

## **Break the Chains Bible Study Series**

### **Session 1**

#### **By Mylinda Baits**

**The Break the Chains** Bible study series is designed to help you explore the complex issues surrounding today's global slave trade as you prayerfully consider the biblical message of God's redemptive work through saving love. Some of the passages you will be asked to reflect upon may make you feel uncomfortable and challenge your thinking, but we encourage you to be open to the surprises God has for you in the Word.

Please begin and end each study with prayer and reflection. Think about your present life situation and ask God to be present in your study, as well as show you how to act on what you discover. If you are studying in a group, read each section aloud and allow all willing participants to share their insights; if you are using this study as an individual, keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings as you ponder the biblical story, information, and personal stories that you read.

May God's spirit fill you, challenge you, free you and transform you in and through your study.

#### **Text: Judges 19**

#### **Background**

The book of Judges is one that rarely gets studied or preached in our local churches because it can be hard to understand and at times quite disturbing. Although some youth groups have explored some of its "texts of terror" because of their grossness factor (blood, guts, etc.), not many of us are familiar with its contents. In its 21 chapters we read about robberies, idol worship, rapes, murders, genocides, wars, and a number of other unthinkable acts done to and by the tribes of Israel when there was no king. Many scholars believe that is a collection of stories gathered to justify the choosing of an earthly king who would unify and lead Israel instead of the loose tribal confederation as described in Judges. Judges 21:25 best encapsulates the reality of the book of Judges as it states: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."

Keeping this in mind helps us to see that the book of Judges is not meant to be prescriptive or normative. At times it offers us heroes to imitate, but more often it is descriptive of the good, the bad, and the ugly, in order to shock us into seeing what happens when people do whatever they feel like doing—not what God desires. Something we must remember when we study biblical texts is that they are clothed in the particularities of their cultural setting. When we read the ancient story we cannot simply transfer its principles and values to our time and place. Rather, we must enter into the particular setting of that distant culture, and only after understanding the original context, try to see the story in light of kingdom values and hear how they speak to our contemporary reality. Keep this in mind as you read the account of the Levite and the concubine.

The Levites, religious leaders of their day, were set aside as priests to provide for the spiritual and worship needs of the people of Israel. Instead of doing agricultural work, they cared for the temple and led worship, so their needs were met by the tithes and offerings of the other tribes.

A concubine was usually a slave used for sex, a captive of war or piracy, collateral given to pay off a family debt, or a daughter sold by her impoverished parents to relieve economic stress on the household. Most often they were like a second wife. Normally women did not choose to become concubines, nor can we assume that their sexual relationships with their owners were tangible expressions of a loving relationship. Rather than mutual love, the relationship here was of owner and property.

In the culture of that time the value of offering hospitality, meaning meeting *all* of the needs of one's guest, was so important that a common practice was to offer one's virgin daughter or other women of the household to meet the sexual needs of the guest. These cultural norms seem more important to the characters in the story than the love of neighbor or the protection of the vulnerable.

### **Entering the Story**

- Read all of Judges 19 and pay attention to your feelings and gut reactions as you read the story.
- Name your feelings and reactions. What don't you like? What makes you feel uncomfortable? Who makes you angry in the story? Do you wish the story ended differently? If so, how would you have ended it differently? If not, why not?
- Think about each of the characters in the story. Who acts and who is acted upon? Who speaks and who remains silent? Who holds the majority of the power in the story? How does this affect the situation? Can you identify with some of the characters in the text? With whom do you identify and why?
- As you see how the story unfolds, how do the choices that are made affect the outcome of the situation? Had they chosen differently, what may have been the possible outcomes?
- What did the events of the biblical story mean to the people who experienced them? Are there spiritual lessons that they learned through their experiences? If we read ahead to chapters 20 and 21, we see that this incident was used to justify a civil war against the tribe of Benjamin. Could there have been other solutions to the conflict? Were their actions pleasing to God or were their actions what *they* thought was the right thing to do? Were there other, life-affirming options available to them all along the way? Are there spiritual lessons that we can learn from the story and put into practice for our context today?

### **Responding with Our Story**

Like the silent woman in our story, there are twenty-seven million slaves in our world today. These are women and children without voices, without options, and without protection or power to break the chains that enslave them. The commerce in human beings, which preys on impoverished, unskilled, and vulnerable women and children, today rivals drug trafficking and illegal arms trade for the top criminal activity on the planet—trafficking is a business that generates \$9,500,000,000.00 every year.

Unlike the characters in the story, God's people are beginning to listen and do something. Today's growing number of modern-day abolitionists want to prevent further victims from winding up on the doorsteps of our cities as sacrifices to meet the "needs" and demands of an ever-growing crowd seeking to use them. Proverbs 31:8-9 says, "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the poor and needy." Many are doing exactly that, and we have an opportunity to join them.

### **What Can We Do?**

When we, like some of the characters in the story, tell ourselves that there is nothing we can do to stop this bad thing from happening, we underestimate our potential and abandon hope for those trapped in captivity. Unlike the owner of the house, too willing to sacrifice his own daughter and the woman we know as the "concubine" to protect the reputation of his male guest, a number of missions and grassroots organizations are standing up to the mob and saying, "no more!" Instead of bowing down to gender inequality, they are investing time and resources in training and empowering women to have a voice and positive options. You can help them by financially supporting their work or volunteering as mentors for young girls and vulnerable women in your local community.

Unlike the Levite and other townspeople closed up in their homes, we can pray for and be a presence of Christ's light shining in the darkness outside, walking alongside of those who find themselves in need of rescue before it's too late. Instead of blaming other people or thinking that the problem is with those "Benjamites" or sex perverts or pagan people outside of the U.S., we can take a hard look at our own contribution to the problem, repent of our indifference and get to work for good without wasting time on who is to blame. Though today we may not call them "concubines" like in the book of Judges, the many voiceless victims of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking are waiting for you and me to pay attention, to protect them from further harm, and to proclaim freedom with our words and our deeds. God is giving us a new opportunity to rewrite the end of the story. Are we ready to write?

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Posted on [Break the Chains](http://www.abwmbreakthechains.org) website June 26, 2007

We can promote and get involved in the support of National Ministries home missionaries and International Ministries international missionaries and their international partners who are working to break the chains of modern slavery and build new lives in Christ at home in the U.S. and all over the world.

International Ministries missionary Lauren Bethell tells a story from her time as director of the New Life Center in Chang Mai, Thailand. A girl sold into prostitution by her drug addicted father had been rescued by the center. The word came that he was on a bus heading to the center to take her back. Instead of allowing this to happen, Lauren met the bus at the station, stood up to him, refused to let him off the bus, and sent him on his way, angry, but unable to enslave his daughter again. The girl, with the power of Christ's transforming love and a strong community to build her up and protect her, was a free woman, never to be in chains again.

For updated research and breaking news, and ways to make a difference, check out these websites. Together, we can break the chains of slavery around the globe:

- [www.notforsalecampaign.org](http://www.notforsalecampaign.org)
- [www.antislavery.org](http://www.antislavery.org)
- [www.protectionproject.org](http://www.protectionproject.org)
- [www.stophetraffick.org](http://www.stophetraffick.org)
- [www.internationalministries.org](http://www.internationalministries.org)
- [www.nationalministries.org](http://www.nationalministries.org)
- [www.abwmbreakthechains.org](http://www.abwmbreakthechains.org)

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