

## Judges 19 – “Immorality Insanity”

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To close out the book of Judah, we come to one more story that if you're not familiar with it will leave you gasping in shock and horror. We're not talking about Israel needing to be delivered and saved from enemies on the outside, we're dealing with Israel needing to be delivered and saved from themselves. But we're no longer looking at the deliverers or judges in Israel. Samson ended our list of judges. Now everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes. To illustrate this, the author of Judges puts these two stories at the end of Judges. They reveal the corruption taking place within Israel.

Chapters 17-18 deal with the issue of corruption through idolatry.

Chapters 19-21 deal with the issue of corruption through immorality. And this gross immorality perpetrated by the Israelites against their own led to a civil war.

- These two stories most likely are not chronological in the timeline of the judges. They're used to conclude the book and give the sad sordid state of Israel.
- **Judges 17:6** gives the condition of Israel: *"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."*
- That phrase, *'In those days there was no king in Israel'* is repeated 4 times in the last 5 chapters and it's only mentioned in these chapters (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). It's giving the reader the understanding that nobody is under any authority in Israel.
- The issue isn't that there was no king, the issue is that they weren't seeing God as their King. They were to be a theocratic nation – ruled by God. But nobody is looking to come under His authority. That's clearly seen in these two stories that conclude the book of Judges.

### 1. A Levite and His Estranged Concubine – 19:1-10

**19:1-2 - *And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote mountains of Ephraim. He took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. <sup>2</sup> But his concubine played the harlot against him, and went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there four whole months.***

We're again reminded right off the bat of the condition in Israel. There was no king in these days. This is meant to show that there was no rule. They should

have been under God's rule, they should have been allowing His law to rule their hearts, but this wasn't happening.

And the main character of this story is this anonymous Levite, just as it was a Levite in the previous story (Chs. 17-18).

This Levite takes for himself a concubine. A concubine was like a second wife and was a socially accepted practice in the Middle East. Legally however, a concubine was always subordinate to the man, and they were often held in lower esteem than the wife.

- Though this may have been a socially accepted practice, and though we read in the Bible of various Godly men taking concubines, it was never something God ordained. He made marriage to be a monogamous relationship between one man and one woman to be one flesh (Gen 2:24).
- This Levite is going against God's standard for marriage.

The Levites were the priestly tribe. They were to be the ones upholding God's law and helping the rest of the nation walk in obedience to it. They were to be the examples of holiness and encourage the people to live in holiness before God.

- So what these stories really illustrate for us is that this sin and wickedness has infiltrated through the nation as a whole. As goes the leadership, so goes the nation.

Now we're not sure what went on in this relationship, but we can imagine it was not good. She ends up sleeping around, playing the harlot against him, and leaving him.

She's gone for four months at her father's home. Is this Levite taking 4 months to contemplate if he even wants her back? He's weighing the pros and cons and then finally decides to go get her back.

- So often when people seek those things which are not of God, it brings trouble and pain. God doesn't say no to these things to keep you suppressed and depressed. He says no because He knows the harm and hurt that will inevitably come from that which is not of Him.

**19:3-4 - *Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back, having his servant and a couple of donkeys with him. So she brought him into her father's house; and when the father of the young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him. <sup>4</sup> Now his father-in-law,***

***the young woman's father, detained him; and he stayed with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there.***

This Levite perhaps was not speaking kindly to her and thus caused her to leave. He comes to her determining to speak kindly now and win her back.

He has two donkeys with him with which he's expecting her to return with him.

Now the father of the concubine is ***glad to meet him*** and invites him in. This may seem odd if his daughter is trying to get away from this guy. But this was very normal code of hospitality that was the rule of the day. In fact, hospitality is going to be a reoccurring theme in this chapter. It was a sacred duty in the ancient Near East.

Now this whole scene is a little odd. They ate and drank and lodged together for three days. It's almost like they're having a celebration. But there's nothing to celebrate. This woman is committing adultery. The Levite committed adultery in taking her as his concubine. The relationship is fractured. There's a lot of wrongs taking place. But here they are having a party like nothing is wrong.

