



Leaves From the Tree

Studies from God's Word

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



JUDGES 19 - 21

Judges 19

PARENTAL ALERT—some of the following subject matter involves mature themes. Please review with discernment before sharing with your children.

19:1-3 - "In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. And his concubine was unfaithful to him, and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there some four months. Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys. And she brought him into her father's house. And when the girl's father saw him, he came with joy to meet him."

The chapter opens with the third mention in the last three chapters of there being no king in Israel. We have seen that the implication of no king is that Israel is no longer following the Lord as king, and since no human king has yet been appointed to lead the nation, the result is a nationwide spiritual and moral free for all with everyone doing what seems right in their own perspective. The story which is told in this chapter is perhaps the most shocking, horrifying, stomach turning story in the entire Bible. Just that it was included in the Bible and that the Lord wanted the generations that followed to know this story is at first surprising. Some have the impression of the Bible that it is a collection of nice stories and sayings intended to help everyone who reads it to better enjoy their day and life. Stories like this grab hold of our hearts, and if we are not completely desensitized, sicken us. That affect on our hearts is purposeful and intended by the Lord. The Lord could have chosen only the positive events of the history of Israel to include in the Bible. Instead, He chose to record the events that teach us everything we need to learn, even when those events are painful for us to consider. The Lord exposes the worst flaws of Israel in all their ugliness so that we can learn not just how bad things were then, but how they got that way. The lesson here is found in the display of how ugly human beings can be when they turn from the Lord and His ways.

The story concerns an unnamed Levite and his concubine. Levites were called by the Lord to be His special servants and spiritual leaders in Israel. We will see that this Levite, like the one in the previous two chapters is in no heart condition to be leading anyone spiritually. Though he is one of the victims of the horrible development later in the chapter, he is also partly the cause of what happens. As a result, he is not intended to be seen as the "good guy" in the story. There really are no good guys here. Remember, everyone (including this Levite) was doing what was right in their own eyes. The Levite is introduced as a sojourner in

Ephraim. This does not mean he was there in the north of Israel on a vacation. The Lord had provided in the Law dozens of Levitical cities where He wanted the Levites to live. These were situated so that their influence would reach all of Israel. This Levite had left the home the Lord had appointed for him and was wandering into the remote parts of the hill country. He married a young woman from Bethlehem, but she is identified as a concubine. The meaning is that their marriage was what we might call a second class marriage. She was not given full rights as his wife, most likely because she did not provide a proper dowry when they married. This second class status of their relationship shows up again in a crucial point of the story.

The concubine is the greatest victim in the story that follows, but even she is not entirely innocent. She left her husband and was unfaithful to their marriage. Based on how we later see him treat her, she may have felt justified in her actions, but nevertheless, it was her who violated their marriage covenant by unfaithfulness to her husband. She then returned to her father's house in Bethlehem, and the Levite came after her there. What stands out is that he decided to wait four months after she left to go after his wife. Nevertheless, his plan was to speak kindly to her and bring her back to live with him again. The implication is that he had probably not spoken kindly to her before she left him.

19:12-16 - "And his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel, but we will pass on to Gibeah." And he said to his young man, "Come and let us draw near to one of these places and spend the night at Gibeah or at Ramah." So they passed on and went their way. And the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, and they turned aside there, to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. And he went in and sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night. And behold, an old man was coming from his work in the field at evening. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was sojourning in Gibeah. The men of the place were Benjaminites."

In their journey back from Bethlehem, they passed by the Canaanite city of Jebus, which would later become the city of Jerusalem. The Levite chose not to stay in Jebus among the Canaanites, but to continue on to the city of Gibeah, and to stay the night with his countrymen of the tribe of Benjamin. When they arrived in Gibeah it was late in the day. They sat in the open city square. The point of this being mentioned is that no one from the city who saw them arrive approached them to offer them hospitality. In those days, there were no motels along the road. Even Inns where people provided lodging was rare. Travelers relied upon the hospitality of people along the way. It was expected in such a case for those who lived in the city to offer their home for food and lodging for the night to travelers, and especially to those who were of Israel. After being ignored by the men of Gibeah, finally an old man returning from his work in the field saw them and offered his home to them. His age is a significant detail because it

implies that the younger generation in Gibeah had lost their commitment to the responsibility of hospitality, but that the old man still retained some of the values of an older, better generation. The old man insisted that they not spend the night in the city square, which hints at his concern about the danger in the city once night fell.

