

# “Christian Atheism” // Judges 17–21 // Broken Saviors #10

---

SERVERDU:

I want to thank all of you for making ServeRDU such a success for 10 years in a row; ServeRDU began a decade ago as an effort to make the gospel tangible.

- The last couple of days, more than 2000 of you have served our city
- Gave 1700 backpacks full of supplies to teachers and students
- On Tues night, more than 1200 people gathered in Durham’s Central Park to pray for the city, in the rain
- Stories are always great and moving... one couple that re-arranged their vacation. CHC... scraping gum off of desks... puled out a tooth
- SERVE365... details

Let me real quick say... You may have noticed that I have a new book that just came out—*Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs... (senD)*. That would be a different book...

**This book is really your story.** It’s the story of how God transformed our church into being a sending church.

- When I started pastoring this church our goal was...
- Every year we send out over 100 people on church planting teams, and over 200 of our members serve overseas... which works out to 1 in every 20 members
  - We send more to the IMB than any other church by a significant margin...
- This book is your story. *Some of you are mentioned **by name*** in this... and for most of you it is positive.

- *If you’re interested, you can get one at your campus...* Reminder that anything we sell here, I do not make money off of. All goes back into the ministries of the church.

**Well... if you have a Bible open it to the book of Judges... Every good book, every good TV series, must come to an end.** This weekend we come to the end of the book of Judges. I’m not sure whether to be **sad or relieved...** How many relieved? It’s been a raw and challenging book. **Judges 17...**

Warning: dark and most gruesome chapters in the Bible...

- Quentin Terentino: all darkness and no hope.
- **WARNING TO PARENTS:** (If you have a young child, say, under the age of 13, this may be a good week to acquaint yourselves with the excellent kids’ programming we offer here at The Summit Church—these stories are just disturbing).
- Very few sermons... maybe you’ll wish I hadn’t... But important.

They describe a state I like to refer to as “Christian atheism.” These people believe in God... but practically speaking, as I’ll show you, they live like atheists. We have a lot of people in our culture that would fit the same category.

The stories may remind you of our time... most of us, regardless of which side of the political aisle you come from, are genuinely concerned about where our country is headed... This has **certainly been one of the most turbulent** summers I can remember...

- Mass murders... and gun violence and racial turmoil... Legitimate questions about our justice system and whether it treats people of color fairly...

**A lot of Christians feel like the sky is falling, morally.**

- A couple of weeks ago we watched Bruce Jenner get the ESPY award for courage. In his speech he basically said, “You know, we’ve got to get beyond where we treat this as a matter of right and wrong.” And the whole place stood to their feet... the

message seemed to be, “If you don’t accept this as normal, you have no place anymore in civilized discourse.”

- Then there’s the recent revelation of what goes behind the scenes at Planned Parenthood... and confusion over the moral outrage that takes place at the death of a lion but the seeming indifference over little boys in the womb...

It seems like the one thing the right and left have in common, they think this country is in trouble...

**Judges 17–21 is going to describe a time very similar to ours, and I hope it shows you that there is nothing new under the sun... and where our hope lies.**

### Judges 17–21

Chapter 17—Samson, the last Judge, has died—and chapter 16 opens with the story of a random man named Micah who **overhears his mom utter a curse** on the person who stole her money. **Well, turns out it was him who stole the money**, and he believes in God enough to be scared of the curse so he goes to her and says, “Uhh... sorry, mom, it was me. Here’s the money. Please take back the curse.” Well, the **woman is so grateful** that not only does she take back the curse, **she says...**

4 “I solemnly consecrate this silver to the **LORD** for my son (Micah) to make an image overlaid with silver. I am going to say thank you to God by making a statue of him. Now, notice, she’s not making an image of a false god—this is a statue of Jehovah, Israel’s God.