- Some speculation has been made that perhaps the father-in-law is trying to win the Levite over. Remember, in this day the punishment for adultery was death (Lev. 20:10). He could have thought that the Levite wanted to bring this justice upon his concubine.
- Some have suggested that the father-in-law was trying to keep the Levite around to bring his own daughter under that guidance of holiness; bring some spiritual stability to his daughter's immoral ways. Though that spiritual stability seems to be long gone from the Levite himself.
- Perhaps the father was just trying to mediate their dispute and bring them back to a reconciled relationship.

Whatever the case, this stay gets extended beyond the time it needed to be which will lead to some bad decisions.

***19:5-10 - Then it came to pass on the fourth day that they arose early in the morning, and he stood to depart; but the young woman's father said to his son-in-law, "Refresh your heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way." <sup>6</sup> So they sat down, and the two of them ate and drank together. Then the young woman's father said to the man, "Please be content to stay all night, and let your heart be merry." <sup>7</sup> And when the man stood to depart, his father-in-law urged him; so he lodged there again. <sup>8</sup> Then he arose early***

***in the morning on the fifth day to depart, but the young woman's father said, "Please refresh your heart." So they delayed until afternoon; and both of them ate. <sup>9</sup> And when the man stood to depart—he and his concubine and his servant—his father-in-law, the young woman's father, said to him, "Look, the day is now drawing toward evening; please spend the night. See, the day is coming to an end; lodge here, that your heart may be merry. Tomorrow go your way early, so that you may get home."<sup>10</sup> However, the man was not willing to spend that night; so he rose and departed, and came opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). With him were the two saddled donkeys; his concubine was also with him.***

The Levite finally has enough of this family reunion and leaves. But by this time it's already getting late in the day. So they start their journey and look for a place to spend the night.

## 2. Looking For A Safe Haven – 19:11-21

***19:11-13 - They were near Jebus, and the day was far spent; and the servant said to his master, "Come, please, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and lodge in it."<sup>12</sup> But his master said to him, "We will not turn aside here into a city of foreigners, who are not of the children of Israel; we will go on to Gibeah."<sup>13</sup> So he said to his servant, "Come, let us draw near to one of these places, and spend the night in Gibeah or in Ramah."***

Jebus is Jerusalem. At this time it was occupied by the Jebusites. It didn't come under Israel control until the time of King David.

Jerusalem was about 5 miles from Bethlehem. Though it would have been the easiest stop to find lodging, the Levite doesn't want to stay there because it's occupied by foreigners. He doesn't think it's safe.

- Yet we will see how when the nation forsakes their moral compass and turns their back on God, there is no safe place to be found.

They decide to move on to Gibeah or Ramah. Gibeah was another 3 miles from Jerusalem and Ramah 2 more miles from Gibeah.

***19:14-15 - And they passed by and went their way; and the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin. <sup>15</sup> They turned aside there to go in to lodge in Gibeah. And when he went in, he sat down in the***

***open square of the city, for no one would take them into his house to spend the night.***

They make it to Gibeah but are forced to stay there because of darkness. What's strange is that as they go into the open square, which was common practice for people to do to let the inhabitants know your need as a visitor, ***no one would take them into his house.***

This isn't super problematic in our day, especially when we don't always know the intent or character of a stranger. But in this day, this would have been shocking because the hospitality code was of utmost importance.

Again, hospitality is a big theme in this chapter. Hospitality is something God instructed.

- **Leviticus 19:33–34**, *"And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. <sup>34</sup> The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."*
- This was an intricate part of the culture then as it is today in the Middle East. They were to be hospitable to the foreigner, but we're not even dealing with a foreigner. We're talking about their own countrymen. They ignored one of their own. And of all people in Israel, the Levites were to be given special consideration
- But since their love for God diminished, so too their love for others.
- Jesus warned of this happening in the last days. **Matthew 24:12**, *"And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold."*
- We certainly see this happening today with the way people are treated and attacked without provocation.