19:22-26 - "As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house, beating on the door. And they said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him." And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing. Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out now. Violate them and do with them what seems good to you, but against this man do not do this outrageous thing." But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go. And as morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, until it was light."

That night as they were enjoying the refreshment of the old man's home, a gang of men surrounded the house and began beating on the door. The men are identified in the Hebrew text as sons of Belial. The name Belial is associated with those that are given over to wickedness. The men were demanding for the Levite who was staying in the house to be brought out and given to them. Their intention was to "know him." They were not seeking a friendly introduction to get to know the Levite socially. It is Hebrew figure of speech that describes sexual intercourse. This gang of men intended to force themselves sexually on the Levite and were demanding that he be turned over to them for that purpose. This story should ring a bell of familiarity for us. It is almost a repeat of what happened in Sodom just before the destruction of the city under the judgment of the Lord. Then, as now, a gang of sons of Belial surrounded a house and demanded to be given the men who were guests under the hospitality of Lot. The tragedy is that Sodom, which had been destroyed by the Lord has now reappeared in one of the cities of Israel. The men of Gibeah are as wicked as the Sodomites.

The old man went out to speak with them and attempt to dissuade them. As a good host in those days, the head of the household practicing hospitality was responsible for the safety and welfare of his guests for as long as they remained under his roof. The old man took this responsibility seriously. At this point in the story, the old man seems to be the best character and most honorable. However, his next statement exposes even him as a man who has lost his way with the Lord. The host began well with an appeal to the gang to not do the vile thing they were planning. Perhaps the fear of what the gang would do to him and his house if he did not satisfy their demand is what moved him to make a counter offer to

them. He refused to bring out the Levite and violate his own honor as a shower of hospitality. Instead he decided to bribe the gang with other victims that they could abuse to satisfy their wicked lust. The old man offered in place of the Levite his own virgin daughter and the concubine of the man. He offered to bring them out and in essence gave the gang permission to violate both women and do whatever they wanted to them. He only wanted their assurance that they would not assault the Levite. In this, the old man displays a shocking situational ethic. His concern is not to protect his own family and all the guests in his home, but only the man who is staying there. He is willing to sacrifice own daughter and the man's wife to their evil desires. It is as though the women do not even matter to either him or the Levite. How far have they drifted from the high perspective the Lord intends godly men to have of women in God's purpose as revealed first in Genesis 1:26-28.

When the gang of men reject his offer of the two women, the Levite takes charge and forces his wife to go out to the gang. The wording clearly implies that she had no desire to go out, but that he seized her and pushed her outside. As a Levite, he was more responsible than anyone in the story to do the right thing in this moment of crisis. He was most responsible because he had been given greater access as a Levite to the holy things of the Lord including the Law of God. Nevertheless, at the critical moment, his only concern was for himself and his own safety. What we don't see him do is stop and pray. We don't see him cry out to the Lord for His intervention. We don't see him bravely confront the wickedness of the gang with a strong word of rebuke. We do see him shove righteousness out of the door as he shoved his wife out. Every man doing what was right in their own eyes. With this unexpected development the gang chooses to cease their demand for the Levite and instead turn their full wickedness upon the helpless concubine. They sexually and physically abused her throughout the night. Only at dawn does the gang release her, when she collapsed at the door of the house where her husband had comfortably spent the night. The circumstance is outrageous. The story is meant to stir deep outrage in the reader. The outrage should be magnified because this happened in the midst of God's holy nation.

19:27-30 - "And her master rose up in the morning, and when he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, behold, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. He said to her, "Get up, let us be going." But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey, and the man rose up and went away to his home. And when he entered his house, he took a knife, and taking hold of his concubine he divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. And all who saw it said, "Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day; consider it, take counsel, and speak."

