

Judges

Chapter 19

A Levite and His Concubine

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. ² But she was unfaithful to him. She left him and went back to her father's house 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 father's house, and when her father saw him, he gladly welcomed him. ⁴ His father-in-law, the girl's father, prevailed upon him to stay; so he remained with him three days, eating and drinking, and sleeping there. ⁵ On the fourth day they got up early and he prepared to leave, but the girl'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 girl'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 girl'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 girl'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. 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 an alien 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 into his home for the night. ¹⁶ That evening an old man from the hill country of Ephraim, who was living in Gibeah (the men 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. No one has taken me into his house. ¹⁹ We have both straw and fodder for our donkeys and bread and wine for ourselves your servants—me, your maidservant, 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. 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.”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 disgraceful 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 to this man, don’t do such a disgraceful 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.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 said, “Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came up out of Egypt. Think about it! Consider it! Tell us what to do!”

19:1–21:25 The second episode of the epilogue (see note on 17:1–18:31). 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)

concubine. See note on Ge 25:6. (CSB)

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)

gladly welcomed him. 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. See 1:21; see also note on Ge 10:16. (CSB)

Occupied by the Jebusites. (TLSB)

19:12 *alien city.* 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)

19:15 *took them into his home.* See notes on 13:15; Ge 18:2. (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)

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)

wicked men. The Hebrew for this expression refers to the morally depraved (see note on Dt 13:13). 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. (TLSB)

master of the house. Responsible for his guests. (TLSB)

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. (TLSB)

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

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. (TLSB)

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. (TLSB)

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

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

19:25 *the man.* The Levite. (TLSB)

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. (TLSB)

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

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. (TLSB)

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

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

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

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)