

Judges 19-21

Judges: Missing Life For All The Wrong Reasons *God Brings His Good Out Of Our Evil*

For the past 8 weeks we've been on an expedition through the Old Testament book of Judges. In some ways it's been like being on a roller coaster. We've seen God's people sink down to what seems like their lowest, and then we've seen them call out to God and do what's right.

We've seen God's people at times totally buy into the sin of the people around them and we've seen them stand strong for the Lord at other times.

There has been lesson after lesson that we've been able to glean from both their successes and their failures.

Today we've come to the last 3 chapters of the book. If you've taken up the challenge to read through Judges you already know that these chapters contain some of the most horrendous actions that you'll read about anywhere in the Bible. In fact, they're about as horrendous as you'll read about anywhere.

I seriously thought about ending this study without covering these chapters just because they deal with such extremely difficult topics.

But God chose to include these chapters for a reason.

II Timothy 3:16 explains that *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable*. These chapters contain things that God wants us to understand so that we can learn from them.

But because of their content, I'm going to approach these final chapters a little differently than we have the rest of the book of Judges. Instead of trying to read through the verses I'm just going to give a brief overview and then see what things God might want us to learn.

The story unfolds in three stages. First, in chapter 19 we have what seems to start off as a positive, almost love story.

A Levite, who was actually supposed to be an assistant to the Jewish priests in the worship of Jehovah God, had a concubine.

The term concubine means essentially a secondary wife. Concubinage was a form of

marriage with a recognized commitment between the man and the woman. They weren't just living together. But it was a less honorable commitment than formal marriage would be, and the reason typically was that either the woman was a slave and unable to enter into a marriage, or she had no dowry or had some other mark against her.

In this case she was unfaithful to him in some way and returned to her father's house. The passage says, *Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back.* (Judges 19:3)

The Levite went to her father's home, and after several days of the father's hospitality, left.

He didn't want to spend the night in a non-Israelite town so they end up in Gibeah, which in the area settled by Jews from the tribe of Benjamin. An old man invites the Levite and his concubine to stay with him at his home.

Unfortunately the Levite's choice of staying in a Jewish town didn't turn out to be such a wise one after all. A mob attacked the house and the Levite in a touching act of selflessness pushes his concubine out the door where the mob abuses her.

The next day he finds her dead on the doorstep. But instead of burying her, the Levite takes her back home, chops her up and sends her body parts to the various areas where his fellow Jews lived.

This caused such an uproar that warriors from each tribe came to the Levite to get an explanation.

He told them what happened in the Benjamite town, so fighters from every other tribe attacked the Benjamites. In the end they killed thousands of their fellow Jews. Only 600 Benjamites escaped.

The other men had vowed not to let a Benjamite marry one of their daughters. But they began to think this all through and finally realized that it would be wrong for one whole family group to die out so they rounded up a bunch of other unmarried women and gave them to the remaining Benjamite men to marry.

Finally, the Book of Judges closes with the words we've read before. *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* (Judges 21:25)

Wow. What a conclusion to a book that gives us over 300 years of the history of God's people. What is it that God could possibly want us to learn from these events? Why is it that God would even want us to know how absolutely wretched His people could be?

Here's what I take from this.

I. It Doesn't Matter How Much Knowledge People Have, They Can Still Stoop To The Lowest Depths

These aren't just any people. These are the people that God called out for Himself. These are the people that God choose to represent Him. They're the people who have been given more divine information than any other people who lived on the planet.

God didn't hide His truth from the rest of the world, but He didn't specifically reveal it to them either.

In one sense, God speaks to everyone.

Psalm 19:1 *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.* (NIV)

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:18-20)

The very creation around us speaks volumes. It crys out that there's a creator. It shows that there's a God and that He's all powerful. No one, not the guy in the jungle who worships a tree or the PhD in the university who says there's no God, is justified in not knowing there's a God. God says, they're without excuse.

So God gets the message of His existence and His power out through the fact of creation.

But God did something for His people that was far more specific. He spoke to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He promised to bless them and make their descendents great. Their descendants were the people we know as the Jews. There's no record of God making promises like that to anyone else.

God promised them, *all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.* (Genesis 12:3) That promise involved sending them His prophets, giving them His truth in written form in the Bible, and then bringing His Son into the world through them. Everything we have spiritually we owe a debt of thanks to the Jews.

The people we've been reading about in the book of Judges are the descendants of Abraham. They're Jews with all the blessings of God in their lives. They're God's people with the books of Moses to guide them.

They had a tremendous knowledge, but it doesn't matter how much knowledge people have, they can still sink to the lowest depths.

Turn to Proverbs chapter 1 page 560

The purpose of the Book of Proverbs is found in 1:2-6 **Read 2-6**

Proverbs was written so that you and I can become wise people. The aim of the book is to help us acquire and apply God's wisdom to the decisions and activities of every day life.

