

Judges Chapter 19

Judges is Scripture. It is the Word of God. Yet, there are passages that people have difficulty with. This is one of those. It includes rape and the dismemberment of a human body. It is gruesome. The grotesqueness of the sin nature is on display.

This week, we start the last episode of the book of Judges. There are many perspectives we could look at to highlight specific actions taken in the book. For this last episode, I want to emphasize the time of the Judges as preparation for the coming kings. As much as I would like to say the first official king of Israel was David, it was actually Saul. But there in lies a lesson: God gave Israel the king it wanted, not the king it needed. By so doing, He demonstrated what a bad king who operated on the basis of human viewpoint. could do and what a good king would accomplish. The judges set the stage for Saul. Saul set the stage for David.

In the book of Judges, the narrative starts out with success and good examples. Judah is a successful tribe. Othniel, the first judge, is the model of a good judge. He is the best judge in the book of Judges. He knows what to do and does it. Hence, there is little fanfare in the text with details. He was from the tribe of Judah. That tribe formed an alliance with the tribe of Simeon to possess the conquered land which was their inheritance. There is strength in numbers. United Israel under Joshua was very successful in conquering the land. So Simeon and Judah took possession of their land, their inheritance. Judah even conquers Jebus, later known as Jerusalem although the Jebusites still remained until king David's day.

All through the book of Judges, the people do what is right in their own eyes, in other words, engaging in anti-God covenant breaking practices.

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They abandon God. Then they get in trouble. It is only when God provides a judge, that there is “adult” leadership. Success under Moses and Joshua. Strong leadership is apparently what they require. The book of Judges demonstrates that.

So, this book starts with the success of Judah and deteriorates in this final episode into the abyss of immorality of the tribe of Benjamin. One commentator calls this section of Judges “The New Sodom.”

The first official king of Israel is Saul of the tribe of Benjamin. As Saul puts it

1 Samuel 9:21 Saul replied, “Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak to me in this way?”

An obvious question would be, why was Benjamin the smallest tribe of Israel? That is a result of a civil war in Judges chapter 20. Saul, although appointed by Samuel at the direction of God, was the people’s choice.

So the people’s choice is a tall muscular man from a tribe that was nearly wiped out because of their extreme immorality. The people’s choice. God’s choice was David from the tribe of Judah.

As an aside, do you remember when the events in the book of Ruth took place? During the time of the Judges.

Ruth 1:1 Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in

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**Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab
with his wife and his two sons.**

Ruth was the wife of one of the sons of Naomi that died in Moab. At the end of the book of Ruth, she marries Boaz, the great grandfather of David. So even in the book of Ruth, the narrative leads us from the time of the judges to king David.

**Ruth 4:18 Now these are the generations of
Perez: to Perez was born Hezron,**

**Ruth 4:19 and to Hezron was born Ram, and to
Ram, Amminadab,**

**Ruth 4:20 and to Amminadab was born
Nahshon, and to Nahshon, Salmon,**

**Ruth 4:21 and to Salmon was born Boaz, and
to Boaz, Obed,**

**Ruth 4:22 and to Obed was born Jesse, and to
Jesse, David.**

Before we go too far, it may be helpful to outline the episode contained in chapters 19-21. This is from Robert Chisholm:

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Sodom and Gomorrah Revisited (19:1b-30)

Retrieving a wife (19:1b-10)

Stopping in Gibeah (19:11-15)

Hospitality extended (19:16-21)

Evil personified (19:22-30)

Bye Bye Benjamin! (20:1-48)

Considering the evidence (20:1-17)

Round one to Benjamin (20:18-21)

Round two to Benjamin (20:22-25)

Benjamin down and out (20:26-48)

Six Hundred Brides for Six Hundred Brothers (21:1-25)

Feeling regret (21:1-3)

Murder and kidnapping (21:4-14)

Dodging a vow (21:15-25)

Read chapter 19 as introduction and to get an overview.

Judges 19:1 Now it came about in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, who took a concubine for himself from Bethlehem in Judah.

Note a common thread that connects this episode with the last one: Levite.

Also note the fact that there was no king in Israel. The fact that everyone did what was right in his own eyes is said twice (Judges 17:6, 21:25). The fact that there was no king in those days is said four times (Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1 21:25). Repetition is emphasis The writer wants us to know that some of the worst things that happened in Israel's history,

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things they did to themselves, happened when there was no king in Israel. It provides a blatant contrast to the writer's time when there was a king.

A third thing to observe is that this Levite, like the Levite in chapter 17, started out from Bethlehem of Judah. There is no mention of the Levite's marital prior to taking the concubine.

Judges 19:2 But his concubine played the harlot against him, and she went away from him to her father's house in Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for a period of four months.