Now something interesting to note, the town where this Levite was shown good hospitality was in Bethlehem – the hometown of King David.

The town where he wasn't initially shown hospitality is in Gibeah – the hometown of King Saul.

- It seems these are being given to foreshadow the differences of character between these two kings.

***19:16-19 - Just then an old man came in from his work in the field at evening, who also was from the mountains of Ephraim; he was staying in Gibeah, whereas the men of the place were Benjamites. <sup>17</sup> And when he raised his eyes, he saw the traveler in the open square of the city; and the old man said, "Where are you going, and where do you come from?" <sup>18</sup> So***

***he said to him, “We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah toward the remote mountains of Ephraim; I am from there. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; now I am going to the house of the Lord. But there is no one who will take me into his house, <sup>19</sup> although we have both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and bread and wine for myself, for your female servant, and for the young man who is with your servant; there is no lack of anything.”***

As this visiting party is waiting in the open square, an old man came in from his work in the field. He’s not a Benjamite, he’s from the mountains of Ephraim, just like this Levite.

The old man sees the Levite and knows he’s a traveller, so he asks some information from him.

The Levite lets the old man know that they’re not in need of anything. They have all their necessary provisions, even for their donkeys. They’re just looking for some shelter.

- This kind of makes the sin of the inhabitants of Gibeah even worse. These travelers weren’t looking to take anything from anyone, they just needed a place to hunker down for the night.

***19:20-21 - And the old man said, “Peace be with you! However, let all your needs be my responsibility; only do not spend the night in the open square.” <sup>21</sup> So he brought him into his house, and gave fodder to the donkeys. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.***

This old man brings these strangers into his home and blesses them. Their needs became his responsibility.

- This area of hospitality is such an important ministry. It’s something we’ve lost touch with in our culture today.
- **1 John 3:17–18**, *"But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? <sup>18</sup> My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."*

### 3. Immorality Incarnate – 19:22-25

***19:22 - As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house and beat on the door. They spoke to***

***the master of the house, the old man, saying, “Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally!”***

The scene quickly changes in a horrifying way. Men of the city came to the old man’s house knowing he was entertaining strangers. They’re referred to as ***perverted men***, which is translated as *sons of Belial*. Belial is another name for Satan (**2 Corinthians 6:15**, *“And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?”*)

These perverted men want to know this Levite carnally, meaning they want to have sex with him. This is all so reminiscent of the scene in Sodom where the angels came to Lot’s home to rescue him. And the men of the city asked Lot to release these men so that they may know them carnally (Genesis 19:4-5).

- It was indicative of the sin in that place that warranted the judgment of God.
- We’re seeing the same thing happening here in Gibeah. Except the perpetrators are not Canaanites, they’re Israelites! How far they have fallen in such a short time.
- George Williams observes: It would have been better for the Levite to have spent the night with the heathen than with the professed children of God, for the latter had already become viler than the former. <sup>15</sup> <sup>1</sup>

***19:23-24 - But the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, “No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act so wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage. <sup>24</sup> Look, here is my virgin daughter and the man’s concubine; let me bring them out now. Humble them, and do with them as you please; but to this man do not do such a vile thing!”***

We read this and we wonder how someone could offer up such a wicked solution; to give his own virgin daughter and the Levite’s concubine??

- But again, the law of hospitality was so strong that to have someone under your roof and under your care meant you were absolutely responsible for his safety.
- And this situation shows the low status of women in this day. They were void of any rights.

<sup>15</sup> George Williams, *The Student’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, p. 132.

<sup>1</sup> MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 284). Thomas Nelson.

- This man saw giving up these women as a lesser violation of giving up the Levite. But in this case there's no lesser violation. It's all sin! It's all wrong. And he should have stood his ground in opposition to these wicked men.

Instead, the old man invites these wicked men to *do with them as you please* – in other words, do whatever is right in your own eyes. This is how the culture was living in this day.

