

Sodom and Gomorrah: Act II

Cycles of Sin . . . Stories of Grace – Part IX

Judges 19-21

Introduction

In our last discussion, we studied the impact of rebellion upon the religion of the nation Israel. In this session, as we finish the book of Judges, we will study the impact of rebellion upon the morals of the nation.

The moral results of rebellion are astounding! The last three chapters of Judges expose the ultimate destiny of any person, nation, or society that rejects the authority of God's word. We find:

- marital unfaithfulness;
- prostitution;
- homosexuality;
- rape;
- cruelty;
- murder;
- kidnapping;
- revenge;
- civil war.

Some might be thinking, "I'm so glad I've heard these two studies. We've studied the failure of the nation's religious standard, and the resulting false religious systems created, and now, we're going to study the immoral perversions of a nation that degenerates into homosexuality and murder. I can hardly wait."

Others might be thinking, "Why study passages like this at all – especially when we could be meditating on the book of Philipians?"

Let me assure you of a couple of things concerning our study of God's word.

- The passages that we study were predetermined several years ago, as God led us to begin a study through the entire Bible. The Bible ultimately, speaks about every issue of life – the good, the bad, and the ugly.
- The Old Testament scriptures are part of scripture that God declares to be profitable for the New Testament believer. Look at II Timothy 3:16-17.

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Some passages, like Judges 19, may be meant for nothing more than teaching afresh that the moral standards of any nation or people are not up for a vote.

The spirit of our age says that we only want to hear the positive things that Scripture has to say, and that the preacher must always be "merry and bright." Quick fix sermons abound today, that entertain and enlighten in superficial ways.

I must confess that a number of years ago, I found myself wondering, "What book of the Bible could I

teach that would be the most interesting and practical.” Then, II Timothy 3:16-17 drove me to the confession, “Lord, You said it is all profitable, so I will preach it all.”

However, in my heart, I was positive that the congregation would sleep through the book of Leviticus, snore through the book of Numbers, and faint in the book of Judges. I still have no idea what to do when we get to I Chronicles. I am hoping the rapture will occur before we get there!

Why God’s Revelation is Profitable

Now turn to the book of Hebrews where God gives three good, clear reasons to study the Old Testament. Let us look at these.

1. The Old Testament reveals, according to Hebrews 6:18, a God who never lies.

God is unchanging! Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, *For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

2. The Old Testament records, according to Hebrews 3:12-19, the story of Israel for the sake of warning the believer from a life of unbelief and sin.
3. The Old Testament relives, according to Hebrews 11:32, the lives of believers to encourage our walk.

I love the way the writer of Hebrews summarizes this chapter, chapter 11, that relives the biographical statements of all the believers. It is as if he throws his hands in the air and says, in verse 32,

And what more shall I say? For the time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah . . .

These are all in the book of Judges – and he says that time would run out!

Then, in Hebrews 12, he says of the testimony of these people in the Old Testament scripture,

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Are you a salesman; a housewife; a lawyer, a mechanic? Are you single; married; a mother; a father? Has it ever occurred to you that this is the race God has set before you, and the Old Testament is designed to give you encouragement and strength to run this race with endurance? Do not give up.

Who are we to say that we will skip it? God has recorded the lives of these witnesses to challenge, convict, and motivate us.

Many times, the Old Testament simply reveals the darkness of human hearts. This is the point of Judges – we see the depravity of human hearts, and the depths to which any nation will sink after denying God’s authority.

Before our very eyes today, we will watch Israel nearly self-destruct. However, if we learn our lessons well, we need never experience the devastation.

The Horror of Sexual Immorality

Our story opens with a man chasing after his wayward wife. Look at Judges 19:1-2.

Now it came about in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, who took a concubine for himself from Bethlehem in Judah. But his concubine played the harlot against him, and she went away from him to her father’s house in Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for a period of four months.

The text will indicate later, that the man had actually married this woman, adding her as he would add a piece of real estate to his personal collection.

If you continued to read, you would notice that women in Israel had become nothing more than property. In these chapters women will be kidnapped, abused, and raped.

When a society abandons God’s authority, women become pieces of property; objects; things. In a home in which the man rejects God’s control, the wife will automatically become a doormat; a servant; a housekeeper. One in which God is honored, a woman will be given dignity, honor, protection, and a right to an opinion.

Continue to Judges 19:3. This blockhead husband seems to be waking up.

