

SESSION 5

Difficulties During the Judges

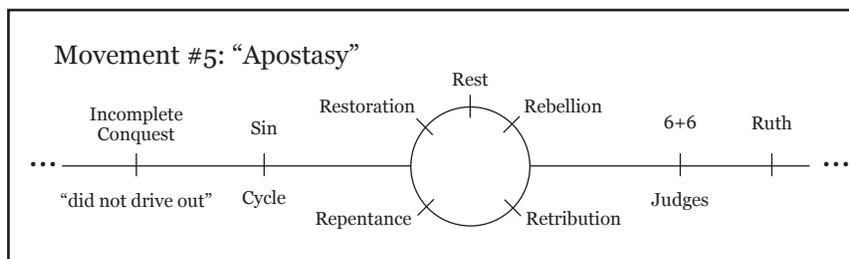
I. PRAYER

II. BOOK OF JUDGES

A. Charted

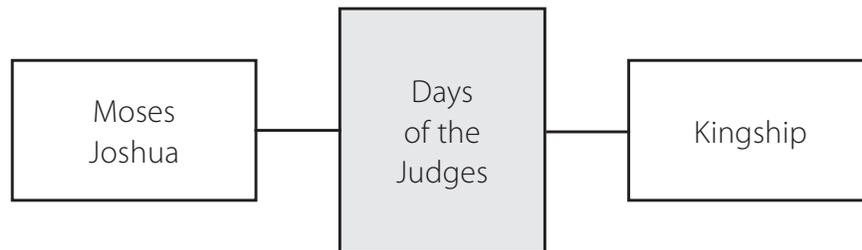
JUDGES		
KEY THEME: "Defeat and Deliverance"	KEY PHRASE: "Did Evil"	KEY CONCEPT: "Sin Cycle"
Days of the Judges 1 3	Deeds of the Judges 3 16	Difficulties during the Judges 17 21
Prologue	Body	Appendix
Sin Cycle (Judges 2)	6 Major - 6 Minor	Idolatry/Civil War

B. Timeline (Movement 5: Apostasy)



III. DIFFICULTIES DURING THE JUDGES

A. Context of Judges



B. Appendix (Judg 17-21) Related to the Stories of the Judges (Judg 3-16)

1. Judges 17-21 forms additional, appended material (stories) that occurred during the time of the judges.
2. These stories are different from the “sin cycle” pattern of the six major and six minor judges of Judges 3-16 (cf. sin cycle pattern in Judg 2:10-19).
3. Chronologically these stories occur during the days of the judges but their inclusion at the end of the book seems to point further to the deterioration of religious and moral life.

Four key passages within this section summarize the problem and anticipate the future kingship period:

- a. Judges 17:6
In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.
- b. Judges 18:1
In those days Israel had no king. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking a place of their own where they might settle, because they had not yet come into an inheritance among the tribes of Israel.
- c. Judges 19:1
In those days Israel had no king. Now a Levite who lived in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.

- d. Judges 21:25
In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.

C. The Bethlehem Trilogy

1. Micah, the Levite and the Danites (Judg 17-18)
2. The Levite, his concubine and the Benjamites (Judg 19-21)
3. Ruth, Naomi and Boaz (Book of Ruth)

IV. BIBLICAL DEVELOPMENT: JUDGES 17-18 (Micah, the Levite and the Danites)

A. Micah and the Levite (Judg 17:1-13)

1. Micah and his idols (1-6)
Judges 17:1-2
Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim² said to his mother, "The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you and about which I heard you utter a curse—I have that silver with me; I took it." Then his mother said, "The Lord bless you, my son!"
 - a. Micah ("who is like the Lord?") is from the hill country of Ephraim (north of Dan, Benjamin, and Judah's original allotments).
 - b. Apparently he stole from his mother who "cursed" the unknown thief. Micah admits his guilt and his mother attempts to bless her son (to counteract her curse?)
 - c. Micah returned the large sum of money; his mother devoted the entire sum to have an idol crafted. This is problematic for two reasons:
 - (1) Worshiping idols was forbidden (Ex 20:4).
 - (2) Declaring to give all before the Lord (and yet giving only a smaller part) was deceitful and hypocritical (cf. Acts 5:1-11; Ananias and Sapphira).

