

## Study #8



READ: Judges 1-8, 13-21

Timeless Truth: God's Call vs. Sin's Culture = Continuous Conflict

God had given His Old Testament people of Israel His promised land. But they disobeyed God when He commanded them to show no pity and evict the evil Canaanites from the land. *These pagan leftover-nations became long-standing spiritual cancers.* With their nature-worship they were an insidious influence and harmed cultural ideas with their lies and pantheon of gods. After the death of Joshua, God's people gave in to this pull of worldly culture and an all too destructive pattern emerged:

1. Israel turned away from the LORD to exciting promises of pagan gods. 😞
2. God brought divine judgment against His own people. 😞
3. Israel saw their sin; they cried out for God's help. 😞
4. God raised up a judge to save them from those He previously sent. 😊

Because Israel disobeyed God and did not evict the pagans from Canaan, a 300-years-long cycle of sin became wrapped like a chain around their necks. In this book of Judges, the Lord raised up many heroes to help His people.

One slice of this history happened when God appointed **Deborah**, together with Barak, to free God's people. When Sisera, the enemy leader, fled the battle, he hid out in the tent of a woman named **Jael**. She recognized Sisera as God's enemy and killed this general of terrorists while he slept. So Israel was

delivered. But their rebellious-sin-cycle against God continued.

So the LORD let Israel be oppressed by Midianites. Then, when they cried for His help, God picked **Gideon**, a young kid out of nowhere, to deliver God's people. Gideon was pretty sure that God needed new glasses because He had obviously mistaken Gideon for some well-built four-star Israelite fighter. Gideon was at first a cynical, "show-me" kind of believer. Gideon asked God more than once for miracles. God graciously answered his requests.



In fact, God kept confirming His eternal plans until finally Gideon gave in. Then Gideon watched wide-eyed as the LORD stirred the hearts of 32,000 of his countrymen came from the fields to fight with Gideon against the Midianite army. Then, Gideon watched as God dramatically downsized those forces to a third. Then the LORD said there were still TOO MANY soldiers in his little army, so Gideon watched God bring down his army to even fewer numbers, all based on how they went to get a drink. With the remaining 300 men the LORD said, "NOW you have an army to go to battle; now My people will see Me in the victory!"

So, according to God's plan, Gideon's 300 were armed with a torch in one hand and a trumpet in the other. No hands left to hold a spear, or shield, or sword. These men were to experience AND witness how the Almighty LORD can take care of those who trust and obey Him. So they watched, with noisemakers and flashlights, as the LORD gave the panicked



Midianites to them. Midian ran wild-eyed as fast as they could away from God's people. God's people enjoyed freedom and peace again...for a while.

Sadly the sin-cycle continued. Israel was soon under the heel of forceful Philistines. This time God prepared a powerful deliverer. He promised a child to a woman who was unable to have children. The boy **Samson** was to be raised as a Nazirite. That is, he was set apart to God in a special way with diet, dress and peculiar practices.



As part of his special Nazirite vow, Samson's hair was not to be cut. And yes, he was indeed very well known for his supernatural strength. But Samson was a he-man who chose to have little self-control over his own body.

Any pretty little lady could capture his heart. He harmed his own faith-life by his lack of self-control. He slept with prostitutes and dishonored his parents. Sadly his last live-in, Delilah the deceiver, Dagon-worshiper, betrayed Samson for cold hard cash.

She whined and needled him until finally Samson gave up and gave in. He revealed: his uncut hair was a sign of the promise God made with him. So Delilah lulled lover-boy to sleep; she called in a silent barber to snip off Samson's long locks. Samson pushed

aside his faith, so the LORD said, ok and left. Thus Samson's gift of supernatural strength was removed and he was easily overpowered.

The Philistines bound him, gouged out his eyes, turned him into a life-long slave of the Dagon-nation. They mocked the Lord and His servant. Blinded, shamed, enslaved, in the dark, Samson's proud heart was finally crushed. Samson apologized to the LORD and trusted His grace once again. His faith grew.

