

# A FOUL MESS

## JUDGES 17-21

Have a discussion about the judges you've looked at over the past 7 weeks. Talk amongst yourselves using these questions:

- Who was a memorable judge for you? Why?
- Who saved Israel in scandalous ways?
- Who were the flawed heroes?

With every judge that God sent for Israel, there was an underlying situation—Israel was constantly doing evil. Israel didn't dislodge the pagan nations when they first entered the promised land and now that failure is reaping its consequence—the nation continually abandons God and serves the foreign Baals and the Ashtaroth. And by the time we get to Samson, the sad truth finally becomes clear. They are happy to merge with their neighbours and settle down to a life of pagan worship. Even the Judges, who were supposed to be God's chosen deliverers, can't break free from this attitude.

In this final part, we'll see the foul and chaotic mess into which Israel has descended.

### **Read Judges 17:1-18:20**

1. What kind of a character is Micah?
2. What is so ironic about 17:3?
3. What motivates the priest to stay with Micah and then to leave with the Danites?
4. How would God feel about the whole situation?

These are bizarre events. A thief makes his own private shrine. An idol is made to worship God. A priest hires himself out for a decent wage. It is the exact opposite of the situation that God said he wanted in Deuteronomy 12. Something is seriously wrong in Israel.

Micah is confident God will bless him because of the shrine (17:13), but if you have a quick read of Judges 18, you'll see his confidence is misplaced. His shrine and his priest are hijacked by a group of Danites, who in turn set up their own shrine, which in time is itself taken into captivity (Judges 18:30). God isn't impressed with the kind of worship being offered in these chapters. It breaks the covenant (agreement) God had made with Israel and so it doesn't lead to his blessing. But the problems in Israel aren't confined to idolatry.

### **Read Judges 19**

5. What decision does the Levite make in v 11-12? Should it have been a wise decision?

6. What kind of a host is the old Ephraimite?

7. How do you feel about his offer in v 22-24?

8. The poor concubine suffers a terrible fate at the hands of the Gibeaites. What do you think about the response of the Levite? (see v25)

This has to be one of the most ugly stories in the Bible. After making a special effort to reach an Israelite town instead of risking the night in a pagan city, the Levite and his party find themselves in a situation reminiscent of Sodom. And beside the actions of the men of Gibeah, there needs to be serious questions asked about the Levite too. How could he send his concubine out to a crowd like that? What kind of sympathy does he offer in the morning? Is it his lack of concern for the concubine (he's tucked up in bed while she's lying at the door) that ultimately causes her death?

9. What's your reaction to the Levite cutting up the body of the concubine?

### Read Judges 20:1-11

10. In v1, how do the Israelites react to the Levite's grisly parcels? How does this compare with their response toward the judges when they seek to gather an army against the nations who overrun them?

Using the table below, compare the Levite's account of the events in Gibeah with what actually happened?

<b>Levites Account (20:4-5)</b>	<b>What Actually Happened (19:22-29)</b>
The leaders of Gibeah rose up against me	
They intended to kill me	
Instead they ravished my concubine so that she died	

11. What is the Levite trying to do with his account of the events?

12. Do you think Israel responds appropriately to the Levite's story?

The note of dark irony continues through this section to the end of the book. After failing to unite behind the judges to fight pagans, Israel is more than willing to unite behind the sleazy Levite to fight one of their own tribes. Through the last two chapters we see this decision brings terrible consequences. Thousands of people lose their lives from both sides of the civil war. Then, to deal with the consequences of their slaughter of all the women from the tribe of Benjamin, the Israelite elders end up proposing a situation that condones women being carried off and raped—exactly the same situation they went to war for in the first place! What has gone wrong?

**Read Judges 17:6 and 21:25**

13. Literally the phrase is, 'everyone did what was right in his own eyes?' If the constant refrain of the earlier part of Judges was 'the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord' (2:11; 3:11; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), what new perspective does the phrase of 17:6 and 21:25 give?

14. How does this phrase sum up these last four chapters of Judges?

15. Who should be the king in Israel?

The recurring phrase 'there was no king in Israel' is a sad commentary on the state of life in the land because Israel did have a king. God! The problem was, they weren't interested in following him. The result of living without their king was the moral and religious chaos of these last few chapters.

16. How is Israel a picture of all humans (see Romans 1:18-32)? Can you see how you fit into this picture?

17. Is there any way out of this bleak situation (Romans 3:21-26)?

18. Is there a king in your life?



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