



A Message in the Mess

RECAP

This week's focus: "When God is absent darkness prevails but with God, we have the power to overcome."

These final chapters of the Book of Judges describe one of the darkest and most gruesome moments in Israel's history. It is marked by moral decay, sexual violence, and civil war. The events illustrate the consequences of Israel's lack of dependence on God, leading to tragic outcomes.

Chapter 19 begins with a Levite living in the remote hill country of Ephraim. He takes a concubine from Bethlehem, but after some time, she leaves him and returns to her father's house. After four months, the Levite travels to Bethlehem to bring her back.

On their journey back, they stop in Gibeah, a town in the territory of Benjamin. An old man offers them hospitality, warning them not to stay in the town square. Later that night, the men of the town surround the house, demanding to sexually assault the Levite. To protect himself, the Levite sends out his concubine, and she is brutally abused throughout the night. In the morning, the Levite takes her lifeless body home, cuts it into twelve pieces, and sends them throughout Israel, calling for action against the crime.

The tribes of Israel are horrified by the outrage and gather to demand justice from the tribe of Benjamin. However, the Benjaminites refuse to hand over the guilty men from Gibeah, leading to a civil war. The Israelites attacked the tribe of Benjamin, but the Benjaminites initially put up fierce resistance, winning two battles. On the third attempt, the Israelites defeat the tribe of Benjamin with God's help by setting an ambush. The Benjaminites suffer a devastating loss, and only a small remnant of 600 men escape into the wilderness.

In Chapter 21 the Israelites, grieved by the near extinction of one of their tribes, seek a way to provide wives for the remaining Benjaminites. They realize that no men from the town of Jabesh-Gilead participated in the war effort, so they attack the town, killing all but 400 young women, whom they give as wives to the Benjaminites. However, this still leaves 200 men without wives. To solve this, the Israelites instruct the Benjaminites to abduct women from Shiloh during a festival. This act of abduction is tolerated as a way to rebuild the tribe.

This horrible story ends with the restoration of the tribe of Benjamin, but it leaves the reader with a haunting reflection on the state of Israel. The final verse of the book sums up the entire era: **"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (Judges 21:25)**. This statement highlights the underlying issue: without God at the center of their lives, Israel is trapped in a cycle of violence, injustice, and moral anarchy.

The events of Judges 19-21 demonstrate what happens to a nation when God is absent, moral truth is clouded, and deception produces division and destruction. The weak are oppressed and abused. The result is moral confusion, pain, and despair, revealing to us that our manmade solutions often lead to more injustice and chaos.

The book of Judges ends in darkness. But in so doing, it points us beyond itself to a greater hope only found in Jesus. All the judges have failed where Jesus has succeeded. He is the deliverer that Israel and we have always been looking for.

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SHARE (5-10 min)

1. Icebreaker Question: What is going on in our world that reminds you of the need for God's salvation?

STUDY (about 30 min) Read Judges 19-21

2. How did God speak to you through the scripture and the sermon this week? Is there anything that was unclear, or that you have questions about?
3. Refer to Judges 19. How do you think the Levite's actions reflect the moral state of Israel at that time? What are some examples of ways we're tempted to blame God for things that are our fault?
4. How do the events in Judges 19 mirror the events in Genesis 19? How are the weak oppressed or abused in our culture today?
5. Thinking about how the tribes of Israel responded to the crime against the Levite's concubine, what are the consequences of communal sin and moral decline?
6. What's tragic about the Benjaminite's decision to stand with the men of Gibeah? What has changed about who Israel is opposing from chapter 1 to chapter 20?
7. In what ways do you see parallels between the chaos in Judges 19-21 and the chaos faced in our society today? How do you see God's faithfulness working today in the middle of cultural chaos?
8. How can you apply the lessons from Judges 19-21 to your personal life, your family, your workplace, the church and the community?
9. What does the book of Judges reveal about God's character? What does it teach you about the way God saves His people? What's one thing you could do to focus on the hope we find in God this week?

SUPPORT (15 min)

Pray: Thank God for what He's taught you about himself throughout the study of Judges. Pray that He would continue to solidify the truths from Judges in your life.