But judge Samson's last day on earth was his best one. The Philistines had all gathered to honor and worship Dagon and the nature gods and goddesses of the earth. Samson was brought into the Philistine temple to be mocked. Samson prayed to the LORD; he buckled the central pillars. The temple toppled and crushed the Philistines. He gave his own life in the fight against the Philistines.

Samson's up-and-down, saw-tooth faith displayed rashness and repentance, miserable lust as well as delightful trust. And that brings us again to the question: how much sin is bound up within the human heart? Is there any part of a person that by itself is good and godly?



**WARNING:** THE FINAL CHAPTERS OF JUDGES ARE THE "SEWER CHAPTERS" OF THE BIBLE (Judges 19-21). The next paragraphs may cause flushes of shame and nausea.

Sin's depravity even breathes its putrid stench among believers! "***The human mind is incurably bad***" (Jeremiah 17). "***The hearts of all people are full of evil, and there is madness in their hearts during their lives—then they die.***" (Ecclesiastes 9). People are not just stained by rebellion; instead, God pictures us in a wicked psychosis, a wild, lifelong madness that tortures us, then kills us.

The holy God did not soften this. He recorded that even His own chosen ones were sinners who could behave like the nature-worshipping pagans around them. In Judges 19, a Levite bought a concubine. After some time they had a tiff and she stormed back home. After a few months, Mr. Levite pursued her, re-wooed her. Then on his way back home, he stopped at Gibeah located in the tribal area of Benjamin.

An elder living among the Benjaminites sees Mr. Levite and invites him home. His concern about camping overnight in Gibeah-plaza is the first hint in the story that Gibeah is not a safe city. The elderly host is feasting with Mr. Levite when the town rabble pounds on the door. They demand Mr. Levite be sent out—so that they can rape him. The host refuses. He offers his own daughter and Mr. Levite’s concubine. When they refuse the sick “gifts,” Mr. Levite gets involved. First, he seizes (a term used for assault) his concubine; then, Mr. Levite thrusts her outside (a verb also used for a violent split). The thugs gang-rape her all night long.

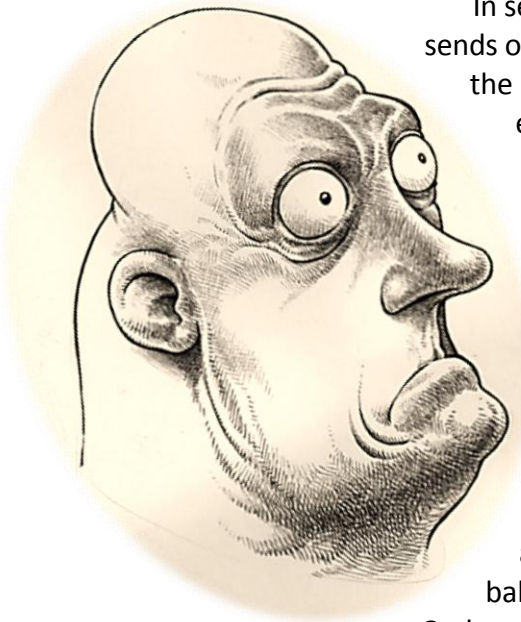


This portrayal of gang rape and torture takes only a short sentence. The gang members let her go as dawn broke. Mr. Levite was still sleeping as his wife crawled back. Just short of safety she falls, collapses at the entrance of the house. With her last bit of strength she stretched out both hands, feeling for the door. Her fingers barely touched the threshold. There she stopped as the sun fully rose. Her actions are the only “statement” she made in the entire story.

As Mr. Levite prepared to resume his journey, he opens the door and finds his path blocked by his concubine’s body. Negligent in her deadly nightmare, her husband now speaks to her for the first and last time. He barks four short words: “Get up! Let’s go!” This whole picture is sickening. Disgusting. Cold. Cruel. Heartless. Calculating. A moral sewer beyond description.

But sinful people can always make sin worse.