5 Micah made a shrine, and he... installed one of his sons as his priest. 6 **In those days Israel had no king; everyone did what was right in his own eyes** (ESV). (No rule; everyone became his own rule)

### Christian atheism... *Redefines God rather than submits to him*

**What this woman did was in direct violation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment:** that we not make any images or likenesses of God.

**Now, let me stop here for minute... a lot of believers say, “I get the first commandment... but what’s the big deal about not being able to make an image of God...?”**

- Here’s why: **An image cannot possibly capture the full range of God’s glory**, and so inevitably in your image you highlight the parts of his nature that appeal to you and conceal other parts that don’t...
  - You **magnify his strength**, for example, but you obscure his compassion, **OR**
  - You **celebrate his grace** while ignoring his purity & justice.
- And what you end up with is a **distortion of God**; a God not as he is, but as you want him to be... **which is not a real God at all**, just a deified version of you.
- It is a rejection of God and a choice of yourself.

And hand in hand with that will come a redefinition of morality. See vs. 6? **“Because there was no king... everyone did what is right in their own eyes. Just as you redefine God, you redefine right and wrong** according to your preferences.

**NOW, in many ways, this is the primary sin of our culture, right?** It’s not that we completely reject Jesus, we just want him to be a certain way. “Well, my Jesus is like this...” Or, “I can’t believe in a God that would say this...”

**The problem is, that is a full-scale rejection of God.**

- **I’ve illustrated it like this: BIOGRAPHY**
  - Strict vegetarian
  - Independent
  - You are bad at relationships so you live with 18 cats to console your loneliness

- When you define God and morality as you prefer it to be, you're not submitting to God at all, you're really just worshipping your preferences.

And BTW, I'm not just talking about the pundits on MSNBC doing this... **People in churches like this one** do it when they decide they are going to sleep together even though God's word clearly says the sexual relationship is reserved for marriage... Some will even have the audacity to say something spiritual, like, "We prayed about it and God gave us peace about moving in together," as if that had any relevance at all. **Just admit, what seems right in your eyes and that has more weight than what God's word says.**

**Let me continue on with the story and show you the 2<sup>nd</sup> thing Christian atheists do...**

**Vs. 7,** After Micah makes the statue and puts it in his house he **meets a Levite** travelling through town. Now, **Levites were the priestly class** in Israel, and so Micah was like, "Oh good, a Levite! This is perfect! You can be my priest for my statue of God!" And the priest says, "Well, **technically you shouldn't** do that... but **how much you paying?**" Micah said, "A lot." And the priest said, "Hmm... let me pray about it. I feel God has called me to say yes."

**<sup>13</sup> And Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since this Levite has become my priest." I've got God on the hook, now!**

**Christian atheism... Uses God rather than worships him**

Micah assumes two things here: a) that this god exists to serve him; and b) if Micah does the right things, this god is obligated to bless him.

The great substitute for true faith in God is this kind of religiosity, and it is built on those two premises: God exists for you; and if you do the right things, God owes you.

By contrast, **True faith says, "God, I exist for you, and you don't owe me anything—I owe you."\***

Religion asks questions like, "How can I get God to help me in my business?" And then, when doesn't happen, religion says, "God, I did those things you said you wanted—I gave money here, did this thing this many times, behaved—what happened?"

True faith says, "God, what do you want with my skill, my life?" And when you go through hard times, faith says, "*God, I still can't believe I get to be saved! How can I glorify you in this?*"

**False religion seeks control of God; true faith surrenders to God.**

Religion seeks access to God to get him to do what you want. True faith gives God access to your heart so that he can tell you what he wants.<sup>1</sup>

**QUESTION: Which kind of God are you seeking?**

You see, let me show you real quick what happens when you shrink God down to a size you can control...

In the next chapter, another group of Israelites show up at Micah's house, and they have more money than Micah and so they persuade the Levite to come with them and steal Micah's statue. Micah comes after them and says, "Hey, you can't take my priest and my statue." They say, "What's the big deal? Why you all bent out of shape?"

