

JUDGES SESSION #27

We have now come to our final session in this study of the Book of Judges. The last 7 sessions focused on the Epilogue to the Book which recorded 4 unusual stories in two sets:

- **appendix #1** (Micah, his idols and the first Levite) showed us that the **religious life** of God's people was not what it should have been – it was, as Michael Wilcock put it, simply “a ludicrous veneer of **rightness**”
- **appendix #2** (the second Levite & all the horrific ramifications of that story) showed us that the **moral life** of God's people was not what it should have been
 - “under the surface, it was a shambles of **wrongness**”
- the epilogue with its 2-part appendix starts with “there was no king in Israel” (19:1) and ends with the same significant phrase, “there was no king in Israel” (21:25)
 - even the famous atheist Jean Paul Sartre once admitted, “Finite man is meaningless without an infinite reference point.”
 - ...God alone, as our King, can provide that crucial infinite reference point

Now let's summarize some of the important things we have learned from all the sad stories of Israel's Dark Ages:

Principles from Israel's National Decline

Gary Inrig suggests **five main principles** which are worth sharing:

1. The **basis of moral behavior** is of critical importance

- if that basis is not the standards of our Creator God, as revealed in the Bible, then we end up doing “what is right in our own eyes”
- Judges shows us the downward spiral of a society that **rejects God as king**
- one of the frightening aspects of Israel's story is that they **presumed** God was still with them – Israel after all was Jehovah's “covenant people” and they seemed to have the idea that it didn't much matter what they did because they had **God on their side**
- during a critical period in his presidency, Abraham **Lincoln** was asked if God was on his side. His response is worth remembering:

“The key issue is not whether *God* is on my side but whether ***I am on God's side.***”

...it's the key issue Israel should have faced because in fact their sins had **alienated** them from God

- a good example of this contrast is seen in the **final 2 verses** of the book:

- vs. 24 shows the *apparent* situation – “all **seems** well”:

24 So the children of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family; they went out from there, every man to his inheritance.

- but vs. 25 shows the **real** situation – “all is **not** well at all”

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

- the mass murderer **Abimelech** provided a strong negative picture for us of how a **wrong belief system** produces **immoral destructive action** – the ‘bramble bush’ Abimelech burned up those around him and self-destructed in the process
- even the ‘strong man’ **Samson**, who had so much potential, spiraled down into personal disaster because his morality was not based on God’s Word but was shaped by the ungodly world around him
- and no matter how ‘strong’ or mature we may think we are as Christians, we dare not allow society’s drifting (& deteriorating) standards to become the basis for our own personal morality – that’s a recipe for disaster
 - God’s Word, reflecting God’s character, is our only reliable basis for judging what is right or wrong and guiding our personal behavior
- here are 3 great **truths** we can live by: [again, from Inrig]
 - * our God is a **holy** God who has **absolute standards** of right and wrong. He is also our Father who loves His children and wants the very best for us.
 - * God has **revealed** Himself in the **Lord Jesus**. Apart from Him, we cannot know eternal life or life now. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and nothing makes sense apart from Him.
 - * God has **spoken** in His **Word**. Scripture is absolutely and unconditionally reliable, and as we order our lives by it, we will be completely equipped for every good work.

A second summary principle is that...

2. **Ethical relativism** is degrading and dehumanizing

- the nightmare narrative at Gibeah (in chap. 19) provided a grim commentary on how badly people can be treated when a community’s ethics are detached from the absolute standards of God
- it is still true – modern morality, with its talk about ‘freedom’ and the liberating right to ‘do your own thing’ will not lift societies to a higher way of life where people are treated with greater dignity – it will produce the opposite, as ethical relativism always does

The third principle is that...

3. In times of **moral fog** a **personal dynamic faith** in the Lord Jesus is essential.

- we saw in earlier sessions how God used the faith of people like Deborah, Barak & Gideon to deliver his people from oppression
 - these judges were able to provide positive leadership and clear direction in **foggy** times because they were looking to God
- I’m reminded of the world’s worst aviation disaster which occurred on March 27, 1977, on the ground (!) at an obscure airport in the Canary Islands
 - it was very foggy, the airport was busy with jumbo jets of tourists coming & going
 - an American 747 had just landed and was taxiing off the main runway; a Dutch 747 was waiting to take off; neither pilot could see the other plane because of the thick fog
 - the Dutch captain, who was KLM’s chief pilot, one of world’s best commercial pilots, started his take-off without clearance from the control tower; he thought he was doing the right thing, but he was tragically wrong and his huge airliner crashed into the PanAm killing 530 passengers

- in that fog, only the control tower knew where the aircraft were and when it was safe to use that runway
 - but one pilot thought he knew better – he did what was right in his own eyes, and the result was a horrible disaster
- in our modern societies we live in the midst of an increasing **moral fog**, where standards are changing all the time and people are groping for clarity – in such times we must trust the ‘control tower’, we must **look to God** and trust his directions, not our own limited vision

4. We must not only **know God's answers**, we must **internalize His values**.

...it is possible to study the Bible, attend seminars, know the principles...but still live as if “there is no king in our lives” and “do what is right in our own eyes”!

- this failure to internalize God’s values was seen in our third session when we looked at the **Second Generation Syndrome**

- they were **satisfied with the status quo** – content with life as it was even though they had not yet fulfilled all God had commanded them
- they took God’s **blessings for granted**
- and they **neglected God’s Word** and failed to pass it on to their children
 - ...because they had not internalized God’s values they could not live out His life

Before the colonialists imposed national boundaries, the kings of Laos and Vietnam reached an agreement on taxation in the border areas. Those who ate short-grain rice, built their houses on stilts, and decorated them with Indian-style serpents were considered Laotians. On the other hand, those who ate **long**-grain rice, built their houses on the **ground**, and decorated them with **Chinese**-style dragons were considered Vietnamese.

The exact location of a person's home was not what determined his or her nationality. Instead, *each person belonged to the kingdom whose **cultural values** he or she **exhibited**.*

- it doesn’t matter where we live in the world; nor does it really matter which church we may be found in on a Sunday
 - these ‘locations’ do not determine our kingdom identity
 - it is the **values** we exhibit which will show whether we belong to God’s kingdom or the kingdom of this world
 - ...whether our final destiny will involve being ‘caught up’ to heaven to meet the Heavenly Bridegroom, or being ‘sucked down’ to eternal doom

- twice in Matthew 7 Jesus said, “by their **fruit** you will recognize them.”

- then he went on to say (in Peterson’s *The Message* version):

“Knowing the correct password—saying ‘Master, Master,’ for instance—isn’t going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is **serious obedience**—*doing* what my Father wills. I can see it now—at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me and saying, ‘Master, we preached the Message, we bashed the demons, our God-sponsored projects had everyone talking.’ And do you know what I am going to say? ‘You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don’t impress me one bit. You’re out of here.’”

- perhaps David Jackman summarized Judges most succinctly when he said that the entire story of Judges “chronicles the **downward spiral** of a society that rejects God as king.”
...in any society where “anything goes”, in the end *everything* goes

Thanks for joining me on this journey through the Book of Judges. It was oftentimes a tough trip as we saw not only people who **SERVED GOD** with amazing faith, but people who **SUCCUMBED** to the wave of sin within their culture, with tragic failure as a result. There were lots of warnings for us here. However, I trust that you have also been encouraged as we saw over and over that our ever-present **SOVEREIGN, PHENOMENAL GOD** cares for His people even in the midst of heart-breaking apostasy.