

Anthology | Learning to Love the Stories of God

Week 6: There Was No King In The Land (Judges 21)

Leader Notes: To understand this somewhat insane chapter of scripture, it's important to know what happens in the previous chapters of Judges 19-20. In these chapters, there's a man that travels with his concubine to visit relatives. On their way home from their trip, they stop in the land of the tribe of Benjamin to stay the night. Benjamin is one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Some of the men of Benjamin rape and kill the man's concubine during the night. The man is outraged and he divides his concubine's body into pieces with a knife and sends her body to all the tribes of Israel. It's a graphic way to deliver the message of what the men of Benjamin had done. Enraged by this act of violence, the men of the other 11 tribes wage war against the tribe of Benjamin, and kill many men women and children. On top of this, they promise to never give their daughters to the men of Benjamin as wives.

Then in chapter 21, the people of Israel cry out and say, "Dear rest of the tribes of Israel, if we have no women, and you don't give us any of your daughter as wives for our sons, then our entire tribe will literally be dead in one generation." So the rest of Israel has compassion but then they come up with the most terrible, chaotic, awful, inhumane and busted solution ever heard of for Benjamin's tribe to not be killed off.

The chapter ends with the powerful and horrific statement, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

Read the story:

When?

During the section We Need A King. It occurs during the period when Israel is led and protected by "Judges". This is after Israel gets into the promised land and before Israel has its first King.

Who?

The tribes of Israel, Elders of the congregation (i.e. leaders of the individual tribes), specifically the tribe of Benjamin, God, the virgin daughters of the people of Jabesh-Gilead and the daughters of Shiloh

Where?

Bethel, Mizpah, Israel, Jabesh-Gilead, Shiloh

Summarize the story:

The people of Israel have assembled together and are weeping and crying out to God, asking Him why such a terrible thing has happened in Israel that the tribe of Benjamin would be eliminated from their nation. The people of Israel offer sacrifices to God. They then ask who of their 12 tribes did not come to their assembly because the ones that did not come were to be put to death. The nation of Israel has compassion on Benjamin and tries to find a way to give them wives to prolong their lineage. They noticed that no one from Jabesh-Gilead had joined the assembly, so they sent an army to kill all the men, women, and children except for 400 virgin women that they will give to the men of the tribe of Benjamin. To get more wives for the tribe of Benjamin, the elders of Israel have the remaining men of Benjamin hide in the bushes while they steal the daughters of a people who live in a place called Shiloh, during Shiloh's annual feast. Like we said; terrible, chaotic, awful, inhumane and busted.

Leader Notes: The point of this story is found in the very last sentence in this chapter and book of Judges. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes because there was no king to lead them. They had no direction or guidance. The reason for their ridiculous, random wickedness is the fact that they did not have a good leader. This shows us that good leadership is good and very helpful. Due to our sinfulness, we will ruin ourselves and

each other if we do not have good leadership. This is another example like Joshua 24 where there is a theological problem but no theological solution given. The way it points ahead to Christ is that we need a king/holy leader to restrain sinfulness in the land but the people don't have one/aren't relying on the Lord to be their king.)

Analyze the story:

Attributes of God displayed:

- Even though God does not do anything in the chapter, God is the King we need.
- God is gracious. Despite all the ridiculous sinfulness of the whole book of Judges and the people doing what's right in their own eyes, God keeps pursuing them and loving them instead of rejecting them.
- God is faithful. Despite all the ridiculous sinfulness of the whole book of Judges and the people doing what's right in their own eyes, God remains faithful to His covenant promise.
- Passive Wrath. This is when God lets us chase our own sin and foolishness to our own suffering and destruction.

Who is who in the story? (Who is like us? Who is like Christ?)

- We are like the Israelites who need guidance.
- We are like the Israelites because we hurt ourselves and others.
- We are like the Israelites in that we come up with terrible and sinful solutions for our problems instead of turning to the Lord and waiting for His solutions.
- We are like the Israelites in that even when we want to have compassion, we oftentimes don't know how to do so in a God-glorifying and truly helpful way.
- There is no Christ-like figure in this passage, and that's the reason for the random ridiculousness. This shows us our need for Christ to be our King.

Connect the story:

Parallel Statements:

- Without a good Savior-King, we will harm and/or destroy.
- Without a good Savior-King, we will harm our loved ones.
- Without a good Savior-King, we will pursue our own misery instead of our own joy.
- Without a good Savior-King, we are lost and follow bad leadership.
- Without a good Savior-King, we do what is right in our own eyes which leads to our destruction.

Apply the story:

- See and submit to God's good authority over our lives. He leads us for our good and protects from our own sinfulness and foolishness.
- Appreciate and embrace the rules and leadership of God. Don't fight His authority in your life.
- Remember that running away from God's rules is running towards our own misery and destruction.
- Obey God's commands. All of them... because they are good.
- Be willing to trust, wait and seek God's will through His Word instead of running after whatever emotional and or panicked solutions you come up with.

Who needs this story?

- Rebellious people who don't like to submit to authority, rules or God.
- People who don't think God's rules are for their good.
- People who think they are wise enough to make their own rules for their life.
- People who think God's rules (or rules in general) are oppressive.
- People who think we can achieve utopia and the good life without God's help.
- People who think people are good on their own without God.