



SESSION OBJECTIVE: JUDGES 19:1-20:7

To understand the depth of moral failure in Israel after the judges.

A Warning To the Reader

In this week's study of the book of Judges, we will encounter what is easily the most horrific story in the Old Testament (and that says a lot because there are a *lot* of rough stories). Judges 19 includes rape and physical violence, and given the current statistics of sexual abuse, this could potentially be triggering for some readers. The point of this story is to demonstrate the state of immorality that Israel has fallen to, and given the details of the story, we quickly discover it's *very* bad. This warning is not to scare you away, but simply to prepare you for what follows. We believe that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work," (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and thus it is profitable to study even something as difficult as this. However, there is also "a time for everything" (Ecc. 3:1), and the time to read something like this might not be right now for everyone.

We are drawing close to the end of Judges, and the need for a king to lead the people in obedience to God's commands has never been more needed. We are introduced to another Levite, that is, one who is from the tribe charged with the spiritual leadership of Israel. This is not the same Levite as the one we met in chapters 17 and 18, and we are not even given his name. This is intentional. The point of this story is to indicate that even the Levites were immoral individuals. This is illustrated by the fact that this Levite has a concubine that travels with him. Why is she called a concubine? Does this Levite have another legitimate wife? For whatever reason, she is not given the kind of dignity that a legitimate wife should receive, and though the Levite goes

after her when she returns to her father's house (Jg. 19:2-3), he still speaks with no compassion to her (Jg. 19:28). This story unveils many important truths, but more than anything, it signals that the moral quality of Israel was as bad as, if not worse than, the ungodly people of Canaan.

The Story Unfolds

Chapter 19 opens with a clear reminder that Israel has no king (Jg. 19:1). We are then given an introduction to another Levite, but with some notable differences from the Levite in the previous chapter. While Jonathan was from Bethlehem in Judah and visiting Ephraim (where Micah lived), this Levite is from Ephraim and travels to Bethlehem in Judah, and while there he “took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah” (Jg. 19:1). We learn that this concubine is unfaithful to him and returns to her father’s house, and it is there that the story begins.

A PUSHY HOST

The concubine apparently is at her father’s house for “four months” before the Levite goes after her. This seems careless at first, but keep in mind that in the ancient world, travel took a lot more time than it does for us today. Eventually the Levite goes to her father’s house to retrieve her, “and when the girl’s father saw him, he came with joy to meet him” (Jg. 19:3). This begins a humorous exchange of an overly excited host trying to hold up his guest. The father wants his guest to stay, and the Levite repeatedly tries to leave. On the fourth day, the Levite “arose early” and “prepared to go” but was hassled again to stay longer (Jg. 19:5). On the fifth day the Levite “arose early in the morning to depart,” but again was held up to stay “until the day declines” (Jg. 19:8). After a final appeal, and as it drew closer to evening, the Levite finally insisted on leaving with his concubine.

JEBUS

Not being able to travel far because of the time of day they departed, the Levite and his concubine and his servant end up in Jebus (that is, Jerusalem), which at this time is a Canaanite city. The servant insists on staying there overnight. Travel in the ancient world was dangerous, and night was especially dangerous due to night predators and bandits. However, the Levite refuses to stay because Jebus was “a city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel” (Jg. 19:12). This is an important passage for a couple of reasons. One, it signifies a kind of superiority that the Levite maintained over the pagan nations. However, why now? The Israelites had been living among the Canaanites and engaging in conversation with them for years now. Also, nothing is mentioned regarding the dominion that Israel was meant to have over Canaan, nor are any of the prohibitions from the Law mentioned to avoid Canaanites. Most importantly, is that the Levite looks down upon a foreigner city and instead chooses Gibeah (a city of the Benjaminites), and yet Gibeah will demonstrate a kind of immorality that not even Canaan was exhibiting.

The Crime in Gibeah

When they arrive in Gibeah, “no one took them into his house” and so they were forced to stay in the town square (Jg. 19:15). However, “an old man was coming from his work in the field at evening,” (Jg. 19:16) and invited them in to stay with him in his own home (Jg. 19:20-21). It is here that the drama unfolds.

THE CRIME

Verse 22 says, “As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house, beating on the door. And they said to the old man, the master of the house, ‘Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him.’” These men are described as “worthless fellows,” and their behaviors suggest this to be true. They begin to pressure the man of the house to surrender

the Levite that they might sexually violate him. At first, the reaction of the old man seems to be a man of upright moral standing in that he rebukes the men of the city for such vile behavior (Jg. 19:23). However, the tone quickly changes when he offers up his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine to them (Jg. 19:24). The men of the city are unwilling to listen to the old man, and in what seems like an act to just shut them up, the Levite "seized his concubine and made her go out to them" (Jg. 19:25a). The text says that "they used her and abused her all night until the morning, and as the dawn began to break, they let her go" (Jg. 19:25b). Verse 26 tells us that she mustered the strength to make it back to the house and collapsed at the door until it was light outside. It is there that she likely died as a result of the rape and abuse she experienced for several hours.

