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand foot soldiers who drew the sword. (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel had gone up to Mizpah). Then the children of Israel said, 'Tell us, how did this wicked deed happen?' So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered," (God calls it correctly) "answered and said, 'My

concubine and I went to Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, to spend the night. And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me, but instead they ravished my concubine so that she died." (I'm pretty sure you put her outside). "So I took hold of my concubine, cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of the inheritance of Israel, because they committed lewdness and outrage in Israel. Look! All of you are children of Israel; give your advice and counsel here and now!" "What are we going to do about this?" But notice he spins the story to make himself look noble. He's the victim, all of a sudden. He didn't ever say, "And by the way, I put her outside so I could sleep that night," which is exactly what he did.

"So all the people," verse 8, "arose as one man, saying, 'None of us will go to his tent, nor will any turn back to his house; but now this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah: We will go up against it by lot. We will take ten men out of every hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, a hundred out of every thousand, and a thousand out of every ten thousand, to make provisions for the people, that when they come to Gibeah in Benjamin, they may repay all the vileness that they have done in Israel.'" They're going to go make it right. "We're going to investigate. We're going to go deal with it. We're going to take 10%." Verse 11, "So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united together as one man," vowing 10% of the men in Benjamin are going to die.

"Then the tribes of Israel," verse 12, "sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, 'What is this wickedness that has occurred among you? Now therefore, deliver up the men, the perverted men who are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove the evil from Israel!' But the children of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brethren, the children of Israel. Instead, the children of Benjamin gathered together from their cities to Gibeah, to go to battle against the children of Israel. And from their cities at that time the children of Benjamin numbered twenty-six thousand men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who numbered seven hundred select men. Among all this people were seven hundred select men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss. Now besides Benjamin, the men of Israel numbered four hundred thousand men who drew the sword; all of these were men of war." So, rather than doing what you might suspect, the Benjamites, the logical thinking, the normal, would say, "Let's go get those guys, and you can take all of them and hang 'em from the highest tree, and be done with this," instead they bonded together and banded together. They didn't want to subject them to the law of

Moses, which would call for their death. Instead they said, "We have twenty-six thousand men. You have four hundred thousand. I think we'll fight." Still nuts. And God will take them out because, "He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Proverbs 29:1). But they didn't care. "I don't want to hand over the perpetrator. You're making this a racial issue. You're just picking on us Benjamites." "Is that what we're doing?" So the men of Benjamin, in not extraditing these wicked men who had done this great evil - instead of handing them over, stand defiantly, give them asylum, even fight, if you will, for their rights, when they had done this horrible thing. It sounds a little bit more modern than the days of the judges.

Well, three battles will ensue. I'm going to save ourselves a couple of verses. And in each of the battles, Israel will say, "LORD, help us," but in reality, because they have been so far-removed from God, and it is a culture where God is not really involved, it almost falls on deaf ears. It's a religious prayer but not really a sincere prayer; until the third battle where they realize they need God's help because they're losing so many men even though they had outnumbered the Benjamites so greatly, 15:1 or so. But they go to war. Seven hundred men - special forces, left-handed, deadly with their sling shots - to protect the men of Gilead who were guilty of rape and murder to begin with. Imagine that.

We read, in verse 18, "Then the children of Israel arose and went up to the house of God to inquire of God. They said, 'Which of us shall go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin?' The LORD said, 'Judah first!' So the children of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah." And notice there's no asking God if they should go up at all. They just want to know who's supposed to go first. I would argue that their cause is right. Benjamin has to be dealt with. It's good for them to be angry at something so horrible, but they are still the people that are living so far away from God. So here's what they say to God, "Pick one." They don't say, "LORD, should we go fight?" Or, "How should we resolve this?" Or, "LORD, what would You have us to do?" They don't cast the lots. They just go to the LORD and, "Who do You want?" "We want Judah." Judah lived right next to Benjamin. They would know the hills. It would be the obvious choice, I guess. But it seems to me that this is still the religious ways of man without a heart for God. The machine is still churning. You'll hear that. When there's tragedy in our country, everybody prays. Until you want to pray in school. Then no one can pray. Your money will say, "In God We Trust," but don't talk about it, and don't mention it. It's religion without a relationship with God. It's death. And you find it in the

days when "everyone does what is right in his own eyes." Presumption. Right? It's presumption. So, they follow this line of presumption. They make decisions for themselves. They decide that they're going to send Judah out. I'm convinced that God has a greater concern for our community that we live in, that they are reached with the gospel, than you and I do. I'm sure He has better ideas how to do that as well. And the answer is always the same. What does God want? Seek God, go with God. That's really what the Bible breaks down to. Seek God, go with God. It's important to wait upon the LORD, to seek His will, and to go with Him. Well, anyway, "Who do You want to send?" The LORD said, "Well, send Judah." They cast the lot, it fell on Judah. "I guess the LORD wants Judah." But trust me. The LORD's not talking to hearts that are this wicked.

