

Bible Study Notes
5-15-24

Judges 19

A Levite Takes A Concubine – Verse 1

¹ In those days Israel had no king. Now a Levite who lived in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.

19:1-21:25 What is the significance of this tragic story? When the Israelites' faith in God disintegrated, their unity as a nation also disintegrated. They could have taken complete possession of the land if they had obeyed God and trusted him to keep his promises. But when they forgot him, they lost their purpose, and soon "Everyone did as they saw fit" (21: 25). When they stopped letting God lead them, they became no better than the evil people around them. When they made laws for their own benefit, they set standards far below God's. When you leave God out of your life, you may be shocked at what you are capable of doing (19: 30).

19:1 Having concubines was an accepted part of Israelite society, although this is not what God intended (Genesis 2: 24). A concubine had most of the duties but only some of the privileges of a wife. Although she was legally attached to one man, she and her children usually did not have the inheritance rights of the legal wife and legitimate children. Her primary purpose was giving the man sexual pleasure, bearing additional children, and contributing more help to the household or estate. Concubines were often foreign prisoners of war. But they could also be Israelites, as was probably the case in this story.

The Levite Reconciles With His Concubine After She Commits Adultery – Verses 2-4

² But she was unfaithful to him. She left him and went back to her parents' home in Bethlehem, Judah. After she had been there four months, ³ her husband went to her to persuade her to return. He had with him his servant and two donkeys. She took him into her parents' home, and when her father saw him, he gladly welcomed him. ⁴ His father-in-law, the woman's father, prevailed on him to stay; so he remained with him three days, eating and drinking, and sleeping there.

19:2-3 Went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back: Here the Levite was an example of how an offended spouse should act when there is adultery. Though she broke the bond between them, he worked hard to bring the relationship back together and succeeded.

19:3-4 When the father of the young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him: Perhaps the father was glad to see the Levite and his daughter back together or perhaps the father was simply glad to have his daughter out of his house again. Jesus told us that divorce is never commanded when there is adultery (Matthew 19:8). If a partner in marriage is sinned against by adultery, they should still work to make the marriage survive and succeed, up to the best of their ability.

The Father Of The Concubine Extends The Visit With A Traditionally Generous Show Of Hospitality – Verses 5-10

⁵ On the fourth day they got up early and he prepared to leave, but the woman's father said to his son-in-law, "Refresh yourself with something to eat; then you can go." ⁶ So the two of them sat down to eat and drink together. Afterward the woman's father said, "Please stay tonight and enjoy yourself." ⁷ And when the man got up to go, his father-in-law persuaded him, so he stayed there that night. ⁸ On the morning of the fifth day, when he rose to go, the woman's father said, "Refresh yourself. Wait till afternoon!" So the two of them ate together. ⁹ Then when the man, with his concubine and his servant, got up to leave, his father-in-law, the woman's father, said, "Now look, it's almost evening. Spend the night here; the day is nearly over. Stay and enjoy yourself. Early tomorrow morning you can get up and be on your way home." ¹⁰ But, unwilling to stay another night, the man left and went toward Jebus (that is, Jerusalem), with his two saddled donkeys and his concubine.

19:5 It came to pass on the fourth day: This portion explains why the Levite and his concubine were delayed in Bethlehem at the home of the concubine's father. He intended to leave on the fourth day but was persuaded to stay one more night.

19:8-10 So they delayed until afternoon: This explains why they left late in the day instead of early in the morning, which would normally be a more sensible time to depart for a long journey.

Returning Home, The Levite And The Concubine Spend The Night In Gibeah – Verses 11-15

¹¹ When they were near Jebus and the day was almost gone, the servant said to his master, "Come, let's stop at this city of the Jebusites and spend the night." ¹² His master replied, "No. We won't go into any city whose people are not Israelites. We will go on to Gibeah." ¹³ He added, "Come, let's try to reach Gibeah or Ramah and spend the night in one of those places." ¹⁴ So they went on, 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, but no one took them in for the night.

19:11-12 We will not turn aside here into a city of foreigners: The Levite and his concubine considered a pagan town too dangerous. They therefore went on to Gibeah, a city of Israel, because they thought they would be safer there.

