



“Rock Bottom”  
Judges 19-21

**Idea:** The quality of one’s lifestyle says a lot about the person.

**Intro:** Read Judges 21:25.

I think we can all agree that the morality of our nation is continuing to decline. What was once considered taboo is now not only accepted; it is embraced and promoted. The spirit of Judges 21:25 has its teeth firmly seated in our culture, but it is not just in the culture of America. It has a firm grip on the culture of the church too. We are seeing an ever-increasing moral decline within the church as Christians divorce at nearly the same rate as the rest of the population, abuse drugs and alcohol, engage in sexually immoral activities, and shift in their acceptance of the LGBT lifestyle. Churches continue to fight, split, push aside biblical truth for political correctness, and move the boundary of what is right and wrong.

“*Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*” It scarcely needs to be pointed out how well that quotation describes the

world of today, or how sharp a lesson the book of Judges may have for the individualism and the anti-authoritarianism of our own society.

“Morality, like art, consists in drawing the line somewhere.”  
– G. K. Chesterton

As the people of God, we must always draw the line where God draws the line...no more and no less.

**Inquiry:** The book of Judges reveals to us how easy God’s people are influenced by the world. Israel was God’s special and chosen people. They were the descendants of Abraham through whom the nations would be blessed. They were to be a light to the world. They were to be the ones through whom the truth of the gospel would be proclaimed. They should have been the influencers, but instead they were the ones who were influenced. The theme of Judges is the Canaanization of Israel. Rather than being and doing what God had set forth, they chose to do what they wanted. They in essence said, “I’ll have it my way.” They rejected God and chose to not worship Him exclusively. Instead, they embraced Baal and worshiped the Canaanite gods right alongside of Yahweh.

Israel did not abandon every aspect of Yahweh worship. They continued using the forms of worship that Moses had instituted. The problem was their worship had form but no substance, and they quickly syncretized them with the forms and substance of worship from the neighboring nations. The general summation of Israel’s growing apostasy is increasingly described as one reads through Judges. Therefore, as we come to the final chapters, it should not surprise us to find a religious and morally empty people. This is a people who have become numb to the promptings and voice of God.

Chapters 17-18 portray the religious decline of Israel. Chapters 19-21 depict the moral decay of Israel. Which one is more important, religion or morality? If the typical Jew during the time of the Judges were asked that question, he would have

quickly responded with religion. The fact is you learn more about whether a man is really right with God from the quality of his life than from the style of his religion.

What we find in these final chapters is a people who have the form of godliness but have denied the power (2 Tim 3:5). The narrative is told as one complete story. Chronologically, it would not have come at the end of the history of the Judges, but, narratively, it is the proper ending. The author's purpose has been to describe for us the Canaanization of Israel. They began this journey as the people who in response to Joshua's challenge to serve the Lord without wavering (Joshua 24:15) pledged their complete and utter devotion to Yahweh (Joshua 24:18).

In these final chapters the rules of holy living (which is true worship) are broken wholesale. Each chapter tells us how a particular set of rules was discarded, and how each abandonment led to another. All is connected. The pulling of the first loose end results in the unraveling of the whole. We could think of the three chapters as three scenes, but they are really a continuous drama more like a one-act play in three sections. The curtain rises in 19:1 and falls in 21:25 with the motto of Judges: *"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* The drama is all about rules, because only a right attitude to the rules of weekday morality gives any meaning to one's attitude to the rules of Sunday religion.

Chapter 19 begins with a Levite living in the remote hill country of Ephraim. He had a concubine from Bethlehem. They had a fight one day, which led to the lady leaving the man and going back to her daddy's house. The ESV translates it as *"was unfaithful to him."* We should not immediately speculate that she had been in an adulterous affair. If she had the Levite could have had her stoned. The term used can be translated, "became angry with." After four months the Levite went to speak kindly to her and bring her back. He wanted her back. He loved her.

The lady's father warmly welcomed the Levite in Judah. They ate and drank for three days. Then on the fourth day, as the Levite and his concubine were preparing to leave the father-in-law urged them to stay one more day. The same thing happened on the fifth day. Finally, on the afternoon of the fifth day, the Levite took his concubine and set out for home.

Their late start meant they would not make it far before dark. They stopped for the night in Gibeah, a small village in the land of Benjamin. They planned to stay the night in the square because no one took them in. An old man who was an Ephraimite took them into his home. As they were eating and drinking, the men of the city came to the old man's house demanding that the traveler be given to them. They planned to "know" the man that night. The host was horrified by the demand. He then offered his virgin daughter and the traveler's concubine to them (19:24), but they refused. At that point, the Levite shoved his concubine out the door and handed her to the men of the city. They abused her all night and left her for dead.

The next day, the man loaded the woman onto the donkey and carried her home. In Ephraim he dismembered her body and sent the parts to the twelve tribes of Israel (19:29). The tribes of Israel were rallied by this outrageous act. Four hundred thousand soldiers assembled to destroy the men of Gibeah. As they marched on Gibeah, all of Benjamin met them with 26,700 soldiers. After three days of fighting Benjamin was destroyed. Israel killed 25,100 Benjaminites.

Israel had also pledged to not give their daughters to any of the remaining Benjaminites. That pledge meant that the tribe would eventually cease to exist. Israel couldn't bear the thought of their brothers being eliminated, so they devised a way to provide wives for their brothers without breaking their vow. The men of Jabesh-gilead did not come to the battle as they were commanded, so Israel slaughtered them. The only ones they left alive were four hundred virgin daughters, which they took and gave to Benjamin (21:14). Then Israel permitted

the remaining Benjaminites without wives to go to Shiloh and kidnap two hundred virgins who came out to dance at a local festival (21:23).

We learn from this final story just how far Israel had fallen away from God. They had hit rock bottom spiritually and morally. What can we take away from this horrific tale? I believe there are four applications.

**1. We stand accountable to the King whenever we choose to walk away from truth.**

The recurrent reminder that “in those days there was no king” is no more than a statement of fact. It does not mean that godliness inevitably declined because there was no king, and that when King David did take the throne all would be well. The kings when they came would have the power (not necessarily the will) to check godliness. We know that the days of the monarchy spawned plenty of sins of their own. In the days of the Judges that power was largely in the hands of the people.

There might not have been a king or a godly judge to lead the people in righteousness and toward truth, but that was no excuse. The reality is that there was a King. His name was Jesus, and He sits on the throne ruling in majesty still today. Everyone will stand before the Kingly Judge one day and answer for his or her life. You will appear at one of two judgments. You will either stand before Jesus as a rebellious sinner and give an account for your rejection of Him or as a redeemed sinner and give an account for what you did as a follower of Christ.

We are all accountable to the King. We are all accountable for our acceptance and what we do with the Truth.

## **2. We are responsible, individually and corporately, for checking ungodliness and promoting holiness.**

*“Every one did what was right in his own eyes,”* means that the people themselves, individually and corporately, had the responsibility of checking ungodliness and promoting holiness. Through Moses God had told Israel what was expected and upon whom the standard was compared. He had instructed them that they were responsible for holding onto truth, extinguishing ungodliness, and promoting holiness.

Where did everyone’s eyes look to find authority?

During the time of the judges, they looked to themselves. They did what was right in their own eyes. Religiously, it might have seemed like they were dependent upon God, but practically they looked to themselves. They rewrote God standards to fit their own.

Appl: Today, we are responsible to check ungodliness and promote holiness in our personal lives, in our homes, and in our church. We do this not by looking to ourselves but to God and His Word. His Word is our only authority. We live by it and not by our passions.

## **3. We reject God when we reject Truth.**

As the time of the judges was about to begin, the reply of Israel to Joshua’s reiterated challenge at Shechem was: “We...will serve the Lord...we will serve the Lord...the Lord our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey” (Joshua 24:18, 21, 24). As the time ends, the Lord tells Samuel, the final judge, that a rejection of his rule is in fact a rejection of the Lord’s rule (1 Samuel 8:7). And in the middle of it Gideon reminds Israel that her real ruler is the Lord (Judges 8:23).

There is no doubt as to where the authority was to be found even in the absence of Moses, Joshua, David, and Solomon. The revealed will of God in the words He has given is there all the time, and may be read plainly by the clear-sighted and obedient. It would have been – and was, as we learn from the book of Ruth – perfectly possible to live as a true people of God in times of the judges. There easily could and should have been more than the skin-deep religion of chapters 17-18 and the subjectivism of chapters 19-21 in the life and practice of Israel.

The people of God rejected Truth, and by doing so, they rejected God. They followed the pattern of the pagans' idolatry outlined by Paul in Romans 1.

Read Romans 1:16-25.

Israel rejected the gospel to embrace the idol. They rejected the Creator and embraced the created. They rejected the power of the Truth and embraced the feebleness of the lie.

Jesus said of Himself, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life"* (John 14:6a). You can't have it both ways. You either embrace the truth or the lie. You either embrace Jesus or something else.

#### **4. We have a gracious God who is faithful even when we are not.**

The history of the judges is messy and ugly. As we read through the chapters, we see God's people increasingly walk away in defiance of His mercy and grace. We see God again and again sell the people of Israel into slavery and servitude, which they deserved. What we don't see is God giving up on His people. Israel was, more often than not, a faithless people, but God was always faithful to them.

It is here that we are reminded that God never leaves or forsakes His people (Deut 31:6, 8).

*For the Lord will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage... – Ps 94:14*

Two great gospel truths from the pen of the apostle Paul might sum up the final message of Judges, this book about a people to whom the Lord had bound himself by unbreakable promises, though they did their level best to free themselves from those bonds of love.

*...where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.*  
– Rom 5:20

*...if we are faithless, he remains faithful. – 2 Tim 2:13*

**Conclusion:** Have you seen yourself in the pages of Judges? Are you the religious one who practices empty religion? You think that God is appeased and satisfied because of your spiritual activity. You go through religious motions, but there has never been a spiritual transformation in your life. You may look good on the outside, but inside you are a rotten mess.

Are you the morally bankrupt one? There is an ever-increasing flirtation and embracement of immorality in your life. Today, you accept things that previously you would have avoided. Rather than growing in faithfulness; you're becoming less and less faithful to God's Word.

Maybe you're at rock bottom. Hopefully, that is the case because it is there that your eyes are opened to the reality of your situation. Wherever you find yourself today, Jesus stands with open arms to welcome you home. Your sin may be abounding, but where sin abounds grace abounds all the more. You may be faithless, but Jesus is faithful.