

The Upside Down - Judges 17:1-18:31 **Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading**

Notes from the Sermon

Hawkins, Indiana in the 1980's was apparently not a safe place to live or visit, at least in the world created by the show *Stranger Things*. In this wildly popular series, a crazy chain of events led to the opening of a worm hole (for those who don't like Sci-Fi, I know) into a place called the upside down. For the purpose of our illustration, the key to the upside down is that it was the anti-Hawkins, a place that mirrored everything about the small town, and yet, everything was off. And a Hawkins teen got sucked into the upside down, so his band of buddies and family had to figure out how to save him. I reference *Stranger Things* and the upside down here because Judges 17-18 represents the upside down of God's Kingdom expressed in His covenant with the Hebrew people in the Old Testament.

At first glance, the story is about a wicked son who robs his mom, gets himself a personal pastor, and then has all of this robbed by a band of hooligans. But when we read this in context and in light of the grand story of the Bible, something else is happening here that is important for our understanding of Judges and of the Old Testament.

First, this story begins the third of three sections of Judges. Judges begins with a 3 chapter introduction which places the book of Judges in the history of Israel right after the time of Joshua and the conquest of Canaan. God was faithful to His promise, He has given them the land of promise. Their response was to reject Him as King and enter the cycle of apostasy and disobedience that marks the book. The second section that we have been examining for quite a while is the story of this cycle on repeat, beginning with their apostasy, God then giving them over to bondage at the hands of the surrounding nations. They cry out and God raises deliverers who rescue them and give them a period of ease. This cycle repeated 12 times, each sinking lower as God's people were further away from Him, His rule, and the covenant. The third and final section contains two lengthy stories that highlight the key verse, "There was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes." These stories are examples of how far the nation had fallen as it looks at stories on the ground among the people whom God had saved. And these stories are ugly.

And here is the key for the first story. The whole story is the anti-covenant, mirroring so many of the things God had given the people in covenant yet in ways that absolutely violate God's Laws and purpose. In the books of Exodus through Joshua God has rescued His people from slavery, formed a covenant, made them a nation, given them this thing called the Levitical Priesthood to be their spiritual leaders, gave them His Law, gave them a Tabernacle which was the place of worship and sacrifice, and God gave them the Promised Land, sending each tribe to their own inheritance. In this story we end up with a man whose name is Micah, which means "Who is like Yahweh." Yet, this knucklehead uses money he stole from his mom to make an idol (violating the Second and the Eighth Commandments), creates a priestly ephod and builds a shrine that is his own personal tabernacle. He does all this while creating his own privatized version of faith and a false idolatrous view of God. He then finds a Levite (the tribe of priests) who will be his personal pastor for a price. Of course, God had been clear that the priests were never to take payment from individuals for their services and that they serve in the Tabernacle for the entire nation. But this priest, who we later find is a direct descendant from Moses is more than happy to live comfortably with a great food and clothing allowance to serve Micah. But this arrangement gets messed up when the tribe of Dan enters the story. They were given the land of the Philistines to the east, but they determined that driving them out as God commanded was too dangerous and too much work, so they find five of their guys to spy out the land and find a better place. These dudes find a city way beyond the northern tip of Israel, so rather than inheriting the land God had given them and obeying His command to take it, they choose the path of least

resistance, battling the people living in the mountains. But along the way they steal Micah's shrine, idol, and ephod, and then work out a deal with Micah's personal priest to leave this post and join them to serve (for a much better price) the whole tribe as their personal priest.

Now, here is the key for the whole story. They do all this while thinking they are obeying and worshiping Yahweh. They do not invoke the names of Baal, Asheroth, or Dagon, the gods of the Canaanites. All through the story they believe they are keeping the covenant and seeking a word from the God of the Hebrews, yet at every step they are living in the evil shadow of the very covenant God gave these people. They are in the upside down and don't realize it. That is terrifying, that people can do faith, claim the name of Jesus, do religious rituals and duties, have religious leaders, and believe God is prospering and blessing their spirituality. And the whole time they have, as Paul declares in 2 Timothy 3:5, "The appearance of godliness, but denying its power."

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

| Sun | Mon | Tues | Weds | Thurs | Fri | Sat |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Leviticus 15 | Leviticus 16 | Leviticus 17 | Leviticus 18 | Leviticus 19 | Leviticus 20 | Leviticus 21 |

Reading from this past week's sermon: Judges 17:1-18:31

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Judges 17:1-18:31

Family Worship

Song - *The First Hymn*

<https://youtu.be/qTyJu9lyVkl?si=t9gUYKmVmjVEuVS2>

Gospel Project

Unit: Jesus' Ministry Continues

Story: Jesus at Passover

Big Picture Question: Did Jesus ever sin?

Answer: No, Jesus never sinned.

Scripture: John 2

New City Catechism

Question 18: Will God allow our disobedience and idolatry to go unpunished?

Answer: No, God is righteously angry with our sins and will punish them both in this life, and in the life to come.

Verse: Ephesians 5:5-6

Judges 17:1-18:31

- Spend some time seeing if you can pick up the different images, ideas, and people in this story that actually comes from God's covenant, and yet are twisted in the story.
- This is a story about people doing spirituality in the name of Yahweh, yet completely missing the True and Living God. How did they get here? What are some ways people in our culture claim the name of Jesus while actually denying Him?
- What are some ways being involved in a rightly ordered and Gospel Centered church can protect us from living in the upside down of the Christian faith?

Prayer

*Ask God to protect you and our church from embracing and believing false views of Jesus.

*Pray that we would experience the power of the Holy Spirit as we gather together for corporate prayer.

*NOTE - Make sure you download and read the C. H. Spurgeon sermon on corporate prayer during our May Prayer Month.