"So the children of Israel rose" (verse 19) ".....and went out....." Verse 21, "Then the children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, and on that day cut down to the ground twenty-two thousand men of the Israelites. And the people, that is, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and again formed the battle line at the place where they had put themselves in array on the first day. Then the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, 'Shall I again draw near for battle against the children of my brother Benjamin?' And the LORD said, 'Go up against him.' So the children of Israel approached the children of Benjamin on the second day. And Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah on the second day, and cut down to the ground eighteen thousand more of the children of Israel; all these drew the sword." "This isn't going well! We're trying to set the balance here. We're trying to exact justice. First day, we prayed. The LORD said, 'Go.' We threw the lots. It fell on Judah. He lost twenty-two thousand troops. Second day, eighteen thousand more dead. Now, forty thousand are dead. And they only had twenty-six thousand to begin with, these other guys, and we've lost forty thousand! What do we do?"

It does seem like, in verse 26, their attitude changed. I want you to read it with me. It says, "Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. So the children of Israel inquired of the LORD (the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days), saying, 'Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?' " You see, "God show us." "And the LORD said, 'Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your

hand.' " Here comes the promise. Before it was, "Hey, who do You want to go?" "Oh, just go!" "Who are we going to send?" "Yeah, just send!" And now they come with offerings for their sin. They go to the high priest. They do things, for the first time in maybe generations, in a manner that God would respond to. And it took several days and the death of forty thousand men before they wised up. And the LORD said, "Tomorrow."

From verse 29 down through verse 46 or so, they decide - because the LORD says, "Go fight" - to send ten thousand men to attack Gibeah from the front, to be the threat; they send ten thousand men to ambush the doors of Gibeah, or the gates, if you will, so when the men come out to fight the ten thousand who were backing up, the other ten thousand come up behind them, and now they have them encircled. And then they sent a bunch more to go into the city while the troops are out and to take the city entirely and to burn it down to the ground. And the plan worked. They lose thirty men in battle (the Israelis), while twenty-five thousand one hundred men of the Benjamites fall in battle.

By the time you get to verse 47, there are only six hundred men left of the twenty-six thousand that had been gathered to fight against their brethren. Almost decimated an entire tribe because the whole tribe failed to hand over those who needed to face judgment. Here's "you reap what you sow." Verse 47 says this, "But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they stayed at the rock of Rimmon for four months. And the men of Israel turned back against the children of Benjamin, and struck them down with the edge of the sword - from every city, men and beasts, all who were found. They also set fire to all the cities they came to." They were left with six hundred guys in hiding. That's all they were left with, and the place would have been completely decimated.

Well, we have one final example of how bad things go when God is out of the picture. The tribe of Benjamin reduced to six hundred men, the Israelis now get together, and they say to themselves, "Unless they find themselves some wives, it won't be long before there are no Benjamites left." Additionally, they make mention of the fact that while they were at Mizpah having the meeting as to "what will we do with the Benjamites," they made a vow to one another that none of them would ever give a daughter of theirs to be married to a Benjamite, which means that, because they had made a promise to God, a vow, they were all unable now, if you will, to provide wives to these six hundred guys who, for the last four months,

had been hiding out - the essence of the Benjamites that still existed. So they were kind of stuck. "What do we do now?" Verse 1, "Now the men of Israel had sworn an oath at Mizpah, saying, 'None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife.' Then the people came to the house of God, and remained there before God till evening. They lifted up their voices and wept bitterly, and said, 'O LORD God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that today there should be one tribe missing in Israel?' So it was, on the next morning, that the people rose early and built an altar there," (which, by the way, they weren't allowed to do there; there's only one place where the LORD had put His name) "and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. The children of Israel said, 'Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up with the assembly to the LORD?' For they had made a great oath concerning anyone who had not come up to the LORD at Mizpah, saying, 'He shall surely be put to death.' And the children of Israel grieved for Benjamin their brother, and said, 'One tribe is cut off from Israel today. What shall we do for wives for those who remain, seeing we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them our daughters as wives?' And they said, 'What one is there from the tribes of Israel who did not come up to Mizpah to the LORD?' And, in fact, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh Gilead to the assembly. For when the people were counted, indeed, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead was there."