It's one thing to be educated and have knowledge but there are some well educated people who we wouldn't describe as wise.

We need wisdom, which is the ability to use the knowledge that we have.

Here's God's steps to wisdom. Now compare these with the statement you read 3 times in Judges, *everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

Read verse 7 Learn to fear God.

Proverbs uses the word "fear" 20 times. Fifteen of those times it's in the phrase "The fear of the Lord."

Proverbs was originally written in Hebrew. The word "fear" comes from the Hebrew

verb that means “to fear, to reverence, to awe.”

We should reverence God. We should be awestruck because He is awesome. But we should fear God for who He is. Sometimes we have such a laid back, superficial view of God that it's like we're not taking Him seriously.

The fear of the Lord means being afraid of what He could do to me. He's awfully big and I'm real small. The fear of the Lord means being afraid of displeasing Him. It recognizes His absolute holiness and His hatred for sin.

The fear of the Lord realizes His anger is something to avoid. It produces a real desire to please Him and to trust Him.

Therefore we reject evil. **Read verse 10**

Where do we find out what things please God? How do we tell the difference between good and evil in a culture that blurs the lines? We learn the truth of the Bible.

Wisdom isn't hidden. **Read verses 20-21**

The Bible uses the word, “wisdom” over 200 times. It repeatedly says, “Wisdom comes from God.”

Psalm 19:7: *“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.”* Psalm 119:130: *The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.*

Wisdom isn't hidden, it's all over the pages of the Bible. The Bible is the divine handbook for living. The owner's manual for life.

There's no way to become wise apart from the Word of God! It doesn't matter how smart someone is, if he or she does not know the Bible, they're wisdom deficient.

Read verses 22,23

It's, learn to fear the Lord, learn to reject evil, learn the truth of the Bible, and then it's recognize the consequences of rejecting wisdom.

Here's what the Israelites should have figured out by experience, if nothing else.

Read verses 24-32

It's true of individuals, it's true of families, it's true of societies and cultures. We can't turn our backs on God without ultimately bringing calamity down on our own heads.

The farther Israel got from God the more they lost discernment as a people. The more everyone did what was right in his own eyes the more the nation imploded.

It doesn't matter how much knowledge we have if we ignore it.

The scholar George Steiner wrote:

We know that a man can read Goethe or Rilke in the evening, that he can play Bach and Schubert, and go to his day's work at Auschwitz in the morning.

Being cultured or sophisticated or educated doesn't protect us from ourselves.

And not even being a Christian, not even being one of the people of God is enough in and of itself.

In 1994 the genocide in Rwanda in which people hacked each other to death with machetes, involved professing Christians. In fact, before the genocide, Rwanda was called the 'most Christian country in Africa', with a strong evangelical church.

That alone didn't not prevent the murder of 800,000 Rwandans.

The book of Judges ought to serve as warning to us that ignoring the wisdom of Word of God can only lead to moral and social chaos.

Michael Tensen writes, "That moral independence we so desire, that we think is a sign of our maturity and freedom, that we think can be attained by superior education and advanced knowledge of science or even by correct and true religion, is a dangerous temptation."

"Christians like us are just as capable of becoming blind to our faults as anyone else. Being told to look inside our hearts to discover there what is right and wrong is a frightening idea, if you know the true nature of the human heart."

- I. It Doesn't Matter How Much Knowledge People Have, They Can Still Stoop To The Lowest Depths*
II. It's One Thing To Be A Hearer Of God's Truth But It's Another To Be A Doer

Turn to James chapter 1 page 1072

Of all the types of deception that we could pull off, the most deadly and the most devastating is also the most common. It's self-deception.

How many of those Israelites might have thought, "Hey, we're God's chosen people. He's been with our people since He called our forefather Abraham out of Ur over 600 years ago."

"He's kept us and multiplied us until we number in the millions. We know His name. He rescued us from Egypt and gave us this land. We have the law of Moses. No one else does. God wouldn't let anything happen to us. We're OK because we're the people of God."

All that was true except the last part. They were OK if they were obedient people of God. In fact, because they were the people of God, God held them to a higher standard than everyone else.

They were in the worst possible place. They were self-deceived.

If we sin because Satan deceives us that's bad enough. But if we sin because we deceive ourselves, that's a far more dangerous thing.

It's actually a mark of spiritual maturity to be able to look at ourselves honestly, compare ourselves to God's standards, and admit where we fall short.

It seems like a paradox, but the more mature we are in our faith, the more we realize just how undone we really are. It's those that are walking closest to God are the least confident in themselves.

That understanding drives us to God and His Word.

Read verses 18-21

The only way we can be confronted with God's truth is if we stop and listen.

If James were writing to us today he might say, “Let everyone be quick to read and slow to speak.” In his day people didn’t actually own personal copies of scripture. They depended on public readings in the synagogues and later in the churches.