The events of the night are staggering in their evil, but it is the developments of the next morning which chill the heart. In the morning, we do not see the Levite and the old man rushing out of the house weighed down with overwhelming guilt at their cowardice and selfishness, and filled with concern for the welfare of the concubine. What we see is the Levite leaving the house ready to continue his trip as though everyone has had a good night's rest together. The Levite opened the door, and saw his wife laying there just outside the doorway with her hands on the threshold in a pitiful sign that she had attempted to gain the safety of the house. We don't see the Levite bend down over her with care and concern. Instead he abruptly issues traveling orders for her to get up so that they can continue their journey north. She did not answer him, because she is now dead. There is no hint of grief or remorse in his response. The Levite acts in a cold hearted business like manner. Placing her body on the donkey he completes his journey home.

Once home, he chooses an extreme course of action to alert the tribes of Israel to this crime. Without taking any responsibility for what was done to her, he further desecrates her body in death by making her a gruesome symbol in messages sent to the twelve tribes. He cuts her body into twelve parts and sends a part to each tribe in a call to arms. It was necessary to alert the other tribes to the deep corruption in their midst and to call them to action, but his chosen method exposes again that his own heart is not in the right place. There are no heroes in this chapter. What is worse is that when Israel most needs Him, there is not a single thought or word directed to the Lord in all of this. They all had ignored the Lord, but we will see in the next chapter that the Lord will not allow Himself to be ignored or disregarded for long.

Judges 20

20:1-8 - "Then all the people of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, and the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah. And the chiefs of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 men on foot that drew the sword. (Now the people of Benjamin heard that the people of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the people of Israel said, "Tell us, how did this evil happen?" And the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "I came to Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night. And the leaders of Gibeah rose against me and surrounded the house against me by night. They meant to kill me, and they violated my concubine, and she is dead. So I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel, for they have committed abomination and outrage in Israel. Behold, you people of Israel, all of you, give your advice and counsel here." And all the people arose as one man, saying, "None of us will go to his tent, and none of us will return to his house."

The tragedy of the previous chapter ended with the Levite dividing the body of his concubine and sending it to the twelve tribes of Israel in an intentionally shocking call for all the tribes to gather. All of the tribes of Israel entire nation assembled as a single nation at Mizpah with the exception of Benjamin. This crime had been committed in Gibeah, one of the cities of Benjamin, and the absence of Benjamin is a cause for concern, but not entirely unexpected. 400,000 men from the other eleven tribes gathered to discover the meaning of the strange message they had received from the Levite. Apparently, he had not given any details in his message, but relied on the revulsion his "message" would cause to stir the tribes to action.

We saw in the events of that horrific night that the Levite was not virtuous in his own character. He had willingly sacrificed his concubine to save himself from the evil intentions of the mob that night. Now, once the tribes had gathered, they demanded to know the story behind his message. The Levite described the events of that night in such a way as to deflect attention away from his own actions, and deftly place all of the blame on the men of Gibeah. The men of Gibeah were certainly to blame for a great crime, but as we will see, the Lord will hold this Levite accountable for his own sinful actions that night.

When the tribes hear what had been done, they respond in a commendable way. They all rose in unity of moral outrage and declare their commitment to deal with this crime. They declare that no man among them will return to his house. The meaning of this statement is that all are together responsible to handle this crisis in Israel. This is not some isolated crime concerning only the local authorities. They correctly understand that for such a wicked act to have been carried out

anywhere in Israel creates a burden for the entire nation. This is God's holy nation and they must not rest until this evil has been purged from their midst.

20:11-14 - "So all the men of Israel gathered against the city, united as one man. And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What evil is this that has taken place among you? Now therefore give up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and purge evil from Israel." But the Benjaminites would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the people of Israel. Then the people of Benjamin came together out of the cities to Gibeah to go out to battle against the people of Israel."

Having determined that the source of this wickedness was in the city of Gibeah, the tribes determined to send a representative army from their gathering to deal with Gibeah. Wisely, before attacking Gibeah, the tribes sent men throughout the territory of the tribe of Benjamin to make them accountable for what had happened in one of their cities. They also demanded that Benjamin give up the wicked men in Gibeah who had committed this crime. They declared their intention to carry out the justice required in the Law of God for their actions. The men of Gibeah were to be put to death by the gathered tribes. Their execution would purge the evil from Israel. This message to Benjamin from the other tribes was strongly worded, but it was a merciful offer to the tribe of Benjamin. If Benjamin were to answer responsibly with appropriate repentance, and turn the men of Gibeah over to the tribes, they would be spared from sharing the judgment upon Gibeah. Benjamin foolishly rejected the merciful offer and instead prepared for war with the other tribes of Israel.

