

JUDGES 19 – A LEVITE AND HIS CONCUBINE

Several commentators connect Judges 19 with Genesis 19 due to similarities. In both accounts, the sin of homosexuality and its judgment is the primary theme. Wicked men of the city wish to rape the male guest(s) of an outsider who is sojourning in their city, and both hosts offer daughters in the place of his guest. The author is informing us that Israel has stooped to moral level of the Canaanites.

V1 For the 3rd time the author pens the thematic statement “In those days Israel had no king.” This is “book end” verse with the ending verse of this story 21:25.

A Levite of Ephraim takes a concubine from Bethlehem (Judah). *What is wrong with this picture?* Levites should not have concubines (a semi-legal, second-class wife- like the culture around him).

Lesson: We rightly expect believers will look different from the world and not conform to it. We are called to live counter-cultural, to a higher standard of morality/ethics, and look different due to our relationship with God.

V2-3 Sometime later she is unfaithful to him and she runs away back to her father’s house. She is there 4 months and then the Levite comes to persuade her to come back.

V4-10 His father-in-law welcomes him and extends great hospitality for 3 nights. On the 4th day the father-in-law extends more food and drink, tells him to stay the night as it was getting late and they end up staying that night. The next day the host goes through the same routine (he is determined to show his son-in-law extra generosity as his daughter has disgraced the family), but the Levite left that evening with his concubine and headed towards Jerusalem.

V11-13 Getting late his servant suggests they stay in a city of Jebus (Jerusalem- controlled by the Jebusites, group of Canaanites). The Levite did not feel comfortable staying in a Canaanite town (“foreign”, “alien” town). He decides to press on to Gibeah or Rammah so they can spend the night in the land of Benjamin. They decide to stay in Gibeah, meaning “hill or height”. Hill Country of Ephraim.

V15 They sat in the square but no one can take them in. *What is wrong with this picture?* Hospitality was the cultural norm. It was sinful to be inhospitable.

V16-21 Then an old man from the hill country of Ephraim takes them in. He shows him hospitality and is a gracious host. (Same area as the Levite)

V22- 26 Then a group of local men from the tribe of Benjamin in Gibeah came and demanded the host bring out the male get so they could have sex with him. The host tries to reason with the mob and offers his virgin daughter and his guest’s concubine. (Sons of Belial)

Why sacrifice a daughter to protect a stranger? Culture influences around them (became like Canaanites) priorities were off as people defined their values themselves. Homosexuality rape was more appalling and a great sin to him, and it was custom to protect your guest once under

your roof. This points to the abuse of women in the fall Israel nation (seen more as property). They would not listen, so the Levite throws his concubine out the door (for his own safety) and she is raped and abused all night to the point of death.

V27 Sounds like the Levite slept in a little and was ready to get on with his journey. Certainly not overly concerned for her safety. She had been in the doorway since daybreak.

V29 When the Levite reached home, he dismembers his concubine and mails her out to publicize this sin against her and to call Israel to seek justice.

Sins of the Benjamite men: inhospitality, homosexuality, rape, adultery, and murder. New low point in Israel's history, they have become like the Canaanites a godless nation. Israel becomes like Sodom.

They no longer conduct themselves like God's people. Like Paul told Titus about the Cretans/Christians in the early church- Titus 1:16 "They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good".

Lesson: We conform to the culture when we remove God from our lives. We need to be in God's Word daily so we can know Him and His ways in order to grow in our walk with Him. If you feel that God is far away, you're not spending enough time with Him.