**[24] And Micah said, "If you take my gods that I made...what have I left?"\***

---

<sup>1</sup> Tim Keller, *Judges for You*

When you shrink God down to a size you can control, you always live in fear of losing him. When you have surrendered to the true God, you quit worrying about that, because you know he'll never lose you.

- **St. Christopher:** I don't have to worry about losing God, because I know he'll never lose me. That comes simply from surrendering.
- **When you try to control God, you live with anxiety; when you surrender to God, you live in peace.**

*What about you? Have you ever just surrendered to God, or are you trying to manage and control him?*

The next stories show you what happens when God is absent:

**19:1** Now a Levite (a different one—new story)\*...took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. OK, so that's a bad start. **2** But she was unfaithful to him. She left him and went back to her parents' home in Bethlehem.

So he goes after her to try and convince her dad to make her come back with him... you know, since he purchased her fair and square. Well, to make a long story short, he prevails, and so he puts her on his donkey and starts the journey back up to where he lives.

**14** And the sun set as they neared Gibeah in Benjamin. **15** There they stopped to spend the night. They went and sat in the city square (This was what you did in those days before Embassy Suites; you hung around in the city square until someone invited you in), but no one took them in for the night. Finally, an old guy shows up, and says, **20** "You are welcome at my house," the old man said. (But whatever you do...) "Don't spend the night in the square."

They're settling in for the night when suddenly, **22** Some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him."

Well, the old man and the Levite, scared, offer up the concubine and say, "Here... Rape her instead." **25** So the [Levite] took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and they raped her throughout the night...\* **26** At daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, fell down with her hands outstretched on the threshold of the door and lay there until daylight. **27** When her master got up in the morning and opened the door of the house and stepped out to continue on his way (apparently with no thought of her), there lay his concubine, fallen in the doorway of the house, with her hands on the threshold. **28** He said to her, "Get up; let's go." But there was no answer. Then the man put her on his donkey and set out for home. **29** When he reached home, he took a knife and cut up his concubine, limb by limb, into twelve parts and sent them into all the areas of Israel.

**20** Then all Israel from Dan to Beersheba and from the land of Gilead came together as one and assembled before the Lord in Mizpah. ...And they say to the Levite, **3** "Tell us how this awful thing happened," And the Levite explained the whole story to them... (Though he conveniently leaves out the part where he sent his concubine out to get raped to save his own skin). Well, this provokes an outrage... **11** So all the Israelites got together and united as one against the city. And they amass an army of 400,000 soldiers to march against the Benjamites, and they demand that the Benjamites surrender the men of this city who did this, but Benjamin won't do it.

So a massive fight breaks out and, at first, the armies of Benjamin are winning. **26** Then all the Israelites, the whole army, went up to Bethel and there they sat weeping before the Lord... **27** And the Lord responded, "Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands."

And he did. It was a rout. **48** The men of Israel put all the towns (of Benjamin) to the sword, including the animals and everything else they found. All the towns they came across they set on fire. Only 600

Benjamites escape, and they go and hide in some caves in the mountains.

Chapter 21, the Israelites, knowing these guys have escaped, take a vow, 21:1 “Not one of us will give his daughter in marriage to a Benjamite.”

Well, a few months go by, and tempers cool, and these 600 Benjamites come out from hiding. Then they say, “Our wives and daughters are all dead, and we’re all a bunch of guys and so we have no one to marry to have kids.”

Well, now they’re in a pickle... because the Israelites have made this vow that no one can ever marry a Benjamite... but now that they have cooled down they don’t want this tribe to go extinct, so 2 The people went to Bethel, where they sat before God until evening, \* weeping bitterly. 3 “Lord, God of Israel,” they cried, “why has this happened to Israel? Why should one tribe be missing from Israel today?” As if is God’s fault! “What are we going to do, God? Why did you let this happen?”