So, here's their perverted thinking: "We've already sworn to not give anyone a daughter from our family, which leaves these six hundred on their own. We've also sworn that if anybody didn't come to fight against them, collectively, that we'd kill them." And so they took a number and figured out none of these guys had shown up. So here's their stupid idea. "We will go to that city, kill all of the men, take the wives and give them to the Benjamites. So we'll fix everything, and everything will be just hunky dory." Talk about a systematic disregard for life.

Now, Jabesh Gilead was on the east side of the Jordan. They hadn't sent anybody. So, according to verse 10, "So the congregation sent out there twelve thousand of their most valiant men, and commanded them, saying, 'Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead with the edge of the sword, including the women and children. And this is the thing that you shall do: You shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman who has known a man intimately.' So they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young virgins who had not known a man intimately; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh" (that's where they should have been offering sacrifice) "which is in the land of Canaan. Then the whole congregation sent word to the children of Benjamin who were at the rock of

Rimmon, and announced peace to them. So Benjamin came back at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh Gilead; and yet they had not found enough for them" (they realized they were still two hundred short). Right? So this is a weird way of life, isn't it? "Let's just go on a killing spree to serve the LORD." This is a mess! "We'll keep our vows, we'll save the Benjamites, the LORD will bless all of us."

"And the people grieved," verse 15, "for Benjamin, because the LORD had made a void in the tribes of Israel. Then the elders of the congregation said, 'What shall we do for wives for those who remain, since the women of Benjamin have been destroyed?' " Okay, "What do we do? Four hundred wives, six hundred guys, two hundred short." Verse 17, "And they said, 'There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe may not be destroyed from Israel. However, we cannot give them wives from our daughters, for the children of Israel have sworn an oath, saying, "Cursed be the one who gives a wife to Benjamin." Then they said, 'In fact, there is a yearly feast of the LORD in Shiloh, which is north of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah.' Therefore they instructed the children of Benjamin, saying, 'Go, lie in wait in the vineyards, and watch; and just when the daughters of Shiloh come out to perform their dances, then come out from the vineyards, and every man catch a wife for himself from the daughters of Shiloh; then go to the land of Benjamin.' " And they did. So, I don't know what to say anymore. (Laughing) This feast was probably the Feast of Tabernacles. It was the kind of feast that the people would dance in the vineyards for the fruit that God has given them. And so they say, "We're two hundred short. We can't give you our daughters because we swore to the LORD. However, we didn't say anything about you kidnapping them. So we'll bring our wives and family to the feast. You jump out of the bushes, put your hand over their mouth, drag 'em into the bushes. They can be your wives. And thus we will have honored the LORD, killed a bunch of people, set up a bunch of Benjamites and saved the day." Unbelievable. "We've kept our vow."

You see why I'm so anxious to come to the end of this book? No harm, no foul in the cesspool of the end of Judges. Well here's the reason. Here's God's explanation. " 'Then it shall be," verse 22, "when their fathers or their brothers come to us to complain, that we will say to them, 'Be kind to them for our sakes, because we did not take a wife for any of them in the war; for it is not as though you have given the women to them at this time, making yourselves guilty of your oath.' " "They stole your daughters, you didn't give them to marriage." Verse 23,

"And the children of Benjamin did so; they took enough wives for their number from those who danced, whom they caught. Then they went and returned to their inheritance, and they rebuilt the cities and dwelt in them. So the children of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family; they went out from there, every man to his inheritance."

And here's the summary, verse 25, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." This is what happens when man breaks his restraints and lets God sit on the sidelines and has his own way. I know you hate rules, but if you don't have 'em, you'll die. And the more you do as you please, the less you'll be pleased with what you do. I think it is something we can take to heart.

Before we move on to Ruth and the time of the kings (especially King David, which will occupy the next two books in great detail), we are going to start a study next week in the book of Acts; only because I really think we need God's Spirit these days, don't we? We need a revival, man. I don't know what it is about even the church that they lose their sense of excitement. You know, revival in the Bible always starts with believers. And I'll go even further than that. Revival in the Bible always starts with old believers, folks that once knew and were excited, who have lost their passion. Revival does not start with unbelievers, and it doesn't really need to start with young believers because they're excited already. It's the old folks that need to - I don't mean old in terms of age, I mean old in terms of your relationship with God. We need revival. The country needs a church that is on fire. And so I think there's probably no better time, as we get towards the end of the year, to kick into the book of Acts, and we'll spend some time there. And then we'll come back. We'll pick up. We'll just let that rest. We don't really want to be in this page for a while, so just kind of close that right on poor Ruth. And Ruth's kind of out of order here, anyway. But we'll do Ruth, and then we'll go back to the chronology - it starts again in 1 Samuel 2. All right?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
October 16, 2017