Concubine. In the society at that time, having multiple wives was allowed. It was also allowed to have a "secondary" wife whose children could not inherit. There is no mention in the text of a primary wife.

Played the harlot against him. This Hebrew word could mean that she cheated on him. It could also mean she was angry at him. The translator here used the term "played the harlot." The same term is used in Hosea of Hosea's wife. The point in the book of Hosea is to illustrate with Hosea's wife, the harlotry of Israel in rejecting God and worshiping idols. That is what is already happening in the book of Judges.

She went away to her father's house. Something similar happened in the account of Samson. His wife stayed at his father-in-law's house.

Father's house in Bethlehem. Not stated, but inferred, is that Bethlehem is in Judah's territory. Later, king David comes from Bethlehem. And of course, centuries later, Jesus Christ. It is also a safe place.

Judges 19:3 Then her husband arose and went after her to speak tenderly to her in order to bring her back, taking with him his servant

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and a pair of donkeys. So she brought him into her father's house, and when the girl's father saw him, he was glad to meet him.

To speak tenderly to her. Literally, per the Young's literal translation, "to speak unto her heart."

She brought him into her father's house. It would seem that the Levite had never met the girl's father before. Or, if they had met, they were not close. Now, the father-in-law seems happy to have this Levite for a son-in-law. If Micah was any indication, then having a Levite in the house was like having a good luck charm.

Judges 19:4 His father-in-law, the girl's father, detained him; and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there.

His father-in-law, the girl's father. Why would the text repeat the fact that the father-in-law was the girl's father? It links the concubine to the word "girl." She is a young girl, perhaps a teenager. This word is used repeatedly of the girl. What if she was only twelve or thirteen years old? Does that change our perception of who she was? This is not what we might consider as an adult woman. And what would her perspective on her situation be. It might have been an arranged marriage.

Judges 19:5 Now on the fourth day they got up early in the morning, and he prepared to go; and the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Sustain yourself with a piece of bread, and afterward you may go."

The father-in-law keeps trying to keep the Levite at his house. Good luck charm?

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Judges 19:6 So both of them sat down and ate and drank together; and the girl's father said to the man, "Please be willing to spend the night, and let your heart be merry."

Judges 19:7 Then the man arose to go, but his father-in-law urged him so that he spent the night there again.

Judges 19:8 On the fifth day he arose to go early in the morning, and the girl's father said, "Please sustain yourself, and wait until afternoon"; so both of them ate.

Note the overwhelming hospitality of the father-in-law. This will be contrasted shortly with no hospitality. And it is because he ended up leaving late in the day that he had to stay where he did that night.

Judges 19:9 When the man arose to go along with his concubine and servant, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, "Behold now, the day has drawn to a close; please spend the night. Lo, the day is coming to an end; spend the night here that your heart may be merry. Then tomorrow you may arise early for your journey so that you may go home."

In all of this, there is no mention of a mother-in-law. Perhaps the old man is happy to have a drinking companion. Or again to have a Levite stay in his house. Like Micah he might have said in his heart, "Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest."

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Judges 19:10 But the man was not willing to spend the night, so he arose and departed and came to a place opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). And there were with him a pair of saddled donkeys; his concubine also was with him.

Jerusalem. Here is another indicator of a comment during David's reign. In the time of the Judges, it was known as "Jebus" and was inhabited by Jebusites. Apparently, the comment is for the reader who is more familiar with the name Jerusalem.

Judges 19:11 When they were near Jebus, the day was almost gone; and the servant said to his master, "Please come, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it."

Based upon the comment in Judges chapter 1, the tribe of Benjamin was unable to completely conquer this city and from that point on until David's day, lived with the Jebusites there.

Judges 19:12 However, his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners who are not of the sons of Israel; but we will go on as far as Gibeah."

Gibeah. Yet another forward looking reference to something associated with Saul. Gibeah was in the land of the tribe of Benjamin. It was Saul's home. The Levite felt safer with another Israelite than with a foreigner.

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1 Samuel 10:26 Saul also went to his house at Gibeah; and the valiant men whose hearts God had touched went with him.

R. B. Thieme Jr. once said that some of the best people in the world are Christians and some of the worst people are Christians. So, the Levite thought he would be treated better by Israelites rather than Jebusites in Jebus (i.e. Jerusalem). From previous text in the book of Judges, people from the tribe of Benjamin and perhaps Judah (Joshua 15:63) lived with the Jebusites in Jebus. But the Levite decided to go to a city inhabited and controlled by Israelites. In this case, they were from the tribe of Benjamin.