19:14-15 No one would take them into his house to spend the night: The Levite and his concubine found no hospitality in Gibeah. This reflects poorly on the people of Gibeah because God commanded such hospitality among the people of God (Leviticus 19:33-34, Leviticus 25:35, Matthew 25:35, Hebrews 13:2). There is something wrong when there is no such hospitality among God's people.

Finally, a fellow Ephraimite finds them and extends hospitality – Verses 16-21

¹⁶ That evening an old man from the hill country of Ephraim, who was living in Gibeah (the inhabitants of the place were Benjamites), came in from his work in the fields. ¹⁷ When he looked and saw the traveler in the city square, the old man asked, "Where are you going? Where did you come from?" ¹⁸ He answered, "We are on our way from Bethlehem in Judah to a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim where I live. I have been to Bethlehem in Judah and now I am going to the house of the LORD.^[a] No one has taken me in for the night. ¹⁹ We have both straw and fodder for our donkeys and bread and wine for ourselves your servants—me, the woman and the young man with us. We don't need anything." ²⁰ "You are welcome at my house," the old man said. "Let me supply whatever you need. Only don't spend the night in

the square.”²¹ So he took him into his house and fed his donkeys. After they had washed their feet, they had something to eat and drink.

19:16-21 The only person to extend hospitality to the Levite and his concubine was a man from their own region. None of the native people of Gibeah cared for the strangers in their midst. But the men of the place were Benjamites — This was indeed one of the cities belonging to the priests; but the cities which were given to the priests, and whereof they were owners, were not inhabited by the priests or Levites only, especially at this time, when they were but few in number, but by many other persons of different professions.

Their Perverted Demand – Verse 22

²² While they were enjoying themselves, 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.”

19:22 Surrounded the house and beat on the door: The verb form of the term beat on the door indicates that there was an increasingly loud pounding on the door. This was in no way a polite or casual request.

19:22 Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally: Their request was the same made by the men who surrounded the house of Lot in Sodom (Genesis 19:5). The picture is clear: During the time of the Judges, Israel was as bad as Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Wickedness And Perversion Of The Men Of Gibeah – Verses 23-26

²³ The owner of the house went outside and said to them, “No, my friends, don’t be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don’t do this outrageous thing.²⁴ Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But as for this man, don’t do such an outrageous thing.”²⁵ But the men would not listen to him. So the man took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and they raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go.²⁶ At daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, fell down at the door and lay there until daylight.

19:23-26 Nowhere is the unwritten law of hospitality stronger than in the Middle East. Protecting a guest at any cost ranked at the top of a man’s code of honor. But here the hospitality code turned to fanaticism. The rape and abuse of a daughter and companion was preferable to the possibility of a conflict between a guest and a neighbor. The two men were selfish (they didn’t want to get hurt themselves); they lacked courage (they didn’t want to face a conflict even when lives were at stake); and they disobeyed God’s law (they allowed deliberate abuse and murder). What drastic consequences can result when social protocol carries more authority than moral convictions!

19:23-26 Centuries later, Israel still remembered this crime at Gibeah, and used it as an example of wickedness. They are deeply corrupted, as in the days of Gibeah (Hosea 9:9); O Israel, you have sinned from the days of Gibeah (Hosea 10:9)

The Levite Discovers His Dead Concubine And Issues A Call For National Judgment – Verses 27-30

²⁷ When her master got up in the morning and opened the door of the house and stepped out to continue on his way, 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. ³⁰ Everyone who saw it was saying to one another, “Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came up out of Egypt. Just imagine! We must do something! So speak up!”

19:27-30 Although this was a terrible way to spread the news, it effectively communicated the horror of the crime and called the people to action. Saul used a similar method in 1 Samuel 11:7. Ironically, the man who alerted Israel to the murder of his concubine was nearly as guilty for her death as the men who actually killed her.

19:30 The horrible crime described in this chapter wasn’t Israel’s worst offense. Even worse was the nation’s failure to establish a government based upon God’s moral principles, where the law of God was the law of the land. As a result, laws were usually not enforced and crime was ignored. Sexual perversion and lawlessness were by-products of Israel’s disobedience to God. The Israelites weren’t willing to speak up until events had gone too far.

19:30 Whenever we get away from God and his Word, all sorts of evil can follow. Our drifting away from God may be slow and almost imperceptible, with the ultimate results affecting a future generation. We must continually call our nation back to God and work toward the establishment of God’s moral and spiritual reign in the heart of every person.