JUDGES 20 – ISRAEL'S WAR WITH BENJAMIN

V1-2 All of Israel (except the Benjamites) gathers to discuss this horrific affair (*gather against Benjamin*). *Only times in Judges they acted as one nation.* The nation gathers to judge Gibeah at the Levite's request. Gathered from Dan the northern boundary to the southernmost boundary, Beersheba. It was a positive sign to see Israel gather for such a reason. This showed that they were willing to deal with the problem of sin in their midst. A moral passion arose from all the degeneracy to show religious conviction, to combat the iniquity of the men of Gibeah. It seems that the crime of Gibeah shocked the conscience of Israel- a national call to righteousness and repentance. However, this is not righteous indignation as they should have been upset with what the Danites did in Chapter 18 and all the other things going on contrary to God in Israel. God taught them what to do when wicked people go astray to worship other Gods. Deut. 13:12-15

Gathered "as one man"- united (except Jabesh Gilead 21:8-9) in Mizpah about 8 mi N of Jerusalem and 3 mi from Gibeah. Interesting contrast assembled as one man vs. the dismembered concubine.

V3 The Benjamites heard of the gathering. It appears they were invited as well since her 12 body parts were distributed throughout the nation.

V4-7 The Levite husband tells the story of gang rape and murder of his concubine. **V5 They intended to kill me, but instead raped my concubine and she died.** *The Levite spun the story to his own advantage. He made the culprits look very bad, and himself good. What he said was true, but he failed to mention the cruel and callous way he abandoned his concubine to the mob. Then the Levite challenges them for a verdict and justice.*

Lesson: Not wise to listen to only one-side of a story. Prov. 18:17 “One who states his case first seems right until the other comes and examines him”.

V8-11 Israel makes vow to avenge this tragedy and preparations for war made. Deuteronomy 13:12-18 instructed Israel how to deal with such abominations among them. It said first test the truth of the accusations. If the charges were true, they must then destroy those who committed such an abomination. **“So all the men of Israel gathered against the city, united together as one man”**. The phrase “as one man” is used 3 times in the first 11 verses to show Israel’s solidarity. *This was an encouraging response in a very dark time. They came together in unity and decided to bring justice to the people of Gibeah.* Israel decides to kill the men of Gibeah who did this deed. This was extreme, but a valid and proper fulfillment of God’s command to Israel in Deuteronomy 13. Israel jumped in to correct Benjamin but failed to do a self-examination.

Lesson: We should examine ourselves before correcting others or God will deal with us. As Jesus taught in Matt 7:3-5 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye...”

V12-17 Benjamin’s help sought and not given. **V13** The Israelites demand that the tribe of Benjamin give up the guilty men in Gibeah (they only wanted the guilty), but Benjamin refuses to *repent*. The other tribes of Israel did the right thing in asking the tribe of Benjamin to **surrender those wicked men** who committed this crime. They sought to resolve the crisis without war, but the tribe of Benjamin committed a great sin by putting loyalty to their tribe before obedience to God’s Law as they decided to protect rather than deliver justice. Instead, the children of Benjamin gathered 26,000 soldiers and 700 *chosen* men from Gibeah. Among all this people *were* 700 *select* men who were left-handed (like Ehud Ch 3:15). *The tribe of Benjamin not only failed to support the just cause of the other tribes, they actively resisted the other tribes with an assembled army.* Notes: lefties concealed dagger on the unexpected right side. Slinging stones- stone were about 1lb & could be tossed 90 mph.

Lesson: As modern followers of God we can make the same mistake when we put the interests of their own nation before the interests of the Kingdom of God. It is important for Christians to remember that they are citizens of the Kingdom of God first (*Philippians 3:20*).

V16 “and not **miss**” The Hebrew word translated **miss** is literally *sin*. This illustrates the principle that the word “sin” literally means to “miss the mark”.

V17 “**Israel mustered four hundred thousand swordsmen**” The tribes of Israel prepared for civil war against the tribe of Benjamin. Israel was right in believing that the greatest good was not the unity of the entire nation as without justice and truth then unity not worth having.

V18-21 Israel’s 1st Civil War, the 1st battle against Benjamin. **Then the children of Israel arose and went up to Bethel (the house of God) to inquire of God. They said, “Which of us shall go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin?” The Lord said, “Judah shall go first!”** Then the children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah. Prior to the first day of battle, Israel sought the Lord – yet they were defeated before Benjamin and loses 22,000 men (this was a staggering, severe loss). Benjamin had a couple of advantages- a fortified position in Gibeah and knew the terrain. After this first day of battle, it seemed that the tribe of Benjamin might successfully resist the other tribes of Israel. We can speculate that though they inquired of God, they still trusted in the might of their army and in the goodness of their cause, but not in the

Lord. Thus, perhaps there was something wrong in the way that Israel approached the Lord, or was this simply part of God's plan to discipline and correct His disobedient nation.