THE DISCOVERY

The Levite seems to be unconcerned with the previous night's events, and simply "rose up in the morning" and "went out to go on his way" (Jg. 19:27). He is almost bothered by the fact that his concubine is in the way. He harshly commands her to "get up," and when he discovers she is not alive, he picks her body up and places it on the donkey and returned home. Some commentators are unclear whether or not she was dead at this point, the Levite's testimony makes it fairly clear that this is the case (Jg. 20:5).

The Gruesome Aftermath

If this story wasn't evil enough, the last portion of it sends it over the edge. Verse 29 reads, "And when he entered his house, he took a knife, and taking hold of his concubine he divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel." The woman continues to be given zero dignity. First she is thrown to the town men to shut them up, she is brutally raped for an entire night, beaten, dies on a doorstep, and now even in death she is violated. Her body parts are sent to the twelve tribes of Israel. The question is, why? Verse 30 indicates that this was some kind of judgment against Gibeah: "And all who saw it said, 'Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day; consider it, take counsel, and speak.'" This crime was so bad that nothing compared to it since the Exodus.

This act sets the stage for chapter 20. It is there that "all the people of Israel" gathered to consider what had been done to the Levite's concubine in Gibeah, and what kind of judgment should be rendered upon the Benjaminites. The Levite gives testimony to what happened and asks the people of Israel to judge the Benjaminites (Jg. 20:1-7). There is no judge in the land. There is no king in the land. Matters are taken, then, into the hands of the community and what follows is not justice, but civil war.

What About Now?

One major takeaway is just how badly people need Godly leadership. The emphasis that there was no king during this time is intentional and telling; the people needed a king and because they didn't have one, they took matters into their own hands and it was very bad. Another major takeaway is the horror of sexual abuse. This story is not meant to leave the reader feeling joyful, but grieved. A woman was violated to death, and the man who should have protected her was complicit in it. Judges 19 should suck the air out of the room when it is read; that's its job. Sin should grieve us, and so it leaves us feeling puzzled when we read a story like this where no one else is grieved in it. This story also speaks to the long and horrific history that sexual abuse has. This is not a new sin for the modern world, but one that has plagued us for many thousands of years.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Judges 19:1-2. What disclaimer is given at the beginning of verse 1? Who is the character in this story, where is he from, and where did he go? What did his concubine do, and what happened after?
-
-

2. Read Judges 19:3-9. What did the Levite do when his concubine did not return? In your own words, describe the back and forth nature of the conversation between the Levite and his concubine's father.
-
-

Day Two

1. Read Judges 19:10-15. What did the Levite refuse to do? When did they depart, and where did first arrive? Why did the Levite not want to stay there? Where did they settle on instead?
-
-

2. Read Judges 19:16-21. Who found the Levite and his party in the town square? What did he say to them? Did they take him up on his offer?
-
-

Day Three

1. Read Judges 19:22-24. Who approached the house while they were inside together? What did the men of the city demand? What did the old man say to them? Who did he offer in the man's place?
-
-

2. Read Judges 19:25-26. How did the men of the city respond? What did the Levite do to appease them? What did the men do to the woman and where did she end up by morning?
-
-

Day Four

1. Read Judges 19:27-30. How did the Levite respond upon finding her on the floor? Where did he take her? What did he do with her body? How did the people of Israel respond?
-
-

2. Read Judges 20:1-7. In your own words, describe the events that take place in this passage, and summarize the Levite's testimony.
-
-

Week 16 Discussion: Sexual Abuse

This story in Judges is both extremely difficult to read and extremely important to digest as it reminds us of the prevalence of such insidious sin over the last several thousand years. The discussion of sexual abuse in the church is one that is not had enough. As a group, talk about this issue in as much detail and transparency as you feel comfortable.

*The following questions were written by Dr. James Reeves, creator and producer of **Fearless Series for Women**. As a growing expert in this field, Dr. Reeves has put a lot of thought into this issue and has much to offer as a result.*

1. Icebreaker: This story in Judges is an example of the sexual abuse of a woman of the worst kind, and it illustrates the reality that this kind of behavior has been with us for a very long time. There are, however, many less violent forms of sexual abuse. In your own estimation, what percentage of women in America will experience sexual abuse from birth to adulthood? What makes you think that is the percentage?
2. If this woman had lived, how do you think this experience of abuse would have affected her?
 - a. In her feeling about herself? Why?
 - b. In her feeling about men? Why?
 - c. In her feeling about God? Why?
3. Why do you think the Levite seemed so calloused about what happened to her?
4. Do you see any contradiction about him giving her up and then asking for judgement on the Benjaminites for what they did? Explain that contradiction.
5. How do men (and women) today often exemplify the same level of hypocrisy?
6. What should the role of Christian men and women be today to the plague of sexual abuse? What should we do? What can we do?

Takeaways:

1. The Levite and his concubine stay with her father, and then leave to the city of Gibeah.
2. The woman is violated and murdered.
3. The Levite divides her body into twelve pieces and sends the pieces to the tribes of Israel in judgment against Benjamin and the city of Gibeah.

PRAYER REQUESTS: