

Exegetical Notes – Judges 19:1-30
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Background: When Joshua died, the conquest of The Promised Land was only partially completed. In large part, Israel had followed the instructions of YHWH regarding the taking of the land and the destruction of the indigenous population who lived there, but Israel had not followed God completely. Large sections of the indigenous population remained and were not under Israeli control.

From the time of the occupation (around 1380 BC) until the beginning of the Monarchs (1050 BC) Israel was a THEOCRACY, a nation whose king was God. Israel was supposed to listen to and follow the word of the Lord, but as we have already seen, Israel was not good at following the instructions of YHWH. Her failure to do so left her in trouble time and again. Partial obedience to the word of the Lord is disobedience to the word of the Lord and always leads to disaster. “Judges provides many examples of the principle that OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW BRINGS PEACE, WHEREAS DISOBEDIENCE MEANS OPPRESSION AND DEATH” (Charles Ryrie). This is the constantly repeated lesson of the Book of Judges. Judges is the story of the time in Israel’s early history when “Every man did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6 and 21:25). This always results in chaos and disaster.

In the Book of Judges a recurrent theme emerges: Step one - The people are following the will of YHWH; Step two - The people stop obeying the word of the Lord; Step three - An enemy arises that oppresses the people of God; Step four - The people cry out to God for help; Step five - God answers Israel’s prayer by sending them a deliverer (a judge to lead her, a Messiah); Step six - The people repent and return to the Lord. Then, the process begins again. Judges simply repeats this pattern over and over again. God’s people are “stiff necked and disobedient.” God is forever faithful. If God’s people would follow God’s word, they could save themselves hardship, worry, pain, etc. But they choose to do what seems right in their own eyes.

Judges 19:1-30

Verses 1-4

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 parents' home 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 parents' home, and when her father saw him, he gladly welcomed him.⁴ His father-in-law, the woman's father, prevailed on him to stay; so he remained with him three days, eating and drinking, and sleeping there.

- The chapter opens with the refrain of this part of the book of Judges. Israel had no king, no recognized authority to help them follow YHWH. As a result, everyone did what seemed right in his own eyes. This chapter continues to show us what happens when everyone does what seems right to himself without regard to YHWH.
- A Levite, a member of the tribe of Levi, one of those called by God to serve Israel as priests, lived in the hill country of Ephraim. He took a “concubine,” a woman with whom he lived as his wife but to whom he was not married. She was “unfaithful to him.” This means that she had sex with other men. Eventually, she decided to end her illicit relationship with the priest and returned to her father’s house.
- After she had been gone from him for four months, the priest decided to go after her. He is referred to as her husband because she and he had had sex together. They were, therefore, husband and wife in God’s eyes and the community in which they lived. There had been no marriage covenant between them, but they had made a “common-law” marriage. When the priest arrived at her father’s home, her father welcomed him. The priest remained there for three days. He probably resumed his relationship with the woman implying to her father that he wanted her back again. Her father’s acceptance of all this, in his house, meant he approved of the relationship between his daughter and the priest.

Verses 5-8

⁵On the fourth day they got up early and he prepared to leave, but the woman'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 woman’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 woman’s father said, “Refresh yourself. Wait till afternoon!” So the two of them ate together.

- The woman’s father prevailed on the priest to stay with him longer than he intended to do. This implies that he approved of the relationship between his daughter and the priest.

Verses 9-10

⁹ Then when the man, with his concubine and his servant, got up to leave, his father-in-law, the woman’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.

- Eventually, the priest decided he could stay there no longer. He left her father’s house and started toward Jebus, later called Jerusalem. It was not a city under Hebrew control at that time (see Judges 1:21).

Verses 11-15

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 any 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 in for the night.

- As it was getting close to sunset, the priest’s servant suggested that they go into Jebus to spend the night. It would have been unsafe to stay out in the open after dark because there was no king and everyone did what seemed right in their own eyes. They would have been unsafe. But the priest felt it would be equally unsafe for them to seek protection in a city that was not controlled by Hebrews. So, they pressed on hoping to reach Gibeah or Ramah, Hebrew cities, before dark. When they reached Gibeah, it was already dark, so they turned in there. There were no hotels in the city and

they knew no one there with whom they could stay, so they set up camp in the city square.

Verses 16-21

¹⁶ That evening an old man from the hill country of Ephraim, who was living in Gibeah (the inhabitants 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 in for the night. ¹⁹ We have both straw and fodder for our donkeys and bread and wine for ourselves your servants—me, the woman 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.

- There was an old man who lived in Gibeah who came from the same area as did the priest. When this old man saw the strangers in the town square he was concerned for their safety. Even though the town was Hebrew, under the control of the tribe of Benjamin, the old man did not consider it safe to be in the town square after dark.
- The priest explained that he had been to Bethlehem and was on his way home. He explained that he had sufficient provisions for himself and those with him, but that no one had offered him a safe place to stay. The priest told the old man that he intended to visit the “house of the Lord,” the tabernacle on his way home. This part of the plan had not been revealed previously. It was probably a lie told to get the old man’s favor.
- The old man invited the priest to stay with him for the night.

Verse 22

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.”

- As the old man and the priest were enjoying themselves in the old man's house, some "wicked" men surrounded the house demanding that the old man turn the priest over to them so that they could abuse him sexually. (The word translated "wicked" literally means "sons of Belial." The term refers to men who practiced idolatry, drunkenness and sodomy. They were men who did what seemed right in their own eyes and did not follow the law of God. They wanted the priest to join them in their activities.) This happened in a Hebrew city.

Verses 23-24

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 outrageous 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 as for this man, don't do such an outrageous thing."

- The old man went out to try to convince the wicked men to leave the priest alone. He offered them his own virgin daughter and the priest's concubine (note that he knows she is a concubine) if they will leave the priest alone.

Verses 25-26

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.

- The wicked men would not listen to the old man. So, the priest sent his concubine out to them to save himself.
- The woman was repeatedly raped. When the wicked men were done with her, she went back to the old man's house. She collapsed on the doorstep. No one let her into the house. She laid on the step until dawn.

Verses 27-28

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.

- In the morning the priest found the woman on the doorstep. He apparently was not looking for her and intended to depart without her. When he saw her, he told her to get up because they were leaving. He showed no concern for her welfare at all. When she did not get up, for she was dead, he threw her over one of his donkeys and set out for his home.

Verses 29-30

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 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!”

- When the priest got home, he cut his concubine’s body into twelve parts. He sent one part of her to each of Israel’s twelve tribes.
- Apparently, the tribes of Israel were offended at receipt of a body part but not sure what the issue was. They knew that nothing like this had ever happened in Israel before. However, they did not know the story behind receiving the body part. It is that to which they refer. That is the “thing” which has never been done before in Israel. The act of dismembering the corpse is the issue. They must investigate. Something must be done.



(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The Priest and his Concubine*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship*, Coatesville, Pennsylvania, & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)