V22-23 Israel encourage one another and then seeks God after the first defeat. **“Then the children of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until evening, and asked counsel of the Lord, saying, “Shall we go up again to battle against the Benjamites...?” The Lord answered, “Go up against him.”** This was a positive reaction in the midst of such a dark event. These soldiers did not lose hope; they strengthened themselves in the Lord and moved forward (like David 1 Sam.30:6). To their credit, the children of Israel did not stop seeking the Lord after the first disaster. They humbled themselves before God and sought Him regarding the next battle, but once again, God did not guarantee victory.

V24-25 2nd day of battle, Israel is defeated by Benjamin again- lost 18,000 more soldiers. The loss on the second day of battle was also severe. This shows that even though the tribes of Israel sought the Lord and fought in a just cause, it was still a very difficult struggle. There was a great cost for them to pay in doing what was right. (Lesson- there is a cost in obedience)

V26-28 Israel repents before God after the second defeat- they went to Bethel (the house God, Ark of the Covenant was there) and wept, prayed, fasted, and presented burnt and fellowship offerings to the LORD. Phinehas, grandson of Aaron was the high priest. *The presence of the ark at Bethel (before move to permanent location at Shiloh) and the mention of Phinehas (Num. 25:7, 11; Josh 22:13) indicates these events happened early in the period of judges.*

Perhaps God allowed the 2 days of defeat for the purpose of bringing Israel low; they needed to be broken in order to humble themselves. Israel demonstrated their humility by fasting (self-denial). They had to understand that the horror of the crime at Gibeah was not merely the result of the sin of one group of men, or one city, or even one tribe. The whole nation had to be humbled because they first thought that the sin problem was only in Benjamin. However, Israel had to see that that nation as a whole had a sin problem.

After the first failure, Israel was sorry and wept. Nevertheless, it was only after the second failure that they put their repentance into action by fasting and made a sacrifice for their sins. Sorrow and weeping are not enough and cannot compare to real repentance and taking care of the sin problem through sacrifice.

V28 Then they inquire of the LORD for a 3rd time if they should go to battle against Benjamin. The LORD responds **“Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hands”**. They were encouraged to go out again, this time with God's promise of victory. Trusted God and did their part by strategizing a strong battle plan.

V29-48 Third day of battle – victory for Israel over Benjamin and Gibeah. We will cover the short version 29-36a. **V36-46** gives a more detailed account of the battle and Israel's victory.

Israel sets an ambush around Gibeah. Benjamin goes out against Israel *and* they began to strike. They kill 30 men and they began to feel victory was at hand again as Israel fled and drew them away from the city to the highways. **V31 “drawn away from the city”- Joshua used this same strategy in conquering Ai (see Josh 8:4-29).** Perhaps they got this strategy by reading the

writings of Joshua and Moses; this may indicate that they returned to God's Word in the course of their repentance.

The Israelites ambush and they conquer Gibeah while the Benjamite army was pursuing the main group of Israelites as they retreated. They left the city undefended. V34 But *the Benjamites* did not know that disaster was upon them. V35 **The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel**, and the children of Israel struck down twenty-five thousand one hundred Benjamites solidiers.

V47 Six hundred men escaped and fled toward the desert to the rock of Rimmon. They hid at the rock of Rimmon for four months until there was a peace treaty (21:13-14).

V 48 The Israelites turned back against Benjamin, and struck them down; men and beasts in every city. They also set fire to all the cities. The two days of defeat made the tribes of Israel ruthless towards the tribe of Benjamin, and they killed thousands. As a result, there remained only a 600-man remnant from the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was undeniably guilty, but there was no need for the near complete destruction. This over-zealous judgment against the tribe of Benjamin is later regretted by Israel.

