

Judges

Chapter 19

A Levite and His Concubine

In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. 2 And his concubine was unfaithful to him, and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there some four months. 3 Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys. And she brought him into her father's house. And when the girl's father saw him, he came with joy to meet him. 4 And his father-in-law, the girl's father, made him stay, and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and spent the night there. 5 And on the fourth day they arose early in the morning, and he prepared to go, but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Strengthen your heart with a morsel of bread, and after that you may go." 6 So the two of them sat and ate and drank together. And the girl's father said to the man, "Be pleased to spend the night, and let your heart be merry." 7 And when the man rose up to go, his father-in-law pressed him, till he spent the night there again. 8 And on the fifth day he arose early in the morning to depart. And the girl's father said, "Strengthen your heart and wait until the day declines." So they ate, both of them. 9 And when the man and his concubine and his servant rose up to depart, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, "Behold, now the day has waned toward evening. Please, spend the night. Behold, the day draws to its close. Lodge here and let your heart be merry, and tomorrow you shall arise early in the morning for your journey, and go home." 10 But the man would not spend the night. He rose up and departed and arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). He had with him a couple of saddled donkeys, and his concubine was with him. 11 When they were near Jebus, the day was nearly over, and the servant said to his master, "Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it." 12 And his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel, but we will pass on to Gibeah." 13 And he said to his young man, "Come and let us draw near to one of these places and spend the night at Gibeah or at Ramah." 14 So they passed on and went their way. And the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, 15 and they turned aside there, to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. And he went in and sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night. 16 And behold, an old man was coming from his work in the field at evening. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was sojourning in Gibeah. The men of the place were Benjaminites. 17 And he lifted up his eyes and 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?" 18 And he said to him, "We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to the house of the LORD, but no one has taken me into his house. 19 We have straw and feed for our donkeys, with bread and wine for me and your female servant and the young man with your servants. There is no lack of anything." 20 And the old man said, "Peace be to you; I will care for all your wants. Only, do not spend the night in the square." 21 So he brought him into his house and gave the donkeys feed. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

19:1–21:25 The second episode of the epilogue. It illustrates Israel's moral corruption by telling of the degenerate act of the men of Gibeah—an act remembered centuries later (Hos 9:9; 10:9). Although that town showed itself to be as wicked as any Canaanite town, it was defended by the rest of the tribe of

Benjamin against the Lord's discipline through the Israelites, until nearly the whole tribe was destroyed. (CSB)

19:1–30 An account of an Israelite town that revived the ways of Sodom (see Ge 19). (CSB)

19:1 *Levite*. Unlike the Levite of chs. 17–18, this man is not named. (CSB)

This Levite was another itinerant, “sojourning” outside the cities that were the inheritance of his tribe (cf 17:7). (TLSB)

19:2 *unfaithful*. Being a concubine was lawful (see pp 54–55). Her unfaithfulness constituted adultery. (TLSB)

went away. She may have fled to escape the death penalty (Lv 20:10). (TLSB)

19:3 *a couple of donkeys*. To bring his concubine home with him. (TLSB)

brought him in. The separation of the concubine from the Levite was probably a matter of family disgrace, and so his father-in-law was glad for the prospect of the two being reunited. (CSB)

The father would have been disgraced if his daughter remained separated from her husband. (TLSB)

19:4 Elaborate and leisurely hospitality of the culture contrasts with the violations described later (vv 22–30). (TLSB)

19:5–9 Extreme hospitality may have been the father's attempt to make up with the man for his daughter's misbehavior. (TLSB)

19:10 *the man would not spend the night*. He needed to leave, but the insistent hospitality of his father-in-law meant that he could travel only a short distance before nightfall. (TLSB)

Jebus. Occupied by the Jebusites. (TLSB)

19:12 *city of foreigners*. With the city under the control of the Jebusites, the Levite was afraid that he would receive no hospitality and might be in mortal danger. (CSB)

He did not feel safe trusting the hospitality of the Jebusites, preferring to stay with fellow Israelites. (TLSB)

19:13–15 *no one took them*. Ironic, given his feelings about the Jebusites (v 12). The town square was the social center of the community, but none of the Benjaminites extended their hospitality, an unspeakable breach of etiquette in that culture. (TLSB)

19:14 *Gibeah in Benjamin*. Distinguished from the Gibeah in Judah (Jos 15:20, 57) and the Gibeah in the hill country of Ephraim (Jos 24:33). As the political capital of Saul's kingdom, it is called Gibeah of Saul in 1Sa 11:4; see also 1Sa 13:15. (CSB)

19:16 *sojourning in Gibeah*. The old man was not a Benjaminite but an Ephraimite, the tribe with whom the Levite himself lived (v 1). He may have been temporarily doing business with the Benjaminites. (TLSB)

19:18 *house of the LORD.* Apparently the Levite was planning to go to Shiloh (see 18:31; Jos 18:1) to present a thank offering to the Lord or a sin offering for himself and his concubine. (CSB)

The Levite intended to go to Shiloh, c 24 mi away, where the tabernacle was located. Perhaps he would offer a sacrifice for the reconciliation he made with his concubine. (TLSB)

19:20–21 *Peace be to you.* Common Israelite greeting. (TLSB)

his house. Though a temporary resident, the old man had established a home in the city and exceeded the Levite's expectation of hospitality. (TLSB)