Judges 17:5

Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some household gods and installed one of his sons as his priest.

- (a) The shrine was not permitted (Deut 12:1-14).
- (b) The ephod and idols were not permitted.
- (c) The installation of a son as a household priest was not permitted.
- (d) The attitude of the day of doing what was fit (right) in one's own eyes was not permitted.

2. Micah and the Levite (7-13)

Judges 17:7-8

A young Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, who had been living within the clan of Judah, ⁸left that town in search of some other place to stay. On his way he came to Micah's house in the hill country of Ephraim.

- a. The Levite was from Bethlehem (not a Levitical city; cf. Num 35:1-8; Josh 21:1-42).
- b. The Levite was apparently not an Aaronic priest (i.e. of the Levitical lineage of Aaron); the text does not describe him in this way.

Micah hires the Levite to be his household priest thinking that to do so would bring God's blessing (17:9-13).

B. The Levite and the Danites (Judg 18:1-31)

The sordid story begins with a reminder: "In those days Israel had no king" (18:1^a). The tribe of Dan had found it near impossible to drive out the Philistines from their appointed inheritance. On a scouting party to find new land to settle, five spies from Dan had a chance meeting with the "priest" in Micah's home.

Later, after discovering the land around Laish (Huleh basin north of the Sea of Galilee), the spies brought six hundred soldiers through the hill country of Ephraim where Micah's

home was located. They were in route militarily to the favorable land in the north.

The soldiers stole from Micah's home the carved image, the ephod, the other household gods, the cast idol, and finally persuaded the priest to also come with them. "Isn't it better that you serve a tribe and clan in Israel as priest rather than just one man's household?" (18:19^b).

Micah and some hastily recruited Ephraimites pursued the Danites but prudently backed down from potential violence with the larger, stronger Danites.

This story illustrates at least four major failings (sins).

1. The Danites had no business leaving their original allotment. God had providentially controlled the process. Rather, the Danites should have trusted God and driven out the Canaanites from their God-appointed land.
2. Both Micah and the Danites were wrong to employ a Levite to become their personal priest and establish (though forbidden) their own place of worship.

Deuteronomy 12:1-7

These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has given you to possess—as long as you live in the land. ²Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains, on the hills and under every spreading tree, where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. ³Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places. ⁴You must not worship the Lord your God in their way. ⁵But you are to seek the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; ⁶there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. ⁷There, in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you.

3. Idols and non-prescribed, religious articles associated with false worship were strictly forbidden. Micah should not have established these in his home. The Danites should not have transferred these to the land in the north.

Exodus 20:4

"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

4. Micah sinned against God by first establishing his son as a priest. Further, Micah sinned later in asking a Levite (not even an Aaronic priest) to serve as a family priest. The Danites sinned not only in stealing that which was not theirs to take but in perpetuating the false priesthood and false worship of the Levite. These sins were highly presumptive upon God to bless what He explicitly denied.

The Danites settled in the captured city (and area) of Laish. Their spiritual condition is at an extreme low.

Judges 18:28^b-31

The Danites rebuilt the city and settled there.²⁹ They named it Dan after their ancestor Dan, who was born to Israel—though the city used to be called Laish.³⁰ There the Danites set up for themselves the idol, and Jonathan son of Gershom, the son of Moses, and his sons were priests for the tribe of Dan until the time of the captivity of the land.³¹ They continued to use the idol Micah had made, all the time the house of God was in Shiloh.

V. BIBLICAL DEVELOPMENT: JUDGES 19-21 (The Levite, the Concubine, and the Danites)

The second of the Bethlehem Trilogy was a story of intertribal civil war. This incident probably occurred early in the days of the Judges (note the reference to Phinehas, son of Eleazar—cf. Num 25:7, 11; Josh 22:13, 31 ff.), yet is placed here to show additional evidence of that which Joshua warned:

Joshua 23:9-13

“The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. ¹⁰One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised. ¹¹So be very careful to love the Lord your God.