So they, not God, come up with a plan... vs. 8, they asked, “When we were preparing to go to war against Benjamin, was there any region that didn’t send anybody?” And they figure out nobody came from Jabesh-gilead: 10 So the assembly sent 12,000 of their best warriors to Jabesh-gilead with orders to kill everyone there, including women and children. 11 “This is what you are to do... Kill every male and every woman who is not a virgin.” (And so they did that, and kept alive 400 girls to serve as wives.)

But it’s not enough. They were still 200 short. \* 20 And they told the men of Benjamin... (There is this tribe up in Shiloh where the women have this tradition where in the fall all the women come out into the fields to do this ritual dance... and none of the men come. It’s a perfect setup for kidnapping.) 21 “When you see the young women of

come out for their dances, rush out from the vineyards, and each one of you can take one home to the land of Benjamin to be your wife!”

And so they do that.

And then, the book of Judges just ends. 25 In those days Israel had no king; everyone did [what was right in his own eyes]. That’s the last verse.

**When God is absent, two things result:** the strong oppress the weak; despair

**When God is absent... the weak are abused**

The inevitable result of casting off the rule of God is defining morality in a way that benefits the strong.

What runs through these last chapters is a horrific callousness toward the weak.

- Israel is mercilessly oppressive toward weaker tribes and weaker groups, like Israelite women.
- **One scholar said you can evaluate Israel’s relationship with God in Judges by how they treat women...** At the beginning, it was evil Canaanites like Sisera who raped and oppressed Israel’s women. Now Israel treats them horrifically.

And what’s even worse, **they seem oblivious** to what they are doing. They **talk like they are right with God**, and like they are just trying to do the right thing...

- Where is the Levite rebuked for (a) having a concubine and (b) sending her out as a peace offering to a group of men looking for a gang rape?
- Where is the concern for the women they kidnapped to provide brides for some of the men?
- Where is the concern in these chapters for the innocent the Israelites killed?

When you take God out of the equation, the strong inevitably begin to oppress the weak.

- The most profound achievement of the American Constitution was to ground our rights not in democracy, or in man's will, but in God's created order... **We are endowed by our Creator**, they said, with inalienable rights... which means rights are not subject to the whims of the majority.
  - **Ben Franklin**, "Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch. Liberty is the lamb having grounds, before God, on which to contest the vote."
- So when **MLK** comes along, he could to say that the American majority was wrong in how it treated black men and women. Even though it was the law of the land, it violated the law of the Creator.
- If MLK only had the will of the people to appeal to, he would have had no leg to stand on. He appealed to a higher law than democracy; the law of the Creator.

When a society, or a person, dismisses God, the strong inevitably begin to oppress the weak...

### Let's ask, "Who are the weak among us today?"

*For many years in our country, it was people of different races.*

- For a large part of our history, many of us white Americans were held to a different standard of justice than was the African, the Native American, or the Hispanic.
- And even today, though the laws themselves have been corrected, we who are in positions of strength ought constantly to make sure justice is not being skewed in our direction, because that can happen very easily, and we ought to empathize with those around us who have not enjoyed the same positions throughout history that we have.
- **I read an article on the TGC site** by Isaac Adams, an African-American UNC student who came to Christ right here...

- Wrote an article a couple weeks ago on the anniversary of the death of Eric Garner... He wasn't trying to pass judgment on the merits of the case, just to urge his white brothers and sisters to at least put themselves in the place of their black brothers and sisters and see it through their eyes...
- *"Imagine being white and every cop who surrounds you is black. The cops pulling up in their car to your once-peaceful scene? They're black, too. You're the only guy who is white. One of the cops just descended on you. Two of them. Three of them now pin you down. Imagine that. You wouldn't think twice about if race were a factor? Imagine saying, "I can't breathe! I can't breathe!" only to have your face further pressed into the unforgiving sidewalk.... (And now imagine all of this in the context of) having seen the slaying of 12-year-old Tamir Rice and the brutal murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till and the memories of situations like Rodney King (or lynchings throughout history). Might you be even just a little bit weary of the police? A little discouraged?"*
- He's not saying the police are bad, or even guilty in each of these situations (he's not in a place to judge that, and he knows that, and he supports the due processes of law) he just wants those of us in the majority culture to consider things from the viewpoint of their shoes and speak up for them as we would want someone to speak up for us.
- **Why? Because all people, black, white, brown... are created in God's image and ought to be treated like such.**