19:21 *washed their feet.* An evidence of hospitality in the ancient Near East, where travelers commonly wore sandals as they walked the dusty roads (see Ge 18:4; 24:32; 43:24; Lk 7:44; Jn 13:5–14). (CSB)

19:1–21 A Levite travels to find his concubine. Though the woman has sinned, the family makes a great effort to be reconciled. Such sins still wound and divide families today. Through the prayers and encouragement we share, the Lord works to restore broken relationships and bring healing. • O Lord, help us to love our family members, even those who sin against us, and to extend Your love to those who need our hospitality, through Christ, our Lord. Amen. (TLSB)

Gibeah's Crime

22 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." **23** And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing. **24** Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out now. Violate them and do with them what seems good to you, but against this man do not do this outrageous thing." **25** But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go. **26** And as morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, until it was light. **27** And her master rose up in the morning, and when he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, behold, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. **28** He said to her, "Get up, let us be going." But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey, and the man rose up and went away to his home. **29** 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. **30** 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."

19:22–26 In the events that followed, no one acted rightly, illustrating how wicked Israel had become. Cf Gn 6:5. (TLSB)

19:22 *making ... merry.* Probably drinking. Cf Ps 104:15. (TLSB)

worthless fellows. The Hebrew for this expression refers to the morally depraved. Elsewhere the expression is associated with idolatry (Dt 13:13), drunkenness (1Sa 1:16) and rebellion (1Sa 2:12). Here the reference is to homosexuality. (CSB)

Rulers of the city made no attempt to curb or punish the mob of rabble-rousers, so the whole community was implicated in the crime. (TL SB)

master of the house. Responsible for his guests. (TL SB)

Bring out the man. The sexual perversion of these wicked men is yet another example of the decadence of an age when “everyone did as he saw fit” (17:6; 21:25). A similar request was made by the men of Sodom (Ge 19:5). Homosexuality was common among the Canaanites. (CSB)

The writer uses a polite way to say they wanted to have sex with the man. Cf Gn 4:1. (TL SB)

19:23 *my brothers.* The Benjaminites, who were to be God’s own people, replayed the sin of Sodom (Gn 19:4–11). (TL SB)

don’t be so vile. An expression of outrage at the willful perversion of what is right and natural (see Ge 19:7; 2Sa 13:12; see also Ro 1:27). (CSB)

The Ephraimite recognized the sinful character of the men’s request. (TL SB)

19:24 *my virgin daughter, and his concubine.* The tragedy of this story lies not only in the decadence of Gibeah, but also in the callous selfishness of men who would betray defenseless women to be brutally violated for a whole night. Cf. Ge 19:8, where Lot offered his two daughters to the men of Sodom. (CSB)

Shockingly, the old man put the obligations of hospitality above everything else, even the safety of his own daughter and his guest’s wife. (TL SB)

Violate them. The man clearly recognized the sinful character of the illicit sexual relations he suggested. (TL SB)

outrageous thing. Homosexual rape was esp abhorrent to the old man. (TL SB)

19:25 *the man.* The Levite. (TL SB)

took. Here the Hebrew for this verb suggests taking by force. (CSB)

Despite the Levite’s earlier interest in being reconciled to his concubine, in apparent fear for his life, he turned her over to the mob. His actions and attitude here may explain why she had been unfaithful to him (cf v 28) or may indicate that he had not truly forgiven her. The Ephraimite’s daughter was not forced to go out, perhaps the one point of mercy in the entire story. (TL SB)

knew her and abused her. Rape and likely other acts of violence (cf v 26). (TL SB)

19:26 *her master.* Her husband, the Levite, who was responsible for her but showed a sinful callousness and lack of courage in abandoning her. (TL SB)

19:27 *hands on the threshold.* Pathetically reaching out her arms for help. (TL SB)

19:28 *Get up.* Colder words have rarely been spoken. (TL SB)

no answer. She was possibly unconscious but most likely had died from the abuse she suffered. (TL SB)

put her on the donkey. Not an act of kindness but part of a plan (vv 29–30). (TLSB)

19:29 *cut up his concubine.* Dismembering the concubine's body and sending parts to each of the 12 tribes was intended to awaken Israel from its moral lethargy and to marshal the tribes to face up to their responsibility. It is ironic that the one who issued such a call was himself so selfish and insensitive. See also Saul's similar action in 1Sa 11:7. (CSB)

The Levite, who would have had experience dismembering animal sacrifices, cut up her body in the same way. (TLSB)

sent her. The 12 pieces were delivered to the 12 tribes of Israel (which would include Benjamin) so that all could see with their own eyes the results of this monstrous, repulsive crime. The writer does not clearly explain the Levite's motives or what message accompanied the packages. Given his callousness toward his concubine and his treatment of her body, he shows no remorse but coldly reports the horror that had taken place. The reader is left to contemplate the meaning of it all and how to respond (cf v 30b). (TLSB)

19:30 *never happened.* Israelites show a keen sense for history and precedent. Same sorts of things had not taken place since the exodus (perhaps a few generations earlier), though they had happened to Lot's family c 1,000 years earlier (Gn 19:1–11). (TLSB)

consider it, take counsel, and speak. The deed was unspeakably horrible, and the people realized that something must be done. They could not immediately reach a course of action. (TLSB)

19:22–30 The violent death of a Levite's concubine illustrates the low point of wickedness during this period in Israel's history. Consider that such horrors happen still today and are even promoted under the guise of sexual or artistic freedom. Lord, have pity! Deliver the Church, Your Bride, from evil. • Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. (TLSB)