

COMBATING THE COUNTERFEIT

Sunday, March 5, 2017

SETTING THE SCENE

- In Tanakh, Judges is part of ‘The Prophets,’ or more specifically ‘The Former Prophets’ (Joshua - 2 Kings).
 - The Tanakh consists of twenty-four books. Tanakh is an acronym of the first Hebrew letter of each of the Masoretic Text's three traditional subdivisions: Torah ("Teaching", also known as the Five Books of Moses), Nevi'im ("Prophets") and Ketuvim ("Writings")—hence **TaNaKh**.
 - This is important for us in discerning why Judges (along with the other prophets) were written: Though they [the prophets] clearly have a strong historical dimension to them, they not simply concerned with history for history's sake.
 - Rather, they are interested in how God was at work in the events they describe. In particular, they [the prophets] are concerned with God's special relationship with Israel and how this was expressed in both judgment and salvation in Israel's history.
 - Special relationship with God was based on Covenant which God made with them on Mt. Sinai (Moses) and was based on the promises he'd made to Abraham.
- SO... Israelites move into Promised Land → Joshua dies and they struggle to stave off and drive out remaining Canaanites → Tribes were separated from one another by settlements of unconquered Canaanites → Israel succumbs to hardship not because of iron chariots or Canaanite military clout, but because of unfaithfulness.
- AND... The tribes were slow to help one another in times of crisis (5:16–17; 12:1–7) and even fell to fighting among themselves (8:1–3; 12:1–6; 20:1–48). Most people were concerned only for their own interests and took advantage of the absence of central government to do as they pleased (17:6; 21:25). This inner decay threatened to destroy the very fabric of Israel and, in fact, constituted a far more serious threat to its survival in the judges period than any external attack.

- The main body of the book, which deals with the careers of the various judges themselves, extends from 3:7 to 16:31. This is preceded by an introduction in two parts (1:1–2:5 and 2:6–3:6) **and followed by an epilogue, also in two parts (chs. 17–18 and 19–21).** The question that is asked at the beginning of the book (1:1–2) is asked again in very different circumstances at the end (20:18).
 - ‘Why didn’t Israel ever fully possess the land that God promised to their ancestors?’ And the answer is given, ‘Because of the apostasy that followed the death of Joshua’.
- As we’re going to find out → **The only hope is Jesus!**
- The Israelites of the judges period failed through unbelief to enter into their full inheritance → that did not mean that God’s ultimate purposes for this people had been frustrated. God remained committed to them, → through Christ would finally atone for their sins and so bring to full realization all that he had promised, → including the inclusion in his kingdom of people of all nations. As the apostle Paul put it, ‘For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ’ (2 Cor. 1:20). → This means that the Israelites of the judges period are our spiritual ancestors, and that the God who showed himself to be so committed to them is our God too. He is none other than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE SIGNS OF COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANITY (Chs. 17-18)

- **EXPOSITION**
- Whereas chs. 2–16 describe external threats to Israel, chs. 17–21 describe internal threats to religious worship and tribal unity.
 - SHOW CHART -
- **Beginning:** “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6).
- **Ending:** “In those days there was no king in Israel” (18:1).
- **Judg. 17:1–6 Religious Corruption of a Household.** These verses depict a thieving son and an unusually forgiving mother who commit apostasy together.
 - Mother → not one word of reproach // only devoted a fraction of money to the Lord as she’d promised // commissions an idol (thought it was religious art)

- Micah → is a thief // idol in his house // ordained one of his sons as a priest (not a Levite = no no)
- **First few verses:** thievery, idolatry, lack of discipline, lack of obedience, apostasy (ordaining his son as a priest), greed, and so on! **And these are minor compared to where we're going!**
- Judg. 17:7–13 Religious Corruption of a Levite.
 - Levite (no territory of their own // just cities within the tribes // served as the priests)
 - (READ vv.11-13) Micah meets a Levite and lures him into serving as a private priest by offering him a fine salary and a safe house.
 - Levite → pursued comfort over obedience
 - Micah → made levite like a son and ordained him // problem? what about his other son whom he'd ordained? // arrogance thinking God would bless him
- Judg. 18:1-31
 - (vv. 1-2) Dan was seeking ... an inheritance. The Danites had been unable to settle in their allotted territory (Josh. 19:40–47), as they had failed to capture it earlier (Judg. 1:34–35).
 - There are (2) scenes involving the Levite whom Micah had recruited to be his priest.
 - (vv. 3-6) He was consulted by the Danite spies and gave them a favorable oracle, and then (vv. 18b-20) agreed to abandon Micah and go with the Danites and serve them instead.
 - In the scene which follows (vv. 22–26) The Danites steal everything Micah has and he's left a pathetic, broken man. Danites ask, "what's wrong with you?" (24). The Danites move on to conquer Laish, which they rename, and Micah's shrine is re-opened, as it were, on a new site and under new management (30–31). But the ominous words until the captivity of the land point to the fact that this shrine eventually suffered the same fate as the original one.
- **APPLICATION**
- Scripture is relentless in its denouncing of idolatry. Though having an appearance of life, it simply dehumanizes and kills!