¹²“But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, ¹³then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the Lord your God has given you.

The failure to drive out the Canaanites led to ever-increasing Canaanite influences upon the people of God, the Israelites. This deterioration began early and ran throughout this period of time. This negative influence is sometimes called the “Canaanization of Israel.”

A. A Levite and His Concubine (Judg 19:1-30)

1. The setting (1^a): “In those days Israel had no king.”
2. The story (1^b-8)

Judges 19:1^b-4

*Now a Levite who lived in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim took a concubine **from Bethlehem** in Judah.*

²But she was unfaithful to him. She left him and went back to her parents’ home in Bethlehem, Judah. After she had been there four months, ³her husband went to her to persuade her to return. He had with him his servant and two donkeys. She took him into her parents’ home, and when her father saw him, he gladly welcomed him. ⁴His father-in-law, the woman’s father, prevailed on him to stay; so he remained with him three days, eating and drinking, and sleeping there.

- a. The Levite (of hill country of Ephraim) was not living in a Levitical city (first hint of something not quite right).
- b. The Levite took a concubine to be his wife (against the original standard – Gen 2:24). This also points to a moral laxness indicative of the times.
- c. The Levite and his concubine quarreled (or better, “she was unfaithful”). She had returned to her father’s house.
- d. The Levite attempted to persuade her to return home, a plan apparently endorsed by the concubine’s father.

3. The separation (9-15)

After four and one half days, the Levite, his concubine and his servant begin the journey home. Not wishing to stay in Jebus (later Jerusalem), they travel to Gibeah expecting a display of “oriental hospitality.” No such care was given. In fact, extreme sinfulness is on the horizon.

Judges 19:14-15

So they went on, and the sun set as they neared Gibeah in Benjamin. ¹⁵There they stopped to spend the night. They went and sat in the city square, but no one took them in for the night.

4. The sinful Gibeahites (16-30)

- a. The hospitable old man of Gibeah (16-21)

Judges 19:20-21

“You are welcome at my house,” the old man said. “Let me supply whatever you need. Only don’t spend the night in the square.” ²¹So he took him into his house and fed his donkeys. After they had washed their feet, they had something to eat and drink.

- b. The sinful men of Gibeah (22-28)

Judges 19:22-24

While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, “Bring out the man who came

to your house so we can have sex with him.”²³The owner of the house went outside and said to them, “No, my friends, don’t be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don’t do this outrageous thing.”²⁴Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But as for this man, don’t do such an outrageous thing.”

- (1) The story reminds one of the incident in Sodom (Gen 19:1-11). What characterized the Sodom-Canaanites of old has become the behavior of Israelites in Gibeah.
- (2) The old man felt a responsibility to protect his guest (custom of hospitality) and did so by offering his virgin daughter. But the offer itself is both revealing and unacceptable (intercourse outside of marriage; flagrant disregard of the protection of one’s daughter).
- (3) The sinful men refuse to listen.
- (4) The Levite pushes his concubine out the door into the hands of the evil mob.

Judges 19:25-26

But the men would not listen to him. So the man took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and they raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go.²⁶At daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, fell down at the door and lay there until daylight.

- (5) The violence of that night led to the concubine’s death.

c. The surprising action of the Levite (29-30)

Judges 19:29-30

When he reached home, he took a knife and cut up his concubine, limb by limb, into twelve parts and sent them into all the areas of Israel.³⁰Everyone who saw it was saying to one another, “Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came

*up out of Egypt. Just imagine! We must do something!
So speak up!"*

- (1) The Levite shows no emotion to her apparent death.
- (2) The Levite takes the body home.
- (3) The Levite cuts up the body into twelve parts, sending a part "into all the areas of Israel."
- (4) The Levite's action causes all to question, "Think about it! Consider it! Tell us what to do!"

Insight: Distasteful Threads in the Story: Note...

1. The Levite's desire for (marital) reconciliation compared to the Levite's casual discarding of her to evil men...
2. The Levite's apparent lack of emotion to the death of his concubine...
3. The sinful demands (unrestrained lust and depravity) of the rapist mob of Gibeah...
4. The bizarre action of cutting the body of the concubine into twelve parts...
5. The call to uncertain action (of the tribes) due to the sordid story.

