



Moral Crisis in Israel Judges 19

Introduction

Few chapters in the Bible are as somber as Judge 19. There are only two chapters which are similar, Genesis 19 and Romans 1. Yet horrible as they are, these incidents hold second place in terms of moral failure and violence to the crucifixion of our Lord at the hand of sinners.

The Bible tells the truth. It does not gloss over, disguise, or water down the depravity of mankind and its consequences. Many of the judges, though heroes who earned their place in Hebrew's Hall of Faith (Hebrews 11), had glaring defects, as did major saints down through the ages. None of us is perfect! Our old sin nature battles with our new nature until death. But through prayer, example, teaching, guidance, and moral and spiritual growth most of us are never as bad as we could be. Only a small percentage out of the mass of humanity reach a depth of degradation that is repugnant to the rest of us. Yet, these few serve to alert us to the awfulness of sin for which Christ paid the full penalty (1 Corinthians 15:3).

Outline of Judges Chapter 19

- I. The Levite Pursues His Concubine to Bethlehem – Judges 19:1-10
- II. The Levite Faces Perversion in Gibeah – Judges 19:11-24
- III. The Levite Sends a Message – Judges 19:25-30

I. The Levite Pursues His Concubine to Bethlehem - 19:1-10

This is the third mention of the fact that *in those days there was no king in Israel*. With no one in charge, evil went unchallenged and unchecked.

A. A Concubine from Bethlehem – Judges 19:1-2

A certain Levite could be the same one we have met from Micah's house, but he need not be. However, the mention of a Levite from Bethlehem who was staying in Mt. Ephraim seems highly coincidental.

Concubines were second wives who probably had no dowry. The relationship constituted polygamy which was not condoned by God. In addition, priests and Levites were called to a higher standard. The woman was either unfaithful to the Levite (KJV) or they had an argument (RSV) and she went home to her father.

B. A Reconciling Husband – Judges 19:3

After four months, the Levite followed her to Bethlehem *to speak kindly to her*, seeking reconciliation.

C. An Overly Hospitable Host – Judges 19:4-10

The Levite's father-in-law was delighted to see him and entertained him for three days. Finally, the Levite began to feel the need to leave. But on the fourth and fifth mornings, his host persuaded him to stay longer. *Let your heart be merry*. He stayed the fourth day and night and on the fifth day he delayed again, enjoying himself until the afternoon. He then gathered his concubine, servant, and donkeys to leave despite the continued urging of his host.

Have you ever delayed longer than you knew you should, either out of pressure or just because you were having such a good time? It takes a firm grip on your purpose and priorities to make a schedule and keep to it. There are emergencies and exceptions, of course. Schedules are not sacred, but they are agreements you make with yourself based on realistic planning and it is usually both disciplined but wise to keep them. God will help you.

II. The Levite Faces Perversion in Gibeah – Judges 19:11-24

A. Refusal to Stay in Non-Israelite City - Judges 19:10-13

The Levite departed even though it was late in the day and travelled the short distance to Jebus (later named Jerusalem). His servant suggested they stop for the night but the Levite refused, thinking it would be hostile and unsafe. Jebus had been given to the tribe of Judah as part of their inheritance (Joshua 18:16), but was still held by the Canaanites because the men of Judah had not been able to subdue them. David conquered the city and made it Jerusalem, the capital of the kingdom. The Levite, thinking that a pagan city would be more dangerous than an Israelite one, chose to press on to Gibeah, the city which later became the capital of Saul's kingdom.

B. Arrival in Gibeah - 19:14-16

Around sundown the threesome passed from the territory of Judah into the territory of Benjamin. Night was coming on as they arrived in Gibeah. They stopped in the main street where customarily travelers would

be invited to spend the night in someone's home. Either people ignored them or were already safe in their homes before dark.

No one approached them. At last, an old man arrived from work in the fields. He was not a Benjamite but coincidentally, had moved there from Mt. Ephraim.

C. Not So Safe in Gibeah - 19:17-21

The old man noticed the trio of strangers and asked where they were from and where they were going. The Levite told him they were coming from Bethlehem and going to Mt. Ephraim, his home. He explained that they had provisions for themselves and their animals but that no one had extended hospitality to them. The old man told them not to worry for he would take care of them. They must not stay out in the street.

Do you tend to think you will be better off with Christians than with non-Christians in business, social, and other dealings? In general this should be the case; however, it is not always so. Jesus spoke on one occasion about the children of this age being wiser than the children of light (Luke 16:8). Christians do not always do better than people who make no claim to true faith. Do you keep an open mind to those who are not in our fold and give them a chance to do you good? Abraham was embarrassed on one occasion because a non-Hebrew king behaved better than he. As we might say, Abraham was "shown up" (Genesis 20:9).

