

# There was no king in Israel ...

Judges 17-21

In the story of Samson, the sad truth finally became clear. The Israelites don't want to be rescued from their oppressors. They are happy to merge with their pagan neighbours and settle down to a life of Baal and Asherah worship. Even the Judges, who were supposed to be God's chosen deliverers, can't break free from this attitude. In these last few chapters, we'll see the chaotic mess into which Israel has descended.

## Background Briefing

Have a look at Deuteronomy 12:1-9. What are the features of worship the way God wanted it done?

## Read Judges 17

1. What kind of a character is Micah?
2. What is so ironic about v 3?
3. What motivates the priest to stay with Micah?
4. How would God feel about the whole situation?
5. What do you think of Micah's confidence in v 13?

This passage paints a bizarre picture. A thief making his own private shrine. An idol being made to worship God. A priest hiring 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, 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

10. What kind of a host is the Levite's father in law? What proves so tragically ironic about his 'hospitality'?
11. What decision does the Levite make in v 11-12? Should it have been a wise decision?
12. What kind of a host is the old Ephraimite?
14. How do you feel about his offer in v 22-24?
15. The poor concubine suffers a terrible fate at the hands of the Gibeaites. What do you think about the response of the Levite? (More literally v 25 says So the man seized his concubine and brought *her* out to them)
16. When does the poor concubine actually die?

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. On top of the terrible rape of the concubine there is a dark irony in which the supposed hospitality of the Father in Law and the old Ephraimite actually contributes to the outrageous treatment of the concubine. In the end there are serious questions 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? And what actually causes the concubine's death?

## Read Judges 20:1-11

17. In v 1, How do the Israelites react to the Levite's grisly parcels? How does this compare with their response to the judges?
18. A more literal version of v 4-5 is as follows

4 So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "I came with my concubine to spend the night at Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. 5 "But the noble men of Gibeah rose up against me and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me; instead, they ravished my concubine so that she died.

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

Levites account (20:4-5)	What actually happened (19:22-29)
The noble men of Gibeah rose up against me	
They intended to kill me	
instead they ravished my concubine so that she died	

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

20 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 bring 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 21:25

21. How many times is this phrase repeated in Judges 17-21

22. How does this phrase sum up the these last 4 chapters of Judges

23. 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.

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

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

26. Is there a king in your life?