B. Civil War in Israel (Judg 20:1-48)

The story continues. From a focus on despicable moral laxness (even degenerating morals) in Judges 19, the next chapter exposes the political disarray of the tribes.

1. The story of the Levite (1-7)

In response to the twelve body parts (19:29-30), Israelites from Dan to Beersheba (North to South, i.e. all Israel represented) assemble at Mizpah to hear firsthand the Levite's story.

Judges 20:2-3

The leaders of all the people of the tribes of Israel took their places in the assembly of God's people, four hundred thousand men armed with swords. ³(The Benjamites heard that the Israelites had gone up to Mizpah.) Then the Israelites said, "Tell us how this awful thing happened."

2. The reactions of the assembled (8-11)

In unity the Israelites determine to select by lots a provisional army to go to the Gibeathites (townspeople) within Benjamin (tribal allotment). This army "can give them what they deserve" (10).

3. The peaceful attempt of a settlement (12-13^a)

Judges 20:12-13^a

The tribes of Israel sent messengers throughout the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What about this awful crime that was committed among you? ¹³Now turn those wicked men of Gibeah over to us so that we may put them to death and purge the evil from Israel."

4. The response of Gibeah and the Tribe of Benjamin (13^b-16)

"But the Benjamites would not listen to their fellow Israelites" (13^b). Instead, they mustered their soldiers for war.

5. The preparation for battle (17-18)

The Israelites vastly outnumber the Benjamites (over 15-1 odds). Israel inquires of the Lord at Bethel (the location of the Tabernacle, some 4-5 miles from Mizpah). Judah was to be the first tribe to fight against Benjamin.

6. The warfare (19-23)

a. First encounter (19-23)

Judges 20:19-23

The next morning the Israelites got up and pitched camp near Gibeah. ²⁰The Israelites went out to fight the Benjamites and took up battle positions against them at Gibeah. ²¹The Benjamites came out of Gibeah

and cut down twenty-two thousand Israelites on the battlefield that day.²² But the Israelites encouraged one another and again took up their positions where they had stationed themselves the first day.²³ The Israelites went up and wept before the Lord until evening, and they inquired of the Lord. They said, "Shall we go up again to fight against the Benjamites, our fellow Israelites?" The Lord answered, "Go up against them."

b. Second encounter (24-28)

Judges 20:24-25

Then the Israelites drew near to Benjamin the second day.²⁵ This time, when the Benjamites came out from Gibeah to oppose them, they cut down another eighteen thousand Israelites, all of them armed with swords.

The defeat caused the Israelites to go to Bethel and weep before the Lord (26). Again they inquired of the Lord whether to go against their brothers (27-28). The answer was "Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands" (28).

c. Third encounter (29-48)

In the final engagement Israel set an ambush against Gibeah (29). Drawing the Gibeahites out of their city to pursue the initial attack of Israelites, the Israelite soldiers hidden in reserve there frontally assaulted Gibeah (31-34). This strategy mirrored that of Joshua and the Israelites in the conquering of Ai.

Judges 20:35-36

The Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel, and on that day the Israelites struck down 25,100 Benjamites, all armed with swords.³⁶ Then the Benjamites saw that they were beaten. Now the men of Israel had given way before Benjamin, because they relied on the ambush they had set near Gibeah.

The routing of Gibeah and the Benjamite soldiers was brutal and decisive.

Judges 20:46-48

On that day twenty-five thousand Benjamite swordsmen fell, all of them valiant fighters.⁴⁷ But six hundred of them turned and fled into the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, where they stayed four months.⁴⁸ The men of Israel went back to Benjamin and put all the towns to the sword, including the animals and everything else they found. All the towns they came across they set on fire.

C. Preservation of Benjamin (Judg 21:1-25)

1. Post-war sorrow for Benjamin (1-9)

Following the tribal civil war, the victorious Israelites realized that the tribe of Benjamin (their brothers) was nearly extinct (600 men remained; cf. 20:47).