D. Trouble At the Door - 19:22-24

The travellers were enjoying themselves in the old man's house when there was a great commotion outside. *The men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door. They spoke to the master of the house saying, 'Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him.'* There are three important things to notice about this startling occurrence.

1. The men are described as *perverted* (literally *Sons of Belial*) - 19:22

Several times in Scripture, groups of people are called *sons of Belial*, *scoundrels*, *rebels*, *base fellows*, *wicked* or *worthless rogues* (Deuteronomy 13:13; 1 Samuel 2:12, 10:27, 25:17, 30:22; 1 Kings 21:10; 2 Chronicles 13:7). These are people who serve Satan's purposes by disruption, rebellion, and promoting evil.

2. They asked for the man that they might *know* him - 19:22

"Know" in this case does not mean "to be acquainted with" but rather is a reference to sexual intimacy. They

were horribly determined to use and abuse the man for their selfish gratification. They did not perceive him as a human being of value but as an object for satisfaction of their lustful craving. This particular behavior has always been considered by the majority of people to be depraved, heinous, and perverted.

3. Comparison to Lot in Sodom

Let us note similarities between this episode and the one of Lot and the angels in Sodom (Genesis 19:1-8).

- a. The travellers came at evening.
- b. They were invited into a home and urged not to stay in the street overnight.
- c. The guests were served and ate with the host.
- d. Men of the city surrounded the house.
- e. They demanded that the guests be brought out so that they could "know" them.
- f. Their behavior was called wicked or vile by the host.
- g. A woman from the house was offered instead.

The two incidents are so similar some people think they are one and the same event. But there are significant differences. In each case the people, geography, and outcome are different. No woman is abused in the first case but the concubine dies in the second. Both instances end in tragedy, the first in judgment and the second in a jolting cry for retaliation so that such a thing would not happen again.

4. Host's Offer of His Daughter and the Concubine - 19:24

The offer of the women by the hosts in Genesis and Judges is hard for us to understand. But there were reasons, and the reasons tell us much about the times.

- a. Lawlessness was prevalent.
- b. There was anarchy -- each person did what was right in his own eyes.
- c. The eastern custom was to protect guests.
- d. It was the choice of an alternative deed which was less deplorable, even if ever so slightly less.

E. A Vile Thing - 19:24

What did the old man call *a vile thing* and what was it that Lot called "wicked"? The obvious answer is homosexuality. Traditionally this was called sodomy, from the city (Sodom) which was infamous for its reputation and devastating judgment of God.

1. Not lack of hospitality

It has been asserted lately that the real crime which God condemned was not homosexuality but inhospitality. This disclaimer is so shallow, so distorts the facts, and so deflects the main lesson to be learned, that to refute it would be to give it a legitimacy that is thoroughly undeserved. It is also self-serving in that it is advanced by those who promote homosexuality. It is therefore biased in motive and questionable in purpose, to say the least.

2. A Worse Degree of Sin

What reasoning may lie behind the offering of women rather than the man to satisfy the lust of the men? Some assert that it was because women were regarded as of less value than men. Others maintain that the offense of homosexuality was even more reprehensible than heterosexual rape and so more to be avoided because of the retribution from God. A third reason is that they thought possibly the woman would not be acceptable to the men and might be rejected unharmed. If they thought this at all it proved to be naive.

Sodomy, the Biblical name for homosexuality, was the *vile thing* the old man referenced and the "wickedness" Lot alluded to. It is what the apostle Paul condemned in Romans 1:20-31 as *vile passions, against nature, and things which are not fitting*. It is what Jude termed *strange flesh* (Jude 7).

3. Forbidden Sexual Behavior

In His law, God explicitly and expressly forbade and condemned all sexual behavior outside of marriage. He still does. See Numbers 25:1-8; Matthew 5: 28,32; Acts 15:29; Romans 1:24-27, 6:19, 7:5; 1 Corinthians 6:18, 7:2, 10:8; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:16-24; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 2 Timothy 2:22; Hebrews 13:4; James 1:15; 1 Peter 2:11; and Jude 7.

III. The Levite Sends a Message – Judges 19:25-30

A. Concubine's Abuse - Judges 19:25

The men outside the house ignored the old man, took the Levite's concubine and abused her all night until the

morning. When day began to dawn they let her go.

People choose the cover of night most frequently for their evil deeds. Light is not their habitat. *Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil* (John 3:19). Paul said, *You are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of the night nor of darkness* (1 Thessalonians 5:5). After the evil men dropped her like a discarded thing, the concubine dragged herself toward the door and collapsed, her fingers on the threshold.

B. The Levite's Drastic Action - Judges 19:26-29

In the morning, when the Levite (one wonders if he slept well) went out to leave, he saw his concubine on the doorstep. His words seem unbelievably brutal and boorish. *Get up and let us be going*. Receiving no response he picked her up, put her over a donkey and took her body to his house. With a grim purpose, he cut her into pieces. The Biblical language reflects the dividing up of a sacrifice according to the bones. The Levite wrapped and sent the pieces to the twelve tribes by messengers.

C. Reaction of the Recipients - Judges 19:30

The grisly packages were meant to serve as an alarm. They stunned the people. Three things were said either by the people or more likely by the messengers. First, no such deed had been done since Israel left Egypt and became a nation. Second, they should give it thoughtful consideration. Third, they should take advice regarding action and then speak. Silence or neutrality was unacceptable.

D. God's Cleansing from Sin

All sin is forgivable. Sin can be forsaken and a new life begun. This is the meaning of conversion, "to turn around". The unforgivable sin is rejection of the means of forgiveness, that is, believing and turning to Christ as one's personal Savior, Redeemer, and Lord. King David committed adultery and murder, Peter blasphemed his Master, and Paul persecuted Jesus Christ by imprisoning Christians and having them beaten (Acts 9:4). All were forgiven and cleansed. Each went on to do great things for God. Other examples abound. Some of the greatest saints were formerly the worst sinners. The sin of homosexuality seems to be a particularly stubborn one to let go of, but Christ promises complete victory, sometimes suddenly, sometimes as a process. If this sin is a problem to you, will you read thoughtfully and carefully Romans 5:1-8, 8:28-39 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-20? Then take these promises to God in prayer as you would take a check to the bank to cash. Tell Him you believe that they are for you and that you take them with praise and thanksgiving for His grace.

Applications

1. Are you craving or scheming for something which is forbidden by God? Confess this as sin and ask Him to deliver you from its power. Christ died for you to give you new emotions, new desires, and new ways of perceiving yourself, the world, and others. Will you take His power to live a pure and godly life (2 Corinthians 5:17)?
2. Are you facing difficulties because of poor choices? If so, confess these unwise decisions to the Lord, take His

forgiveness and seek His direction. He wants to guide you out of the current situation and into His will. Will you choose to believe and follow Him?

3. Are you side-tracked from your goals by well-meaning friends? If so, use self-discipline to plan your work and then work your plan. What step will you take today to see how helpful this can be? How will you trust the Holy Spirit to help you?

QUESTIONS

Questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Read all notes and references.

1. ? (Thought Question) Name some of the sins that led up to the travelers spending the night at Gibeah.
2. What three things were said when the 12 tribes received the package and message from the Levite?

DAY TWO: Read Judges 20:1-14.

3. a. From verses 1 and 2, what was the result of the Levite's alarming action?
b. What did all the people of Israel want to know?
c. ★ (Memory Question) Was the Levite's description of what happened totally truthful? If not, in what way(s) was it not?
4. What did all the people decide to do after hearing the Levite? Circle the correct answers.
return home repay the vileness Benjamin had done go up against Gibeah
find another concubine for the Levite assemble an army fast and pray
5. a. What did the tribes do before going up against Gibeah?
b. Did the people of Benjamin listen? What did they do?

DAY THREE: Read Judges 20:15-25.

6. What was the size of each army?
Benjamin
Israel
7. a. What did the tribes of Israel do before the battle?
b. What answer did they receive?
c. What was the result of the battle?
8. What did the Israelites do after the battle? Circle T (True) or F (False). If the answer is true, give the verse where it is found.
 - a. T or F vs. ____ They all went home.
 - b. T or F vs. ____ They formed a battle line.
 - c. T or F vs. ____ They cursed God.
 - d. T or F vs. ____ They encouraged themselves.
 - e. T or F vs. ____ They asked counsel from God.
 - f. T or F vs. ____ They wept.

g. What did God tell them to do?

9. What happened on the second day?

DAY FOUR: Read Judges 20:26-35.

10. a. List five things the people of Israel did next.

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b. How did God encourage them?

11. a. What strategy did the people of Israel use this time?

b. What was the result?

12. Fill in the blank. _____ defeated Benjamin before Israel.

DAY FIVE: Read Judges 20:36-48.

13. a. Using the following verses, describe the Benjamites thoughts and feelings.

Judges 20:36

Judges 20:39

Judges 20:41

b. In verses 44 and 46, what kind of soldiers were the Benjamites?

14. a. How many of men of Benjamin escaped?

b. Referring back to verse 15, how many men of Benjamin had been killed in the three days of battle?

15. a. What do you think caused the tribes of Israel to win?

b. What do you think caused Benjamin to lose?

c. What lesson do you learn from this?