Their stubborn response meant that war was now unavoidable. What would follow is a battle that is the equivalent of an Israelite Civil War. Tribe would go to war against tribe and Israelite would shed the blood of Israelite. This development was the result of more than a disagreement or misunderstanding between the tribes. Benjamin had spiritually descended into rebellion against the Lord. In their rebellion, they would now fight against anyone that represented the standards of the Lord to them. There is an important but difficult lesson for all believers here. People in rebellion do not like being held accountable to the Lord's standards and will fight anyone that dares to hold them accountable. At the same time, the Lord's standards should not be ignored or compromised. Some things are of such high value that they are worth the price to be paid to uphold them even if that price is the opposition of those who are rejecting the Lord and His standards.

20:18-25 - "The people of Israel arose and went up to Bethel and inquired of God, "Who shall go up first for us to fight against the people of Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Judah shall go up first." Then the people of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah. And the men of Israel went out to fight against Benjamin, and the men of Israel drew up the battle line against them at Gibeah. The people of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and destroyed on that day 22,000 men of the Israelites. But the people, the men of Israel, took courage, and again formed the battle line in the same place where they had formed it on the first day. And the people of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until the evening. And they inquired of the LORD, "Shall we again draw near to fight against our brothers, the people of Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Go up against them." So the people of Israel came near against the people of Benjamin the second day. And Benjamin went against them out of Gibeah the second day and destroyed 18,000 men of the people of Israel. All these were men who drew the sword."

The next step the unified tribes of Israel took was to inquire of God regarding the battle to come. They asked God which of the gathered tribes should take the lead in the battle. There was something right and something wrong about what the tribes of Israel did at this point. What was right is they asked the Lord who should take the lead in the battle. It is always wise and right to ask for the Lord's direction in such a serious venture, and not presume to know how to deal with the circumstance at hand. What was wrong is reflected in the way they inquired of God and also in what they neglected to ask the Lord.

The way they inquired of Him exposed that the problem in Israel was not confined to Benjamin alone. The tribes used the general name for God, Elohim when they inquired of Him. This is a hint that they had themselves drifted from the covenant relationship with the Lord of Israel. The Lord had revealed Himself to Israel as Yahweh, the Lord. This was His covenant name. By calling on Elohim, rather than Yahweh, Israel was praying without consideration of the covenant between the Lord and His people.

What they neglected to ask the Lord is what they should do in this situation and whether there was anything they themselves needed to first address with Him. They did ask which tribe should first go to war, but they had not even asked the Lord first whether they should go to war and whether they were spiritually prepared to go to war. The truth was that the other tribes, though unified by their outrage at the crime done in Gibeah, were not in the right spiritual condition to be judging another tribe in Israel. There is a Kingdom principle which they were ignoring in their zeal to react to Gibeah. Jesus identifies it for us in the Sermon on the Mount.

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you

see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:1-5).

Israel's rush to judgment against Benjamin would expose them as hypocritical. The standard of judgment that they intended to apply to Benjamin would first be applied to them by the Lord. They had not noticed the log in their own eye. The Levite who had called them to gather against Gibeah was actually held to a higher standard because he was a Levite and was called to be a spiritual leader in Israel. His sinful actions in the events at Gibeah would not be swept under the carpet by the Lord. The Lord would use the tribe of Judah to bring much needed discipline to the tribe of Benjamin, but not until they were first disciplined by the Lord.

20:26-28 - "Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. And the people of Israel inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days), saying, "Shall we go out once more to battle against our brothers, the people of Benjamin, or shall we cease?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand."