Judges 21:2-3

The people went to Bethel, where they sat before God until evening, raising their voices and weeping bitterly. ³“Lord, God of Israel,” they cried, “why has this happened to Israel? Why should one tribe be missing from Israel today?”

All of the tribes were called to a solemn, required assembly during this war aftermath. However, it was later discovered that none from Jabesh Gilead were present (21:8-9).

2. Post-war anger against Jabesh Gilead (10-12)

Societal, tribal morality has reached an all-time low. Now, angered that Jabesh Gilead has failed to appear, the Israelites send fighting men for vengeance and to procure women for the depleted males of Benjamin (12).

3. Post-war proposal to Benjamin (13-24)

- a. The virgins of Jabesh Gilead (400) were offered to the men of Benjamin (600) (13-14).
- b. The shortage of women causes a further problem (15-18).

Judges 21:15-18

The people grieved for Benjamin, because the Lord had made a gap in the tribes of Israel. ¹⁶And the elders of the assembly said, "With the women of Benjamin destroyed, how shall we provide wives for the men who are left? ¹⁷The Benjamite survivors must have heirs," they said, "so that a tribe of Israel will not be wiped out. ¹⁸We can't give them our daughters as wives, since we Israelites have taken this oath: 'Cursed be anyone who gives a wife to a Benjamite.'"

- c. The "creative" solution included a "loophole" to allow Israelite women to be "carried" off from the annual celebration festival at Shiloh (perhaps the harvest feast of Tabernacles) (19-24).
 - (1) Technically, an oath had been given that no Israelite woman could be given to Benjamin (18).
 - (2) The young women of Jabesh Gilead were too few for the surviving Benjamites (400 women for 600 men).
 - (3) The men of Benjamin were to hide in the vineyards and when the celebration and dancing began, they could "rush from the vineyards" and each one could "seize a wife."
 - (4) Thus, when the fathers complained, the elders could plead the Benjamite case and point out that "technically" they had not given their daughters (thus breaking the oath) but that the daughters were taken.

Judges 21:23

So that is what the Benjamites did. While the young women were dancing, each man caught one and carried her off to be his wife. Then they returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the towns and settled in them.

- (5) The Biblical text does not indicate that God approved the subterfuge. In fact, God can permit while not endorsing man's plans and schemes.

Insight: Final verse of the Book of Judges

“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did what he saw fit”
(Judg 21:25).

VI. TAKEAWAYS

A. Appendix Stories (Judg 17-21)

1. In these added episodes we see the spiritual and moral decline of the Israelites.

Proverbs 14:34

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin condemns any people.

2. In these episodes we see how a lack of strong leadership for the whole Israelite nation has caused an imploding of ethical standards and unbridled revenge against one's brothers. In none of these appended stories was worship of Baal the primary cause. "The Israelites needed no judge or king to lead them into apostasy or battle. They did both on their own" (Constable, *Notes on Judges*, 137).

B. Major Sin Issues

1. Sexual sin was highlighted (cf. Levite's concubine, the mob at Gibeah).
2. Theft was reported (cf. Micah, the Danites).
3. The moral fabric of the tribes was disintegrating. It seems to parallel the New Testament listing of the "acts of sinful nature" or the flesh.

Galatians 5:19-21

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

4. Consideration for the value of human life was at a low point.

C. Sad Conclusion (to Judg 17-21)

Constable (*Notes on Judges*, 137) quotes Inrig for an apt conclusion:

“Judges 9-21 gives us the ugliest story in the Bible. The key to it is that, at every stage, men were acting on the basis of what was right in their own eyes. As far as the men of Gibeah were concerned, rape was all right. To the farmer and the Levite in the house, homosexual rape was unthinkable, but other rape was acceptable. The men of Benjamin thought it was right to overlook sin and to defend evil men. To Israel, revenge and retaliation would be justified, and to solve their problems about marriage for the Benjamites, the massacre of innocent people and kidnapping could be condoned.

“The interesting thing is that none of this had anything [?] to do with idolatry and Baal worship. It began with individuals ignoring the law of God, doing what was right in their own eyes, and it led a whole nation into moral collapse.”