Then her husband arose and went after her to speak tenderly to her in order to bring her

back, taking with him his servant and a pair of donkeys. So she brought him into her father's house, and when the girl's father saw him, he was glad to meet him.

We do not read anywhere in the text of their deep conflict being resolved. She has been unfaithful to him, but it seems the Levite puts on his game face for the relatives. At the same time, however, bitterness grows. I believe this explains to some extent, the callousness that we will see.

This couple stays at the relative's home for five and a half days, even though the Levite tries to leave several times. His wife has accepted her husband's sweet talk – along with the flowers and chocolate candy – and they finally leave.

Skip to Judges 19:14-15.

So they passed along and went their way, and the sun set on them near Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. They turned aside there in order to enter and lodge in Gibeah. When they entered, they sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night.

Understand that hospitality was considered a sacred duty in the ancient Near East. Residents of towns or villages were expected to entertain travelers in their homes.

However, no one would take them in! It grew dark and finally, an old farmer returning from his fields sees them and invites them to his humble abode for dinner, conversation, and overall good hospitality.

This is about to be rudely interrupted. Look at Judges 19:22-28.

While they were celebrating, behold, the men of the city, certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the door; and they spoke to the owner of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations with him."

Then the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my fellows, please do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not commit this act of folly.

"Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Please let me bring them out that you may ravish them and do to them

whatever you wish. But do not commit such an act of folly against this man."

But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and brought [forced] her out to them; and they raped her and abused her all night until morning, then let her go at the approach of dawn.

As the day began to dawn, the woman came and fell down at the doorway of the man's house where her master was, until full daylight.

When her master arose in the morning and opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, then behold, his concubine was lying at the doorway of the house with her hands on the threshold.

He said to her, "Get up and let us go," but there was no answer. Then he placed her on the donkey; and the man arose and went to his home.

Now you know why this passage is not on the list of the ten best loved passages to preach to Sunday morning crowds. It is tragic; it is crude; it is inhuman. We do not know whether to scream or weep. This passage reveals the violence of sexual perversion.

We read that the men were "pounding the door," or literally, were "hurling themselves at the door". This scene mirrors the events of Genesis 19 that took place in Sodom, except that there were angels who rescued Lot from the homosexuals.

However, in the story of Sodom, the homosexuals were Gentile idol worshipers. Sodom and Gomorrah were admittedly anti-God. In Judges, the sexual deviants are Hebrew men – they are circumcised sons of Abraham.

In the same way in our nation, in yesteryear practicing homosexuals were outside the walls of the church. Today, their lifestyle is condoned, they are ordained, their unions are blessed, and when the rest of the church cries, "Wrong," they are considered to be narrow-minded; bigoted.

Seven steps to self-destruction

God has not stammered in His declaration. Israel, and America, is clearly seen in Romans 1:21. This passage gives us seven steps to self-destruction.

Turn to Romans 1:21 and notice that these people “knew God”; that is, they literally, “knew about God”.

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Let us look at the steps to destruction in this verse.

1. They refuse to glorify God; that is, to give Him His rightful place.
2. They refuse to thank God; as if to say, “Nothing ever came from Him anyway!”
3. They refuse to acknowledge God; their speculations ignore Him.

Because of these three steps, the next four steps are actually consequences.

4. They become self-proclaimed experts; as we read in the next verse (Romans 1:22), “[They were] professing to be wise”.
5. They lose the ability to discern truth, in their foolish hearts that were darkened, which literally means, “without insight”.

I watched the recent interviews in Los Angeles, after the rioting. Reporters asked the people, “How can we stop this from happening again?”

The common answer was, “We need better education . . . more jobs . . . more money.”

No one said, “We were wrong.”

Our nation is confused as to solutions. The solution for venereal disease is sex education and free protection and clean needles.

Do the people of Israel, or America, recognize the futility of their own wisdom?

No. Look at Romans 1:22, in fact.

Professing to be wise, they became fools,

They are strutting around, ignoring God’s revelation that deals with sin – not symptoms – but while they are spreading their feathers, according to God’s word, they become “fools,” or translated in the Greek, “morons”!

6. They create their own system of religion, which leaves the Creator out.

Look at Romans 1:23.

And exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible

man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

7. They are delivered up by God.

What does God do? He, in effect, steps aside and lets the idolater self destruct!

What are the symptoms that they are caught in the quicksand of immorality?