Israel thought they had done everything right. They had responded to the call to gather. They had demonstrated the appropriate outrage as the heinous crime committed in Gibeah. They had vowed not to return to the comfort of their homes until this issue was resolved. They inquired of the Lord for his marching orders in the battle with Benjamin. Nevertheless, in the battle, the rebellious tribe of Benjamin won a great victory over Judah and 22,000 men of Judah fell in the battle. Convinced they were in the right; Judah again asked the Lord for his direction and returned to battle a second day. Hopeful of victory, Judah suffered the loss of an additional 18,000 men. Their presumption of an easy victory was now shattered.

In confusion and uncertainty of heart, all the people of Israel sought the Lord with whole hearted concern. They fasted, offered burnt and peace offerings to the Lord and inquired of the Lord at the ark of the covenant through the High Priest, Phinehas. These are the things they should have done before the first battle. This is the heart attitude that was necessary given the heart rending severity of the crime in Gibeah and the rebellion of Benjamin against the other tribes. By treating the circumstance too lightly, and ignoring the spiritual issues in their own lives and hearts. Judah had lost a total of 40,000 men in the battle. This was no accidental number. The total number of the men of Israel that gathered in

response to the call of the Levite was 400,000. The 40,000 men lost was one tenth of the total, or a tithe of the total men. Their loss was a painful yet necessary reminder that the nation belonged to the Lord and not to them.

Now, because of this chastisement, the men of Israel were ready to represent the Lord in the battle against Benjamin. Their hearts had been humbled by their defeat and cleansed in repentance and the sacrifices offered to the Lord. The Lord would now use them as his rod of discipline to correct the wayward hearts of the tribe of Benjamin before their sin led to their utter destruction. The discipline of the Lord would be severe for Benjamin, but it would prove ultimately redemptive. In the same way a cancer treatment can seem almost too much to bear, the Lord's discipline for Benjamin would be strong enough to bring this tribe in Israel to the edge of extinction.

20:40 - "But when the signal began to rise out of the city in a column of smoke, the Benjaminites looked behind them, and behold, the whole of the city went up in smoke to heaven."

In the final battle there are elements which are intended to remind Israel and us of an earlier famous battle in their history. In the battle of Ai (Joshua 7-8) in the conquest of the Promised Land, Israel had suffered their first and unexpected defeat. In the defeat they discovered that the issue was not superior enemies, but the spiritual compromise in Israel itself. Following the Lord's discipline, in the subsequent battle, the Lord had Israel divide its forces in an ambush strategy which completely caught the opponents off guard. This resulted in the burning of the target city in a spiritually symbolic display of that city being purified as a whole burnt offering to the Lord.

Now, all of those same elements are repeated here in this battle. Israel was in the right, but suffered initial loss to expose the compromise within their own lives first. Once restored to right covenant relationship with the Lord, Israel is prepared for victory as the Lord will fight for them in the battle. Israel again uses a strategy of split forces with a rear ambush like at Ai. The city of Gibeah is now set on fire as a whole burnt offering unto the Lord. The irony is that the roles have changed. This is no city of ungodly, pagan Canaanites. This is a city of God's supposedly holy people who have become so corrupted in sin and rebellion that they are now as bad as the Canaanites. There is also a second layer of Biblical similarity here. The city of Sodom was so wicked in its corruption that the Lord destroyed it in fire. The sin of the Sodomites that immediately preceded the judgment of the Lord was almost identical to the sin of the men of Gibeah on that night.

Israel would have to learn this lesson the hard way. Their special status as God's covenant people did not purchase for them a free pass from adhering to God's standards of righteousness and holiness. The Lord had destroyed the cities of Sodom and Ai in fire and smoke because of the wickedness of their hearts and behavior. Gibeah would serve as a strong reminder to future generations that the

Lord would do the same to any city in Israel that turned from Him. The Lord has specifically warned all Israel of what would be done in such cases in the Law of God. Now they would all witness that the Lord was not like a threatening parent who warns and warns but never actually disciplines.

"If you hear in one of your cities, which the LORD your God is giving you to dwell there, that certain worthless fellows have gone out among you and have drawn away the inhabitants of their city, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known, then you shall inquire and make search and ask diligently. And behold, if it be true and certain that such an abomination has been done among you, you shall surely put the inhabitants of that city to the sword, devoting it to destruction, all who are in it and its cattle, with the edge of the sword. You shall gather all its spoil into the midst of its open square and burn the city and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God. It shall be a heap forever. It shall not be built again." (Deuteronomy 13:12-16).