- Genuine inheritance only comes from wholehearted devotion to the Lord (Deut. 30:5-6)
- What we worship and how we worship matters, for what we worship reveals what we most deeply trust (Ps. 115:4-8).
 - Either we will become blind, deaf, dumb, and ineffective like the idols of our own making
 - Or we will worship the one true God and be conformed to his image—ultimately revealed in Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 4:4).
- What are our idols?
 - Comfort and security like Micah and the Levite?
 - Power? Prosperity?
- We praise God for Jesus Christ, our better and faithful priest (Heb. 2:17 - “became like his brothers in every respect to become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God to make a propitiation for sin”). At great personal cost—and for no personal gain—Jesus fulfilled his own calling to be the ransom and mediator for all God’s flock (Heb. 9:15 - Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.). As a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9), following Christ’s example and in gratitude for it, we should also testify selflessly to the nations concerning his Word and deeds (Rom. 16:25-27). And, we are granted a true “suit of clothes” (Judg. 17:10; cf. Zech. 3:3-5), cleansed by the blood of his sacrifice (Rev. 7:13-14). Christ is secured as the priest who intercedes for us not through what we individually pay but through what he offered (Heb. 9:11-15). We [The people of God] exist in an intricate web of relationships in which the spiritual health of the individual matters to the community and vice versa. Because our Lord is our true and righteous King (Rev. 19:16), he calls us to subordinate private gain and personal ambition to kingdom concerns (Matt. 6:25-34; Acts 2:43-45; James 3:14-18). Rather than seeking an idolatrous inheritance of our own creation that cannot sustain or satisfy us, we are called to seek the inheritance Christ gained for us. He himself is the only inheritance that is truly secure and the only one that really satisfies (Col. 1:11-14; 1 Pet. 1:3-5). Where our Lord reigns in the hearts of individuals and

communities, we recognize that personal idols upon which we rely (e.g., private addictions, family background, self-righteousness, appearances, etc.) are to be put to death, as was signified and accomplished at the cross (Gal. 6:12–16).- ESV Gospel Transformation Bible

THE CONSEQUENCES OF COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANITY (Chs. 19-21)

- **EXPOSITION**

- SHOW CHART -

- **Beginning:** “In those days there was no king in Israel...” (19:1).
- **Ending:** “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (21:25).
- Judg. 19:1–30 Moral Outrage at Gibeah. These verses recount one of the most sordid stories in the Bible. Rape, murder, and callous indifference lead to the death of an innocent woman and, eventually, to civil war.
 - The Levite (Micah’s priest // priest to Danites) travels to recover his wife/ concubine who has left. What happens next is devastating.
 - 2 scenes of ‘hospitality’: The **FIRST** in Bethlehem (vv. 1-10) is normal enough. The **SECOND**, (11-28) is perverted and grotesque, with unmistakable similarities to Sodom in Genesis 19:1-13.
 - There’s a bitter irony here in that the Levite specifically chose to avoid the lands of the Canaanites in order to seek lodging with their fellow Israelites (vv. 12-14).
 - Pause: **WARNING**(vv. 22-28 // NOT ON SCREEN) - The rowdies in the streets of Gibeah were clearly morally bankrupt, but so too was the old man who opened his house to the travelers.
 - Here is moral bankruptcy indeed. When God’s people do whatever is right in their own eyes they are no better than Sodomites.
 - The Levite himself, however, is the most perverted of all. After having thrust out his concubine to the mob he retired to bed and apparently gave no further thought to her until he found her dead or unconscious on the doorstep in the morning. Then, with almost unbelievable callousness, he told her to get up because he was ready to go (27–28).

- This was the man who will summon all Israel to war in the next episode. In retrospect we can understand very well why his concubine found it impossible to live with him (see v 2 and note).
- 19:29–20:11 Preparations for war.
 - (ch. 19:29-ch. 20:7) An ad hoc meeting of representatives of the tribes of Israel is called (by the Levite) to discuss the matter of national importance over the outrage committed at Gibeah (the Benjaminites).
 - There's a sense of irony created by the fact that we, the readers, know more about both the convenor (the Levite) and the matter in hand (the rape/murder) than the members of the assembly do.
 - To us, the Levite's dismemberment of his concubine and distribution of her parts is an extension of the harsh callousness he showed towards her at Gibeah.
 - **But** to them it was an act of holy zeal. They were galvanized into action and came out as one man, from Dan to Beersheba (20:1). The summons issued by this Levite elicited a response which far surpassed anything achieved by the judges raised up by the Lord.
 - Having called the assembly together, the Levite gave what was at best a distorted account of what had happened, designed totally to camouflage his complicity (cf. 20:5 with 19:25).
 - In view of this, the high moral tone he adopted has a particularly hollow ring to it. It is not even clear that his concubine had died (as he implied) as a direct result of her rape in Gibeah (5b). She may have died at his own hand when he got her home (see 19:28 and comment).
 - For all this, the members of the assembly are just as impressed by the Levite's speech as they were by his grisly summons. They arise as one man and decide at once on united punitive action against Gibeah (8–11).
 - It may well have been that drastic action was called for, but what would become of Israel when its assembly could be convened and manipulated by a person of such dubious morals as this Levite? That is the serious question posed by this second episode.
- 20:12–48 The war itself.