- They become obsessed with sexual immorality (Romans 1:24);
- They become obsessed with unnatural immorality (Romans 1:26-27).

Romans 1:26-27 talks about women and men exchanging the natural function for the unnatural. Who said it is unnatural? Us? No. God!

In fact, the key word “function” is the Greek word “schematic,” from which we get our word “scheme”. This is God’s scheme – men and women, not men and men or women and women.

The events happening in Israel, and in this country, are spelled out in Romans 1. The prophet Isaiah, under inspiration from God, says,

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! . . . Woe to those who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the rights of the ones who are in the right! (Isaiah 5:20, 23)

One million words from our self-proclaimed experts cannot overpower one word from God – God has spoken.

Let us look back at Judges 19:29. The Levite takes his murdered wife home.

When he entered his house, he took a knife and laid hold of his concubine and cut her in twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout the territory of Israel.

The Hebrew word “cut” refers to ritualistic dissection. Twelve messengers went to the twelve tribes, saying, “Look at what has happened.”

Continue to Judges 19:30.

All who saw it said, “Nothing like this has ever happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up!”

This really worked. It shocked the nation awake!

The Foolishness of Human Solutions

However, two problems arise as a result of Israel being awakened to this sin. Let me give them to you.

1. The first problem is that the tribe of Benjamin defends the immoral offenders.

Look at Judges 20:12-13.

Then the tribes of Israel sent men through the entire tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What is this wickedness that has taken place among you?" Now then, deliver up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove this wickedness from Israel.

We should not be shocked at the way the tribe of Benjamin responds in Judges 20:14.

The sons of Benjamin gathered from the cities to Gibeah, to go out to battle against the sons of Israel.

When someone is convicted of guilt and will not allow God's authority to invade their life, two results come naturally. Let us look at these briefly.

- The guilty one will shift the blame.

This is what Adam and Eve did. Adam told the Lord that it was Eve who was to blame. Eve told the Lord that the serpent was to blame.

Listen to the words of one man, who said, "I have spent the best years of my life giving people pleasures and all I get is abuse and the existence of a hunted man."

Who is this poor, persecuted humanitarian who said these words?

The cold-blooded gangster, Al Capone.

When this does not work, there is a second possibility to try.

- The guilty one will avoid the consequences.

This is the reason a political figure can be caught on video tape using drugs, and when he is exposed, he hollers, "Entrapment!"

In other words, he is saying, "You're wrong, not me."

When that does not work, he says, "No one was hurt."

The bottom line is, "Don't make me pay for my crime!"

2. The second problem, in addition to the Benjamites defending the immoral defenders, is that the nation does not respond correctly.

The nation makes three foolish vows. These include:

- no one will go home until Gibeah is attacked and destroyed;
- anyone who does not join us will be killed;
- we will exterminate the entire tribe of Benjamin.

So the war begins. Notice Judges 20:15-16.

From the cities on that day the sons of Benjamin were numbered, 26,000 men who draw the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah who were numbered, 700 choice men. Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.

Left-handed people are usually right on target. Sorry, I could not resist saying that, since I am left-handed. Continue to Judges 20:17.

Then the men of Israel besides Benjamin were numbered, 400,000 men who draw the sword; all these were men of war.

Understand this picture – 400,000 is about the size of the Iraqi troops during the Gulf War. Now, take less than half the population of our small town to go fight Iraq. These odds are not very good.

Israel is going to lose the first two attacks. Why? Because they do not go to God and ask permission, they just go to God ask who is to go first. Look at Judges 20:18.

Now the sons of Israel arose, went up to Bethel, and inquired of God and said, "Who shall go up first for us to battle against the sons of Benjamin?" Then the Lord said, "Judah shall go up first."

These words, "Judah shall go up first" are the most tragic words. Look back at Judges 1:1-2a.

Now it came about after the death of Joshua that the sons of Israel inquired of the Lord, saying, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" The Lord said, "Judah shall go up . . ."

Do you see the tragic implications? Do you see the consequences of disobedience? This is the result of every man doing that which is right in his own eyes!

The Israelites began by conquering the Gentile idolaters and God said, "Judah shall go up first." Now they are fighting against themselves because of sin.

For the sake of time, let me say that the rest of Judges chapter 20 catalogues the civil war with the tribes of Israel. This war nearly wiped out the entire tribe of Benjamin.

Now look at Judges 20:48-21:3

The men of Israel then turned back against the sons of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, both the entire city with the cattle and all that they found; they also set on fire all the cities which they found.

Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, "None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage."

So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly.

They said, "Why, O Lord, God of Israel, has this come about in Israel, so that one tribe should be missing today in Israel."

In typical fashion, the Israelites blame God. The Hebrew mind is unable to link action with consequence.

Dr. Wayne Dyer, in one of his recent books, told the somewhat humorous story about a speaker who was assigned the difficult task of speaking to a large group of alcoholics. He was trying to demonstrate to them their danger.

On a table, this speaker placed two identical containers filled with a clear fluid. One contained water; the other, pure alcohol. The speaker placed a worm into the jar of water. The worm swam around and then, headed for the side of the glass. Scooping the worm out of the water, the speaker placed it in the other container. The worm convulsed and died before it even reached the bottom of the container.

"There," said the speaker, "you have seen what happened to that worm. What does this simple illustration teach you?"

A voice from the back of the room said, "If you drink alcohol, you won't have worms."

In the same way, the Israelites, because their hearts and eyes were turned away from truly following Yahweh, were unable to discern cause and effect.

They now even make matters worse. The other tribes of Israel had made a vow that the tribe of Benjamin would be wiped out – now, they were sorry for that vow. Six hundred Benjamite men were all that was left of this tribe – and they needed wives to bear children and carry on the tribal name.

Two-fold plan to save the Benjamite tribe

Did the Benjamites go to God for advice and counsel? No, they conceived their own plan. It is brilliant – tragically brilliant. Let me give the two steps of their plan to save the Benjamite men.

1. Step one is in Judges 21:10-12.

And the congregation sent 12,000 of the valiant warriors there, and commanded them, saying, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the little ones. This is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every man and every woman who has lain with a man." 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.

So step one is to kill everyone except the teenage girls. The Benjamites will kill the girl's fathers, mothers, little sisters and brothers! The girls then, will have no one to take care of them and nowhere to live. They will have no choice but to become the property of a Benjamite man!

The plan is carried out. Now only two hundred Benjamite men are still single.

2. Step two is in Judges 21:23.

The sons of Benjamin did so, and took wives according to their number from those who danced, whom they carried away. And they went and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the cities and lived in them.

So step two is to kidnap the girls who danced at the annual festival of Lebonah, near Bethel. The

Benjamites will kidnap two hundred of the single girls who danced at the festival.

The Benjamites bring great tragedy into the lives of many people; they split homes; they slaughter innocent Hebrews.

What does God, who is supposed to be the King of the Israelites, have to say about all of this? Look at Judges 21:25.

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Application

Let me summarize our fourteen studies in the book of Judges in three sentences.

1. When God's Word is rejected, the depravity in a person's heart is unbelievable.
2. When God's authority is denied, the destruction of a person's life is inevitable.
3. When God's Word is received, the difference in a person's life is wonderful.

Look at I Corinthians 6:9-10.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

Now look at the next phrase in I Corinthians 6:11a.

Such were some of you . . .

The church in Corinth was filled with people like you and me. They were capable of doing anything; of committing any sin, but they were washed by the blood of Jesus Christ and brought into the family of God – forgiven.

As II Corinthians 5:17 says,

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Let me tell a story. A lady who lives in another city and attends another Bible believing church, came into my office. I had never met her before. She was involved in an immoral affair. She came to see me to try to find a way around a passage of scripture in I Corinthians 7; to find a loophole to make what she was doing seem right. We talked for about thirty minutes, until she finally realized that God did not allow any loopholes in that chapter. Then, we began talking about her own relationship with God. She sat and listened with wide open ears to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We came to the end of the plan that I was presenting to her – the way Jesus Christ could forgive her, an adulterer, and make her clean and white – and I said, “You have to make a choice between Jesus Christ and the relationship you are involved in.”

This middle-aged woman put her face in her hands, as after a couple of hours, it all hit home, and began to weep. I prayed. Finally, she pulled her hands away and said, “I choose Jesus Christ.”

We prayed right then, and this woman received Jesus Christ as her Savior.

What happened to her sin? What happens to your sin when the blood of Christ is applied? It is washed away.

You and I are living in potentially the most exciting time in the history of mankind. There is no greater time to be light and salt. I cursed the darkness today, through the study of this text in Judges. However, God has told us the way to handle it; what to do. We are to shine. Why? Because we have the answers and we can take to people, the message of Christ that liberates, that forgives, that cleanses.

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