*Or here's another group: **the fatherless...***

- 1 in every 3 kids in the U.S. is growing up in a single parent home. In most cases, no dad. **In Durham County alone**, 20,000 kids will never know what it's like to have the love of a father. That group would fill the Durham Bulls ballpark ... *twice*.
  - **Foster kids:** 716 children in foster care in Wake Count, up 200 from last year.

- Many of them **bounce from one house to another**; constantly feeling like nobody wants them or loves them. And every year, hundreds of them age out of the system, where 99% of the time, they end up on the streets.
- Do they not deserve the love of a parent? Are they not created in the image of God like our kids are? Wouldn't you want your kids to know that kind of love? Are they invisible to us? Have we felt their pain?
- **The homeless:** Tonight, in Durham and Wake Counties, 333 children will go to bed homeless.<sup>2</sup>
- **Prisoners:** I read a study recently talking about how one of the primary predictors of whether someone goes back into crime when they are released is whether they have relationships with healthy people on the outside. **40% of prisoners have no one come visit them a single time they are in prison.** (Not family, not friends, not someone from church. We have a ministry that does that.)<sup>3</sup> 53 waiting to be sponsored.
- **The unborn:** This revelation that Planned Parenthood traffics in the body parts of aborted babies ought to make us ask an uncomfortable question:
  - ***What does it say about us as a society that we have a use for aborted human organs but not the baby that provides them?***<sup>4</sup>
  - *Now, let me press this a little farther*, because I know it is potentially controversial. **In one sense, Planned Parenthood's logic makes sense**—they maintain that the unborn is not human... it's just a piece of hamburger. Well, if that's true, no one should have any problem destroying it, or selling it... a woman does have a right to her body

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ncceh.org/files/4355/>;

<http://www.ncceh.org/files/4289/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.doc.state.mn.us/pages/files/large-files/publications/11-11mnprisonvisitationstudy.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Tweet by Michael Wear

and if she wants to remove part of it and sell it that's on her...

- What doesn't make sense when someone says, "Yeah, the unborn is human... but a woman ought to have the right to kill it... but selling it is barbaric."
- Listen: "If the unborn is not human then no justification for abortion or selling body parts is necessary. If the unborn is human, no justification we give could be adequate"<sup>5</sup>
- Are children in the womb human beings made in the image of God? If so, then how can we be ok with a human being killed for our convenience? And if you say, "Well, it is not really human life... then what kind of life is it?" Both logic and science prove that it is life.
- In Wake County, there are 23 abortions *every day*. We need to be broken-hearted. And righteously angry. And do something! What we can't do is be silent!

If there is no God, we don't need to be worried about anybody's pain but our own. But if there is a God, then we recognize that each person created in his image is worthy of respect, dignity, and to be loved.

- We Christians ought to speak up for anyone in a position of weakness... **High school students**—different gear... Do you speak up for those being picked on in the lunchroom? There are few times you are more like God than when you stand up for someone being oppressed; and few times you anger God like when you participate in, or sit silent during, the bullying of someone else.
- **Lastly, for us as Christians... Millions of people without Jesus;** they are headed to the worst kind of suffering, eternal suffering.
  - Don't we have to be working for them?
  - We talk about them like they are a stat. Stalin. They are individuals!