But the point is, however the input comes, there needs to be an openness to God’s truth. Be slow to speak. Don’t argue or debate God’s truth, put it into practice.

And that leads to verse 22... **Read verse 22-24**

It’s been said that most Christians in America know way more about the Bible than they’ll ever put into practice. It’s more than listening or reading. God’s truth isn’t effective in our life unless we put it into practice.

So what happens? We learn what the Bible says but... But it doesn’t fit into our plans. It doesn’t mesh with our agenda. It doesn’t line up with our goals for life.

If you and I hear the Word but don’t do it, we’re tragically self-deceived.

It’s like we get up in the morning, look in the mirror and see that we have major bed head, there’s sleepy dirt in our eyes, and our teeth need to be brushed. Then we just walk away, forget about everything we’ve just seen, hop in our car and head out to work in our PJs.

If we did that people would laugh at us. We’d be the laughingstock of the office or the work crew. We’d be fools.

We’ll that’s exactly what God says we are if we take a look at His commands, see our failures, and then just walk away as if everything was great.

Here’s what God wants for us... **Read verse 25**

Notice what God’s Word is called here. The perfect law of liberty. Does the Bible contain law? Sure it does. It says, “Thou shalt and thou shalt not.” But it’s not the perfect law of constraint. It’s the perfect law of liberty.

Today if you look at the Bible as just a book of rules to keep you from having fun, or a prison cell where God wants to trap you, you don’t begin to understand who God is and what He wants to do in your life.

God is about freedom. God is about life. God is about liberty.

The Jews during the time of Judges seemed to totally miss that. In the end it only brought them shame and heartache.

I. It Doesn't Matter How Much Knowledge People Have, They Can Still Stoop To The Lowest Depths

II. It's One Thing To Be A Hearer Of God's Truth, But It's Another To Be A Doer

III. What Satan Means For Evil, God Can Turn To Good

If the Bible ended with the book of Judges we'd think that God's plans had dissolved in the corruption of His people. It's like the book of Judges ends up raising more questions than it answers. You'd almost expect God to say, "Well that didn't work out the way I planned it. Time to shift gears and go for plan b."

Fortunately we're given the rest of the story. There is no "plan b" in God's economy.

We can't read Judges accurately without remembering that it is part of a bigger story – a story that tells of God's faithfulness to his own promises as much as it tells of Israel's repeated faithlessness. God alone fulfils His promises, in this case despite of ,not because of, His people.

In a hundred years from the end of Judges David, son of Jesse, of the tribe of Judah, became king of Israel.

God was still at work weaving history and bringing His designs, His intentions to pass.

That familiar prophecy that we hear sung in Handel's Messiah, promised this.

For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:6,7)

Just like God had promised that all the world would be blessed by a descendant of Abraham, He narrowed that descendant down to an offspring of King David. That offspring would be the Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

For all the centuries leading up to Messiah people wondered how it was all going to happen. Today we have the privilege of being able to look back and trace every step of God's actions.

Turn to Matthew 1 page 849

Read verse 1

From there you move through Jesus' genealogy. It goes Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It flows through Boaz and Obed and Jesse. **Read verse 6**

On it goes down to verse 16. **Read verse 16**

Jesus was a direct descendant of David right down through Joseph. Now you say, "Wait a minute. Joseph wasn't the physical father of Jesus. Does that genealogy really count?"

It does, but now look at **Luke chapter 3 page 907.**

This is the genealogy of Jesus through His mother Mary. Notice it goes through Abraham, verse 34. It goes through David, verse 31.

Read vs 23 +24

You'll notice instead of using the word *begat* Luke uses the phrase *the son of*. Actually all the way through in Greek it just says *of*, not *the son of*. That is except for Joseph. There it uses the Greek word *uiov*, or *son*. That shows that the parenthesis in verse 1 should include Joseph. *Jesus as was supposed the son of Joseph.*

Jesus wasn't the son of Joseph, he was just thought to be. The next name *Heli* was Mary's father or grandfather.

Now drop down to verse 31. **Read vs 31**

Mary was also a descendent of David but through another of his sons, Nathan, not Solomon. That becomes crucial because there was actually a curse placed on one of Solomon's descendants in which God said he'd never have an offspring sit on the throne.

Joseph's line came through Solomon but Mary's didn't. That meant that the curse didn't affect her or her son, but Jesus was still the lineal descendent of King David. Talk about a marriage made in heaven. And all of this was to bring us a virgin born Savior.

What Satan means for evil, God can turn to good.

Satan tried to destroy God's people at every turn. At times it looked like he was succeeding. But nothing can stop our God. Judges ends with the statement, *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

For us the King has come. His name is Jesus. He came to save as well as rule.

You might be looking around today and say, "At times it looks like God's people are in disarray. At times it looks like the evil of this world is winning and God is losing.

We might wonder, "Where is God?" Remember God is always faithful.

God is at work bringing men, women, boys, and girls to faith in His Son, Jesus Christ