

JUDGES 19-21

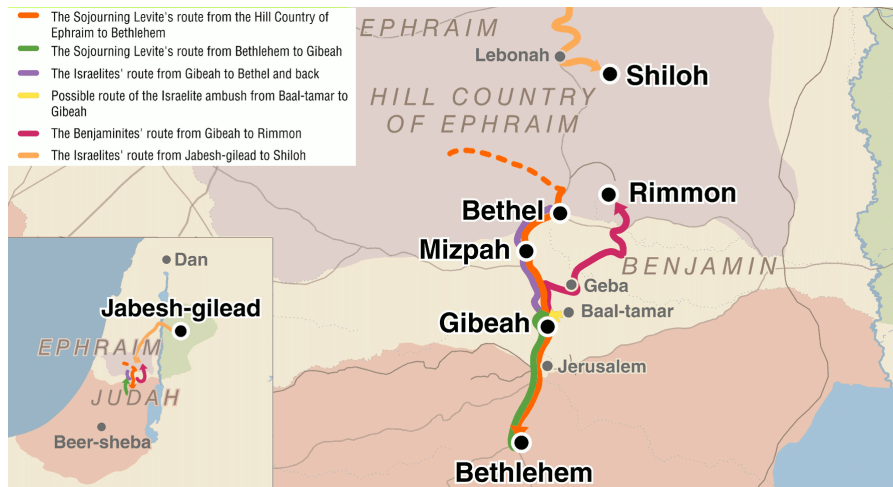
WELCOME TO THE NEW SODOM

Sometimes professing Christians can be so unconsciously influenced by their society that someone looking on can't tell the difference between Christian and non-Christian. As we reach the very end of Judges, we see a similar thing has happened to Israel...



CONTAINS
GRAPHIC SCENES
& SEXUAL ABUSE

Last week we met an unnamed Levite going from Bethlehem to Ephraim. Here we meet another unnamed Levite going exactly the opposite route (see map). **Read Judges 19:1-20:7.** But be warned: the crimes depicted here are even worse than we've seen in Judges so far.



1. Compare the father-in-law's hospitality with the 'hospitality' of the men of Gibeah. What extra dimension does that add to the crime in Gibeah?

2. The Levite stays in the Israelite city of Gibeah, not Jerusalem, because at this stage Jerusalem is Canaanite and therefore unsafe. But read **Genesis 19:1-8** for a description of Sodom, famous as the worst ever Canaanite city. What similarities do you notice in Gibeah? What does that say about the condition of Israel in this final stage of Judges?

3. How is the concubine treated...

a. by the men of Gibeah?

b. by her husband/master, the Levite? (see **sidebar over page**)

4. Compare the Levite's re-telling in 20:4-5 with what actually happened in 19:22-28. What's different? What does this tell us about the Levite?

GENESIS 19

¹ The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city...² "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house... "No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square."³ But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him...⁴ Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house.⁵ They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."⁶ Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him⁷ and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing.⁸ Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof."

Comment: Lot regards his duty of care for his visitors so highly that he even offers his own daughters in their place. That might seem to put his daughters at risk. But by offering young women, whom most men would find far more desirable than other men, Lot exposes that the mob does not really desire sex as they claim; instead they want to shame these visitors, the exact opposite of the duty Lot himself upholds. Lot thereby attempts to shame the mob themselves.

NO HALF MEASURES

Read Israel's response in Judges 20:8-29 and (skipping some battle details for now) the result in **20:46-21:4**.

CONCUBINE

A “concubine” was a female servant designated for sex and children. So they took on some very limited aspects of being a “wife”. That’s why the Levite is called “her husband” (19:3) but then also “her master” (19:26,27). Of course, God designed men and women to become husband and wife in intimate partnership (Genesis 2:18-25, Ephesians 5:21-33), not master and concubine.

5. Judges began with these words:

The Israelites asked the LORD, “Who of us is to go up first to fight against the Canaanites?” The LORD answered, “Judah shall go up.”

Compare that beginning with 20:18. What’s changed? What does that say about the condition of Israel?

6. From the start of Judges, Israel’s campaign against the Canaanites has been characterised by disunity, giving up at the first sign of difficulty, and only going half way in purging evil from the land. What’s different in this campaign against one of their own tribes? Is this a good thing, a bad thing, or both?

Israel never committed to removing the Canaanites around them. That’s why they kept on adopting Canaanite idols and culture. The irony is, Israel only gets serious about purging evil from the land, banding together, overcoming setbacks, not intermarrying... when the enemy is one of their own tribes! If they’d done that against the Canaanites like they were meant to, Gibeah would never have become New Sodom in the first place!

At least Israel are now doing their best to enact justice after a horrific rape and murder. But are they making things better... or worse? **Read Judges 21:5-25**.

7. List the different things Israel does to try and address problems here. How much are they really fixing things? How much are they actually multiplying atrocities similar to the ones they’re meant to be fixing?

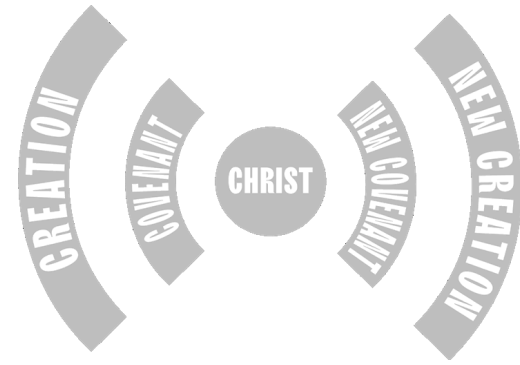
LIVING GOD'S STORY

Last week we saw normal Israelites shaping their own image of God and therefore “doing what is right in their own eyes”. It wasn’t a failure of leadership, as earlier in Judges, but of the human heart. This final week, there’s much more “doing what is right in their own eyes.” Most strikingly, Israel’s idea of what’s “right”, when it isn’t shaped by the true God, is radically shaped by the Canaanite culture around them. And that idea of “right” only seems to bring more and more wrong!

Thankfully, we aren’t stuck in the Covenant episode of God’s story. Thanks to Christ and the New Covenant, we aren’t doomed to repeat Israel’s mistakes. But Judges warns us: when we aren’t committed to being shaped by Jesus and his Spirit, we will easily go the same way as Israel...

8. Think about how our own culture might be affecting us like Canaanite culture affected Israel. Are there ways our culture might encourage us to:
 - a. Treat women like objects? (e.g. porn)
 - b. Edit the truth to present ourselves in the best possible light? (e.g. social media profile)
 - c. Punish a whole group for what a few have done? (e.g. muslims for terrorism)
 - d. Feel like we’re putting things right even if we’re making things worse? (e.g. social media shaming/virtue-signalling)
9. Of course, these were just some of the ways Israel took on Canaanite culture. And of course Australian culture is very different again. Over the series, have you come to realise you’re putting something above God himself? How so?
10. Though our hearts are being renewed by the Spirit, we simply won’t be able to put everything right in this broken world. Like Israel, some of our attempts will even make things worse! How can it help to remember that the **New Creation** is coming?

We’ve finished the book of Judges! But of course our surrounding culture will still continue to influence us for the rest of our lives. So let’s pray. For the things God has shown you about yourself through this series. That you wouldn’t be shaped by your culture, like Israel was with the Canaanites. That you’d be shaped instead by Jesus and his Spirit. That you wouldn’t value most whatever others value most. That you’d cherish Christ above all. That the change which Christ makes in you would actually influence others to want to know Christ too. And let’s keep praying!



REVELATION 21

¹ Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”