- The outcome of the assembly in the previous episode was a holy war.
- Holy war is something we have witnessed repeatedly throughout the book of Judges, **but there are disturbing differences here.**
- Indeed, the ‘holy’ war of this chapter scarcely rates as such. It was decided on at an assembly convened by a man of bad character, and it concluded in a bloodbath that reeked more of vengeful excess than of justice
- Much of this chapter is about the war itself
 - Victories ebb and flow between Israel and the Benjaminites
 - The Israelites were so arrogant to assume the Lord was on their side, but eventually they would win and decimate the Benjaminites.
- **The Benjaminites undoubtedly deserved to be punished. But the moral and spiritual state of the nation as a whole was such that holy war almost destroyed it instead of preserving it.** In this third episode **the Lord appears to be as angry with the rest of Israel as he is with the Benjaminites, and he shows it by distributing defeat and victory in such a way that the whole of Israel is judged.** He is both the judge and preserver of his wayward people.
- 21:1–25 Rehabilitation of the surviving Benjaminites.
 - In this final episode, attention swings back to the workings of the tribal assembly - Now they’re worried about the Benjaminites
 - **Due to the excessive slaughter, entire tribe of Benjamin was threatened with extinction - there weren’t enough women to repopulate**
 - But they’ve made a vow not to give any of their daughters to the Benjaminites
 - So, they come up with **2 plans**
 - **First attempt → Kill all men, women, children from tribe that didn’t help us against Benjaminites and only spare the virgin women. And it worked... But there weren’t enough.**
 - **(vv. 13-23) Second attempt → The same men who had been so outraged at the rape of the Levite’s concubine now asked the men of Shiloh meekly to accept the rape of their daughters as a fait accompli.**
 - **The following ironical pattern emerges: (a) the rape of the concubine; (b) holy war against Benjamin; (c) problem: the oath—Benjamin**

threatened with extinction; (b1) 'holy' war against Jabesh Gilead; (a1) the rape of the daughters of Shiloh.

- The behavior of the assembly in this episode again shows us just how morally and spiritually bankrupt Israel had become. But in spite of this the story finally moves to a point of fragile equilibrium, with the Benjamites rehabilitated and calm restored (24).
- **APPLICATION**
- This utter chaos is the result of buying into a counterfeit relationship with God
- What used to only be true of the godless Gentiles, is now true of the Israelites
 - The repugnance of Sodom is repeated in Gibeah
- We are silenced, angry, and heated against the unspeakable acts committed against the Levite's wife.
 - For some, this may elicit the guilt shame or fear that they have experienced at the hands of others - perhaps even by some professing the name of Jesus.
- Amazingly, Israel has survived, **but looking back we must conclude that this was due much more to God's overruling than to the performance of its leaders and its institutions.** Israel's survival in the chaotic period of the judges was a miracle of God's grace, as salvation always is (Eph. 2:8).
- We must also consider that if fallen but redeemed men and women sense the depravity of these events, then how much greater is the pain to our Lord and how amazing is the grace he provides to atone for such sin. Jesus, the King, has come and conquered our rejection of his reign (John 1:9–13). His suffering with us enables us to bear up in our own suffering (John 16:33; Rom. 8:21–39). The painful experiences of being both sinner and sinned against propel us to plead with God for the return of our true King. Our prayer must be, "Lord, under your reign, empower me to do my part in promoting the flourishing of your people." And so the prayer of the Davidic king (Ps. 22:19) becomes our prayer: "Our Lord, come!" (1 Cor. 16:22). - ESV Gospel Transformation Bible

THE ANTIDOTE TO COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANITY

- The Gospel



- What is a counterfeit Gospel? Where God is dethroned and individual desire reigns (James 1:14-15).
 - Individual desire and religion have many names.
 - Call it humanism. Call it post-modernism. Call it pluralism. Call it whatever.
 - **A counterfeit religion places our desire, comfort, pleasures on the throne... Not Christ!!!**
 - But without Christ, all life is meaningless and **left to our devices, we can't expect a different result than the Israelites.**
- We have an enemy who hates us, Church!
- The only answer is Jesus by what he has accomplished on the cross!