JUDGES 21 – WIVES FOR THE REMNANT OF BENJAMIN

V1 Another foolish vow. At Mizpah, cursed is anyone who gives their daughter as wives for the tribe of Benjamin. **“Not one of us will give his daughter in marriage to a Benjamite”**. Considering their anger against Benjamin, this probably seemed like the right thing to do. However, this foolish oath had unforeseen consequences; this tribe faced the challenge of preserving themselves from extinction.

Israel forgot the purpose of justice is to not only bring punishment to evildoers, but also guard against punishment being too harsh.

V2-3 Israel realizes that a whole tribe is in danger of extinction since they went too far and the remnant is unable to marry due to the curse. They cried out to God, **Why has this come to pass in Israel, that today there should be one tribe missing in Israel?** The question is easily answered; because of the excessive vengeance of the tribes of Israel against the tribe of Benjamin.

V4-14 First solution to the problem of the foolish oath. **Who from all the tribes of Israel has failed to assemble before the Lord? ... Should certainly be put to death.** Here again Israel did something that seemed right at the time, but was actually horrific. They decided to slaughter a whole city of Israel, every man and non-virgin woman in Jabesh Gilead (East of the Jordan) because they failed to join with Israel in the fight against Benjamin. This was doing one bad thing to make up for another.

Why didn't the leaders of Israel take alternative action and seek God's counsel? Unfortunately, they did know God's Word. They followed the Mosaic law on vows from Num 30:2, that one

must not break his vow. However, they forgot Lev. 5:4-6 that by confessing to the LORD they made a huge mistake and repented and paid ransom to the temple. Then God would have shown them grace and released them from their vow at Mizpah. This would have allowed them to give their daughters as wives to the men of Benjamin, and renouncing the foolish vow.

V12 They found among the people living of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young virgins. In the ungodly massacre at Jabesh Gilead, they killed all inhabitants but 400 young virgins. Still, this was not enough. V14 **But there were not enough for all of them.**

V16-24 Second solution to give the remaining men of Benjamin an opportunity to take wives during a festival in Shiloh. **Each of you seize a wife from the girls of Shiloh.** They answered the problem of wives for the remaining Benjamites by creating a little scheme where the Benjamites were allowed to “kidnap” women (who were no doubt unwilling), so that the marriages could be arranged without “official” approval. V19 We are unsure of what Feast, some commentators probably Tabernacles at the time of grape harvest. The Benjamites hid in vineyards.

Rather than go through this charade at Shiloh and the destruction of Jabesh Gilead, they should have simply confessed their sin of making a foolish oath and done the right thing instead of trying to make two wrongs equal a right.

V22 When their fathers and brothers complain to us, we will say...and you are innocent since you did not give your daughters to them. This allowed the men of Shiloh to keep their oath by not voluntarily “giving” their girls to the Benjamites.

V23 Then they went and returned to their inheritance, and they rebuilt the cities and dwelt in them: In this, the tribe of Benjamin was sufficiently restored, and would later provide Israel with its first king (Saul).

V25 This verse appropriately summarizes the events of this book. **In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.** This kind of moral, political, social, and spiritual chaos could only happen where there was no recognized king over Israel, where people forgot about God as their King. When God is absent, the strong oppress the weak and we live in despair and destruction.

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Generally, the 350-year period of the Judges was marked by this radical individualism. They rejected the standard of God’s Word and accepted the individual standard of *what was right in their own eyes*. The author points out this phrase several times in the book to let us know that righteousness does not come from the “bottom up”, but that it can only come from the “top down”. The nation of Israel was godly only when they followed the one true God.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is how the rape and murder of one woman was "resolved" in Israel with thousands of deaths, forced marriages, kidnapping and rape of hundreds of women. Some books end on a high note. Not this one.

Final Lessons:

- 1) We need to submit to the one true God for who He is and not redefine Him in the God we want Him to be. This is a rejection of the real God leads to redefinition of morality – “right in your own eyes”. Only God brings order out of chaos.
- 2) God’s love and grace is so great, He will always pursue us and seek to deliver us.