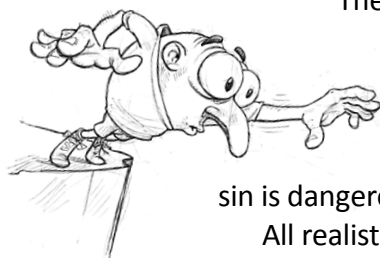
In self-righteous hypocrisy, Mr. Levite dismembers her body. He sends out her body-parts to the other tribes as a call to arms. Shocked at the reception of such a parcel post, eleven tribes gather to demand an explanation from Mr. Levite. Here the story changes. In the mouth of Mr. Levite, the crimes are tainted and twisted. It becomes not so much the rape and murder someone, or Mr. Levite’s sick involvement. Instead it becomes the “crime” of *intended* assault on one of God’s men, Mr. Levite. And instead of thugs, the Gibeah town council was responsible.



It was this that led to civil war against Benjamin. A single speech by Mr. Levite was the reason a holy war was justified as something called a “*ban*”. (This was the act of *devoting to destruction* a person or place because of a specific sin – like Jericho had been). But while calling the LORD as their witness, they conveniently left out the justice checks and balances God had put in place: 1. All assumed Gibeah-city was guilty;

God required a minimum of two or three witnesses. 2. Gibeah-city was ordered to hand over guilty ones without a thorough investigation. 3. The crimes were not idolatry or witchcraft, which were the only two sins God allowed for total destruction.

The civil war that followed, like a fire out of control, consumes the tribe of Benjamin! wastes entire towns! kills all women, elderly men and children! reduces the entire tribe of Benjamin to a mere 600 men! This butchery of Benjamin alarmed the hardest-hearted Israelites among them. Lawlessness, self-deceit, half-truths and hatred – this was the standard of the day. On the whole, God was gone from the public square. Even God’s people did whatever they thought was right in their own eyes. “God” was used as an excuse to rebel, to cover misconduct.



These nauseating last chapters of the book of Judges, the “sewer chapters of the Bible”, make even the most callous sinners feel like vomiting. Imagine what God feels. Almighty God does not whitewash rebellion. Sin must be exposed as the harmful decline that it is. In the past, repeatedly God had reduced the speed of Israel’s headlong rush over the cliff of destruction. But sin is dangerously slick.

All realistic discussions about sin and its deceitful influence would obviously lead to despair and anxiety. People know God *cannot, will not,* accept sin or sinner. Yet the LORD’s greatest desire is to rescue each sewer-soaked soul.

So the LORD God made sure to record His continual presence even in the worst of those immoral times. The LORD is the *faithful* God. God *never breaks His covenant of grace.* Yes, He is *holy* and yes, He *delights in mercy.* What is God to do? Through His own Messiah’s great work of salvation, the LORD urges us to trust the substitute for every sinner, Jesus Christ. God loves us deeply as Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, once-and-for-all, demonstrates. It really is finished, as Easter’s tomb gloriously declares!



We join in David’s prayer, “**Examine me, and probe my thoughts! Test me, and know my concerns!... and lead me in the reliable ancient path!**” (Psalm 139). God’s grace in Jesus Christ covers the most revolting sinner, the most disgusting sins. Where sin abounds, God’s grace did much more abound. Amazing grace amid our continual conflict.

## Judges 1-12; 13-18; | 19-21 – The Sewer Chapters of the Bible –

1. Can you share about a time you were rescued from a difficult or dangerous situation?
2. What is the repeated cycle in the book of Judges?
3. Often people excuse sin by saying, “I know it’s wrong, but I’ll do it just this one time.” How does God’s book of Judges address this self-deceit?
4. Who had the strongest Christian influence on you?
5. Joshua 2:10 says, “another generation grew up’ that forgot to teach their children about God. Not just as individuals, but as a group, the children did not learn about the true God. Talk about ways that you can teach children of Good Shepherd and their friends about the Living Lord God:
6. Was judge-Gideon’s request for a miracle a sign of faith or faithlessness?
7. Where do you see God’s grace in the sewer chapters of His book of Judges?

**Kind Time** – Take some time to encourage one another.  
How can Christians here at Good Shepherd pray for you?