
Day 84 - March 25

Conquering a Land (1400 – 1100 BCE)

Civil War with Benjamin

Period of Judges Summarized

Readings: *Judges 19:1-21:25*

Reflections:

- This story begins again with the key line, “In those days Israel had no king.” This is important because it is setting up what will become a major turning point in the story of “what doesn’t work.” Rather than looking to God as their king, they start to live like they have no king and then in turn, start to cry out for a human king. They look for a human leader to save them rather than looking to God.
- A Levite takes a concubine but she leaves him to return to his father's house. He finally comes to his father's house and the text makes it clear that the father likes to party. Eating, drinking and sleeping is all he likes to do. So the Levite buys into just sitting around drinking all day. He finally heads out and decides not to stop at a non-Israelite city but to make his way to Gibeah. They arrive but no one in the city offers them hospitality. This is the first sign that this place is not an honorable city. An old man from out in the country finally welcomes them to his house. He is obviously more honorable because he takes care of them and washes their feet.
- But the old man is only partly honorable. The wicked men of Benjamin come and try to take the visiting man to have sex with him. The old man offers his daughter and the concubine but the Levite (a priest of God) offers up his concubine. This is completely sick and twisted. So the concubine is raped all night long and finally drags herself back to the house and dies on the doorstep.
- The Levite takes her body, cuts it to pieces and sends it out to Israel as a sign of how terrible things have become. Now, let's not assume here that this is now a return to holy conviction before God. Sin starts to mount upon sin. Israel is outraged and comes to wipe out one of their tribes with ruthless vengeance. The Levite was the one that had been dishonorable as well but he projects it all on the wicked men of Benjamin.
- Israel supposedly consults God but you know something is wrong because they are defeated. It begs the question why? Remember the idolatry within the Levite clan. Could

Israel be consulting priests who are giving out orders that ultimately do not reflect the actual will of God? It is not stated clearly but it is also not a far leap of logic to question these supposed "directions from God."

- Finally on the third attempt they set an ambush and are able to kill the Benjamin army. Notice that the vows they take and their vengeance against the innocent of the tribe of Benjamin goes way beyond anything that could be viewed as God honoring. This is sin mounting upon sin. The reader's heart is meant to be grieved, shocked and outraged at how terrible everything has become. They get to Gibeah and execute mercilessly the whole city. Only six hundred men escape and the rest of the whole tribe is exterminated, even their animals and children.
- When Israel comes to her senses, she realizes they have gone too far. Now they grieve what they have done and worship God. This again is not a sign that they have truly repented and understand God's heart. It simply shows how they can tell the difference between what honors God and what doesn't.
- They have all taken a rash vow in their anger just as Jephthah did. They won't let their daughters marry the remaining few men of Benjamin. So what do they do? They realize that no one from one of the smaller cities had come to help them exterminate the tribe of Benjamin. So they now turn their swords once again against their own people. They exterminate the whole city again except the virgins. So some of the men now have wives but there is still not enough. Well, the complete stupidity and evil continues. They decide to tell the men to go steal some of the young women from Shiloh because their vow of not offering their daughters restricts them from doing it honorably. So instead, if they steal them, then they won't be breaking their rash oath. Can you see how clearly this has come to the place of complete insanity, complete evil, complete depravity? The Law and the Priesthood has completely failed to change the hearts of Israel.
- Instead of turning to God to repent and seek him, they will now try to become like the nations around them. They now want a king to rule over them and keep them in line.
- Judges ends with the key statement we have heard many times already: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." Sound familiar? Everyone was "deciding for themselves what was right and wrong." Israel was again choosing a path of selfish independence from God rather than humble submission. A sad and pathetic account of how bad the human heart can get, even if you have received directly from God a religion for you to follow with laws, priests and the offer of forgiveness.