Questions from Judges 19:

Question: In last part of the story it was said that the man chopped the body of the woman and distributed it to the 12 tribes to give messages of what happened. My question is: Why is it that he chopped the woman and did this brutal act instead of sending a summons (letter) to the people concern?

Answer: I believe there are two reasons why the message was sent by the Levite in this horrible manner. First, the Levite was not himself in a good place with the Lord. He had treated his concubine in a callous and heartless way, and this message arose out of the hardness of his own heart. At the same time, it is likely that the Lord was at work in this for a deeper purpose. Because of the poor spiritual condition of the hearts throughout Israel, it is reasonable to conclude that a normal message would not have had the same impact on the other tribes. A message in words alone might have easily been ignored. It was necessary for all the tribes to gather to learn the hard lessons of the Lord's discipline.

Judges 21

21:1-4 - "Now the men of Israel had sworn at Mizpah, "No one of us shall give his daughter in marriage to Benjamin." And the people came to Bethel and sat there till evening before God, and they lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. And they said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, why has this happened in Israel, that today there should be one tribe lacking in Israel?" And the next day the people rose early and built there an altar and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings."

The great civil war in Israel between the allied tribes and the wayward tribe of Benjamin is over. After the initial disciplinary losses in the first two battles, the allied tribes become the Lord's hand of judgment against the hardness of Benjamin's heart. The resulting defeat in battle is devastating to Benjamin. The loss of 25,000 men of Benjamin in battle virtually destroyed the future of the tribe as a viable tribe in Israel. Only 600 men of Benjamin are left alive. While the actions and attitude of Benjamin had deserved this severe result, the reality of what had occurred now began to sink in for the other tribes of Israel. This was not a judgment upon an isolated part of the nation leaving the rest of the nation unaffected. The destruction of an entire tribe was a tragic day for the entire nation. The people appropriately did not rejoice and celebrate their victory in the battle, but instead mourned as if they were the losers. The truth is that they all were the losers in this circumstance and all had contributed to its development by ignoring for far too long the spiritual compromise growing in their midst like a cancer.

The people cried out in bitterness to the Lord asking why this had happened that one tribe was lacking in Israel. They wanted the God of Israel to answer why such a thing had happened in Israel. The implication of their cry lays responsibility at the feet of the Lord. Why had He allowed this situation to sink so low? It's instructive that the Lord never responds to their tears and accusatory question. He will not be put on trial by man. His response to their cry is complete silence. This was a time of crisis in Israel when they most needed to hear from the Lord, but throughout the events of this chapter He remains silent. Rather than seek Him in genuine repentance until He spoke through a prophet, the people decide to take matters into their own hands.

It is true that the next day the people offer burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord, but their offerings do not move the Lord to either speak or act. The reason is that their offerings are not acceptable to Him. Why not? The Lord had been exceptionally clear in His Law about where and how the people of Israel should seek Him, especially in the matter of offering sacrifices. The Lord had given Israel the tabernacle of the Lord and the Levitical priesthood as the appropriate avenue to approach Him with sacrifices. Where is the tabernacle in this story? Where is the high priest of the Lord? Neither are mentioned, and apparently both were ignored by all of Israel when they decided to offer sacrifices

to the Lord. The people remembered enough from the Law to know they needed an altar upon which to offer their sacrifices. But rather than travel to the only authorized altar of the Lord at His tabernacle, the people took it upon themselves to build their own altar. The point is they have all been living on their own terms and now, in the midst of a national crisis meant to arrest their heart's attention, they attempt to fix the problem by continuing to act on their own terms. This approach resolves nothing. Israel is only going to deepen the current mess by making it a worse mess.

21:6-12 - "And the people of Israel had compassion for Benjamin their brother and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel this day. What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them any of our daughters for wives?" And they said, "What one is there of the tribes of Israel that did not come up to the LORD to Mizpah?" And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead, to the assembly. For when the people were mustered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there. So the congregation sent 12,000 of their bravest men there and commanded them, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword; also the women and the little ones. This is what you shall do: every male and every woman that has lain with a male you shall devote to destruction." And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him, and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan."