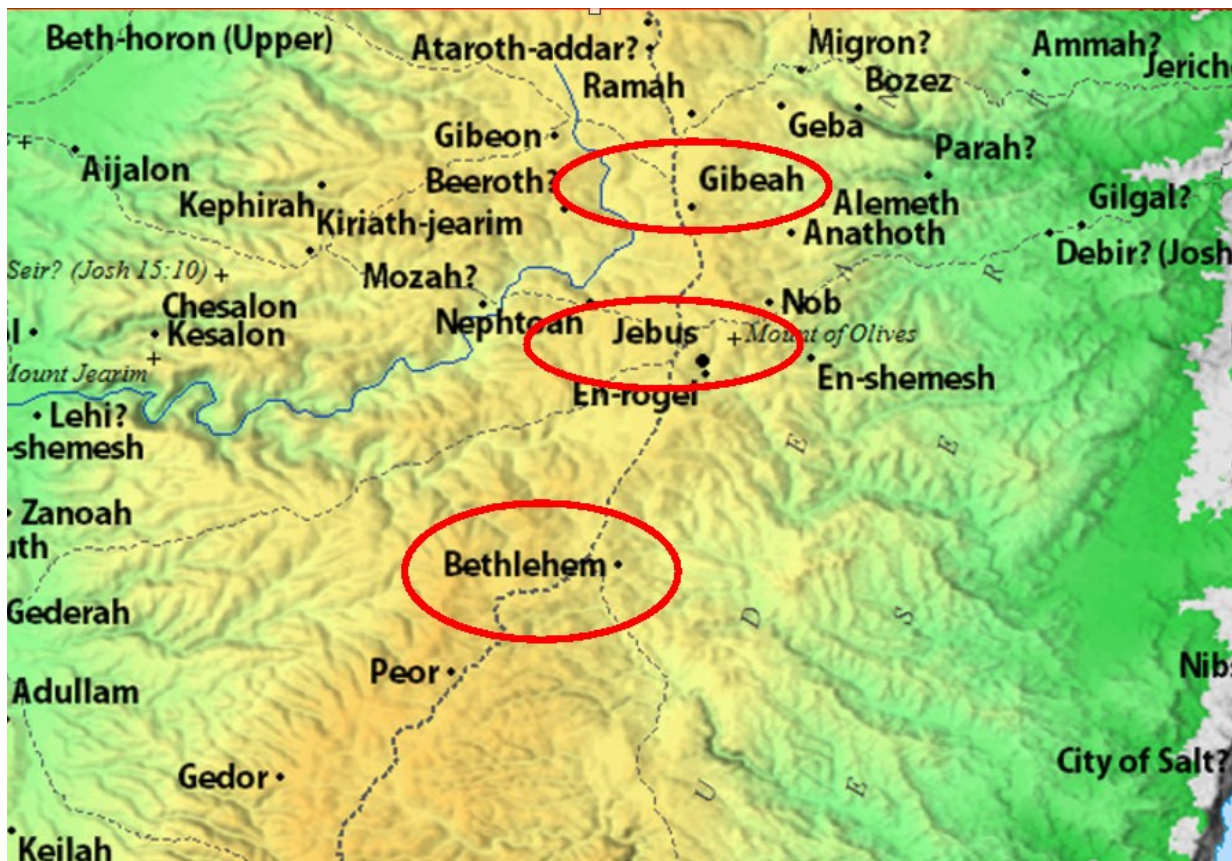
Judges 19:13 He said to his servant, “Come and let us approach one of these places; and we will spend the night in Gibeah or Ramah.”

Judges 19:14 So they passed along and went their way, and the sun set on them near Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin.

Sun set. It is getting dark.

Benjamin. Here is the first explicit reference to Benjamin in this episode.

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As you can see from the map, Ramah is further north of Gibeah.

Judges 19:15 They turned aside there in order to enter and lodge in Gibeah. When they entered, they sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night.

No one took them into his house to spend the night. Apparently, the expectation was that the townspeople would be hospitable and take care of a fellow Israelite. But the Levite was mistaken. Even paganized Micah took in a Levite. There are two trends in the sin nature. There are those who think they can be nice and win God's favor. There are others that

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don't care about what God thinks and let their basest emotions take over their actions.

Judges 19:16 Then behold, an old man was coming out of the field from his work at evening. Now the man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was staying in Gibeah, but the men of the place were Benjamites.

Old man. Age was revered in the Middle East. And here, an old man

Hill country of Ephraim. All through Judges we encounter “Ephraim.”

Staying. This indicates he is a stranger or alien to the city of Gibeah.

This begs the question, why was a man from Ephraim, ostensibly from the tribe of Ephraim, working in the fields in the area belonging to the tribe of Benjamin?

Judges 19:17 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?”

Being a resident of Gibeah, he was apparently familiar with the lack of hospitality there. Shades of the “good Samaritan.”

Judges 19:18 He said to him, “We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, for I am from there, and I went to Bethlehem in Judah. But I

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am now going to my house, and no man will take me into his house.

No man. No mention of God. The Levite is from Ephraim, same as the old man. As said before, he is now in the area belonging to the tribe of Benjamin after visiting in the area of Judah.

Judges 19:19 Yet there is both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and also bread and wine for me, your maidservant, and the young man who is with your servants; there is no lack of anything.”

Judges 19:20 The old man said, “Peace to you. Only let me take care of all your needs; however, do not spend the night in the open square.”

The old man may have wanted to hear the latest news from Ephraim. And here was a kindred soul who needs to take refuge in a city hostile to foreigners, even if they were from the sons of Israel. But just as likely is that he already knew the depravity of the people of that town. He figured that they would be safe in his house.

Judges 19:21 So he took him into his house and gave the donkeys fodder, and they washed their feet and ate and drank.

Hospitality.

Judges 19:22 While they were celebrating, behold, the men of the city, certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the

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door; and they spoke to the owner of the house, the old man, saying, “Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations with him.”

This is a blatant reference to homosexuality. And this is not a request. It is a demand.

Judges 19:23 Then the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, “No, my fellows, please do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not commit this act of folly.

The old man tries to reason with the mob outside of his house.

Judges 19:24 Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Please let me bring them out that you may ravish them and do to them whatever you wish. But do not commit such an act of folly against this man.”

Why did the old man decide to present the women to protect themselves? And the Levite should be a “man of God.” But there is no mention of asking God for help. So this Levite is no better than the one that Micah hired to be his priest. Are they not cowards?

Judges 19:25 But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and brought her out to them; and they raped her and abused her all night until morning, then let her go at the approach of dawn.

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The man seized his concubine. The Levite is only identified as a “man” here.

Judges 19:26 As the day began to dawn, the woman came and fell down at the doorway of the man’s house where her master was, until full daylight.

In spite of all that had happened to the girl she returned to her “master” and died. The men of the town did terrible things during the night.

Judges 19:27 When her master arose in the morning and opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, then behold, his concubine was lying at the doorway of the house with her hands on the threshold.

Judges 19:28 He said to her, “Get up and let us go,” but there was no answer. Then he placed her on the donkey; and the man arose and went to his home.

She does not respond because she is dead. There is no apparent emotion. She died that he might have a night’s sleep in relative security. Perhaps he is pretending that she is still alive for appearances sake. He doesn’t want to cause trouble.

Went to his home.

Judges 19:29 When he entered his house, he took a knife and laid hold of his concubine and cut her in twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout the territory of Israel.

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How could anyone do such a thing? It is obvious he wants revenge. There is also some actions not included in the text. How did he send parts of her body throughout the territory of Israel. Likely he used some kind of courier. And he likely sent some kind of message either an oral message to the courier or perhaps a written message describing what had happened in the town of Gibeah.

Judges 19:30 All who saw it said, “Nothing like this has ever happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up!”

There is a textual issue here. One question is raised by the LXX translation. One version included that the Levite attached this message to the pieces he sent out by individual couriers. Here is Robert Chisholm’s translation:

Judges 19:30 (Chisholm) Everyone who saw the sight said, “Nothing like this has happened or been witnessed from the day the Israelites left the land of Egypt until the present day. Take careful note of it! Discuss it and speak!”

Judges 19:30 (NIV) 30 Everyone who saw it was saying to one another, “Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came up out of Egypt. Just imagine! We must do something! So speak up!”

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Here we are once again, referring to the exodus from Egypt but without referring to the person who did that: God. If they had only taken a few minutes to consider who it was that is supposed to be king. They had written information with a system of justice embedded in the Torah. Yet, human viewpoint is going to rule.

Here is Robert Chisholm's comment on the textual issue:

“Codex A of the LXX has the following additional words: “And he instructed the men whom he sent out, “Thus you will say to every male of Israel: “There has never been anything like this from the day the Israelites left Egypt until the present day.”” It is possible that these words were accidentally omitted from the Hebrew textual tradition.”

There are three verbs that look to be a call to action. The NIV may be closest.

Consider it/Take careful note of it/Just imagine!. The verb is often used for “to put” or “to seize.” Here they are to seize upon the facts presented. This is an imperative.

Take counsel/Discuss it/We must do something! I like the NIV here. Unfortunately, the advice, apart from seeking guidance from God, leads to a very bad outcome.

Speak up! The word for speak here has many meanings. If the verbs up to this point are “Just image,” or “concentrate on this,” or “we must do something,” then the word here is more than just speak up. The Hebrew word here could be a command. Or perhaps we could stretch this to mean Act now! Or Command it!

Sounds like many politicians today. Again, when human viewpoint is applied, often the situation is made worse. Then the retort is, we still have work to do so continue to vote for us.