This man, and the Levite, showed a callousness to the sin of these perverted men. They were willing to put innocent lives at risk to protect their own honour. This old man upheld the code of hospitality at a greater value than the code of the care and protection of the weak and vulnerable. This Levite was ready to dismiss his concubine for his own protection and safety. Everybody in this story is doing what is right in their own eyes.

**19:25 - *But the men would not heed him. So the man took his concubine and brought her out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until morning; and when the day began to break, they let her go.***

What a tragic story. The Bible does not hold back on the sordid story that sin causes.

Thankfully, wherever the gospel has gone, women have been wonderfully liberated. People have a distorted view of the Bible and think it promotes or condones actions like this. That's not true. The Bible simply shares in real time the kind of sin that was pervasive to show the depravity of humanity and the need for a Saviour. Ultimately it reveals what we can be in and through Christ.

- **Galatians 3:28**, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

#### 4. Consider, Confer, Call Out – 19:26-30

**19:26-27 - *Then the woman came as the day was dawning, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, till it was light. <sup>27</sup> When her master arose in the morning, and opened the doors of the house and went out to go his way, there was his concubine, fallen at the door of the house with her hands on the threshold.***

What is so sad in this whole account is the seeming indifference of the Levite. He knows this woman has been out all night as prey to these wicked men. And it seems he's just been inside enjoying a good night's sleep. It's reprehensible.



He doesn't even come out until it's full daylight. She's been collapsed on the threshold of the house since dawn.

**19:28 - *And he said to her, "Get up and let us be going." But there was no answer. So the man lifted her onto the donkey; and the man got up and went to his place.***

When the Levite comes out, he just callously tells her to get up, they've got to continue their journey home. There's no concern or compassion for what she's just been through.

When she doesn't answer he just picks her up and heads home.

- We're not even sure if she was dead at this point or just unconscious. We don't know how many men she's been abused by. There's lots of questions unanswered.

**19:29-30 - *When he entered his house he took a knife, laid hold of his concubine, and divided her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. <sup>30</sup> And so it was that all who saw it said, "No such deed has been done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it, confer, and speak up!"***

Some commentaries have been open to the idea that this Levite was actually her murderer. We're just not sure. When it says he ***laid hold*** of her, that term expresses a forcefulness. It may be that she resisted to some degree in the weakened state she was. This is just a possibility.

Nevertheless, she is divided up into twelve pieces to send to the tribes of Israel.

When everybody saw this, their conclusion was appropriate – ***no such deed has been done or seen*** up to this point in Israel. They were shocked.

- We've seen not just an inhospitable individual, but a whole town. We've seen the homosexual desires of a selfish mob, we've seen the horrendous abuse of an individual leading to the desecration of her body. This is beyond comprehension.

This Levite sends his concubine around Israel to rally them to revenge. He wants to see justice. But there can be no proper justice because everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes. They want to take action and right these wrongs, as we'll see in the following chapters, but their moral action is based on their societal norms. But right morality comes from God, the true Law Giver.

So there will be no true justice if they do not allow God to rule over them. This is the state of Israel at this point. It's the state of a society that dismisses God as their authority.

This account is talked about by Hosea as being the epitome of Israel's corruption:

- **Hosea 9:9**, *"They are deeply corrupted, As in the days of Gibeah. He will remember their iniquity; He will punish their sins."*
- **Hosea 10:9**, *"O Israel, you have sinned from the days of Gibeah; There they stood. The battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity Did not overtake them."*

Again, it didn't have to be this way for Israel. God had something better for them, but it would come from a life of obedience. Doing what is right in your own eyes is a recipe for disaster. May we always seek to do what is right in God's eyes.

#### Points to Ponder:

1. Are you investing into your marriage? Are you securing the right kind of atmosphere for this relationship to flourish?
2. What is your attitude when it comes to being hospitable? The Word of God has a lot to say about this. **1 Peter 4:9**, *"Be hospitable to one another without grumbling."* (cf. Hebrews 13:2).
3. When you see the wickedness in the world, are you considering the harm of it and speaking up? It's easy to get numb to the violence and evil, but may we never turn a blind eye or deaf ear to the atrocities being committed.