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Gregory Koukl

I know you can't be involved in all these ministries... but all Christians give themselves away for the weak. It's the sign you've met God. (summitrdu.com)

### When God is absent... we live with despair\*

Well, as I noted, this book ends with a note of desperation... It tells these stories and just ends... **25 In those days Israel had no king; everyone did [what was right in his own eyes].**

It's so appealing there at the beginning... "I get to define God as I want him... he's my lucky rabbit's foot." It ends with hell on earth.

**But that's where this story takes a turn.** You see, the book of Judges does not exist by itself in the Bible. There is **another book in the Bible** written in parallel with the last chapters of Judges... the book is called Ruth.

Ironically enough, Ruth is a woman who is not even an Israelite (and she was a widow... a foreign widow was about as low as you could get on the Israelite totem pole). Unlike the Jews, she trusts God in the face of impossible odds.

Whereas Judges ends with despair (where there is no king and the land lives in darkness), the book of Ruth ends this way: **Ruth 4:21, "...And Boaz (and Ruth)\* fathered Obed, [22] Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David."** And David would have a son, who had a son, who had a son... whose was Jesus.

These books, written in parallel, show you that where the strength of Israel fails, God would save through one considered weak (like Ruth), an outcast.

This king Israel didn't have... and clearly needed, would come not as one who was strong, like Samson, who would force the people to obey; but one who was weak, like Ruth... He would be **poor**, like Ruth,

and **wander as an outcast** without a home, like Ruth, and would change our hearts so that we wanted to obey.

**And his death would be a horrible, gruesome thing; a distorted perversion of justice** like we see here in the last chapters of Judges.

You see, **these chapters** in Judges are dark and gruesome, but they are **not the darkest chapters in the Bible**. The most gruesome, distorted section of the Bible is the crucifixion of Jesus.

- **The Roman historian Cicero** said that one of the Roman's goals in crucifixion was to create such a spectacle none would ever dare rebel...
- They beat them until they were **barely recognizable... PASSION** movie
  - **Cicero said that** it was not uncommon in the scourging to see a **rib** go flying off the frame); we are almost certain he was at least partially **disemboweled**
- The prophet Isaiah said he was beaten to a point he didn't look like a man—**unrecognizable**
- A **public place** like the mall... because the **cross was so painful** men would weep, vomit, urinate all over themselves
- All the while, religious leaders congratulated each other for doing the work of God.

**Why? He was enduring the darkness brought on by our sin.** He was entering into Judges 17–21 for us. The price he paid for our sin had to be equal to the horrific nature of our sin.

**Why was the cross so bloody?** Because the wickedness of our sin demanded that it be.

But instead of sending out his bride and then cutting her up into pieces, he would give himself to be cut up for us, so that he could redeem us as his bride and make us spotless in his sight.



*Dark is the stain that I cannot hide; what can avail, to wash it away?  
Look, there is flowing a crimson tide! Brighter than snow you can be  
today.*

*Grace, grace, God's grace! Grace that will pardon and cleanse within!  
Grace, grace, God's grace! Grace that is greater than all our sin!*

Jesus' death not only pays the price for our sin, it transforms us from selfish, hateful people to graceful, loving ones...

**Charleston:** *You remember a few weeks ago, when Dylann Roof shot and killed 9 people at Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston. You remember that Roof's hearing, the families of the victims, one after another, stood up to tell him, 'You've taken something from us we can never get back. But because Christ has forgiven us, we forgive you.'*

- **What gives someone the power to do that?** It is not a general sense of morality; nor is it just the belief that God exists; it is the belief that God made himself weak for us so that we could live.

***Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace, freely bestowed on all who believe!*** *You that are longing to see his face; will you this moment his grace receive?*

## **Conclusion:**

Maybe you are living in your own Judges 17–21... Maybe not as gruesome, but only different by degree... you have redefined God; you have used him; you have abused others...

God's grace is greater... It can pardon and cleanse within...

You have to quit redefining God, using God... and surrender to God.