Israel now hopes to save the tribe of Benjamin for future generations by showing compassion to the remaining 600 men of Benjamin. Since they alone are left from their tribe, wives must somehow be found for them to marry and start new families. There is a problem with their good intention. All of Israel had previously taken an oath by the name of the Lord that they would not give any of the women of their tribes to the men of Benjamin after the battle.

Since Israel was stuck without a good solution to this quandary, what should have happened next is that the leaders of Israel should have stopped and sought the Lord for their next step. Only the wisdom of the Lord could steer the nation through this national crisis without their next step causing further trouble for themselves. However, as great as the need for prayer, we do not see the leaders seeking the Lord at this point. They come up with a solution, but the solution leads to more bloodshed in Israel without the direction of the Lord.

Israel identifies the city of Jabesh-gilead as the one city in Israel that had not responded to the call to gather for the battle against Benjamin. It was decided that an army of the gathered tribes was to strike and destroy the city and all its inhabitants sparing only the virgins of the city who would be spared for the men of Benjamin. This kind of total war in which city and inhabitants were destroyed was the kind of warfare the Lord had commanded Israel to wage against the

cities of Canaan back when they first conquered the Promised Land. That Israel now attacked one of their own cities in this same way indicates that Israel had become as the Canaanites that had preceded them.

21:15-22 - "And the people had compassion on Benjamin because the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel. Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?" And they said, "There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe not be blotted out from Israel. Yet we cannot give them wives from our daughters." For the people of Israel had sworn, "Cursed be he who gives a wife to Benjamin." So they said, "Behold, there is the yearly feast of the LORD at Shiloh, which is north of Bethel, on the east of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah." And they commanded the people of Benjamin, saying, "Go and lie in ambush in the vineyards and watch. If the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances, then come out of the vineyards and snatch each man his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. And when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, we will say to them, 'Grant them graciously to us, because we did not take for each man of them his wife in battle, neither did you give them to them, else you would now be guilty.'"

Because the 400 virgins of Jabesh-gilead were not sufficient to provide a wife for every remaining man of Benjamin, Israel needed another solution to find more women for the other 200 Benjamites. Again, they neglected to stop and ask or seek the Lord for His wisdom or direction. Instead they hatched a plan that would provide women while allowing them to avoid breaking their national oath on a technicality. They sent the men of Benjamin to a feast at Shiloh. They instructed them to ambush and kidnap the daughters of Shiloh for themselves, and flee with them back to their own territory of Benjamin. The leaders of Israel agreed to cover the retreat of the kidnapers by convincing the protesting fathers and brothers of the women they took.

The leaders saw this as a way to provide wives for Benjamin from the daughters of Israel without any of them being given in violation of the oath they had sworn. This does technically satisfy the letter of the oath, but it violates the spirit of it. In choosing this solution the leaders of Israel are acting like the Pharisees of later generations. They violate the greater concerns of the Law of God in a legalistic dodge of their oath. They seem completely unconcerned with the law forbidding kidnapping. They are also unconcerned about the impact on the families victimized by their decision, or on the women themselves. The families of Shiloh had done nothing to deserve this treatment by the rest of Israel. They were simply a convenient solution. In their attempt to patch a hole in Israel caused by their own sin, the leaders of Israel have now torn another hole in the nation.

21:25 - "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

The entire book of Judges has been a record of one spiritual misadventure by Israel after another. We might hope that the book at least ends on a happier note with Israel heading in a healthier direction. However, the book ends with events as confusing and spiritually contradictory as any in this sad period of Israel's history. The book is a cautionary tale of what happens to a people (even those identified as God's holy nation) who reject the authority of the Lord over their lives and choose to live life on their own terms rather than His terms.

The familiar spiritual description is the final word to explain the events of this chapter and period of Israel's history. The Lord was Israel's true King, but His holy nation no longer looked to Him and treated Him as king. Without a right relationship to the Lord as King, the nation was left to find their own way as every man lived in the manner that seemed best to him. The results are obvious in the events of this book.