

Judges 19

Introduction – It is one of the most shocking stories in the Bible. It turns our stomachs. When we come to this passage in our family Bible readings, aren't we tempted to skip ahead to Ruth? This passage is a nightmare, a horror story of sorts. But God has a purpose in it for us. One way to think of these appendices is 1) Chapters 17-18 show us that the Levites failed to protect the people from idolatry, and 2) Chapters 19-21 show us that the Levites failed to protect the people from immorality. Idolatry is the parent of immorality. If we don't love God exclusively, we will not love our fellow man either.

Unfaithful Wife (vv1-3) – A concubine was a second-class wife in places where polygamy was practiced. He is still referred to as a 'husband', but she is not called simply a 'wife.' Nevertheless, this concubine plays the harlot and then deserts her husband. The Levite waits for his wife to return for four months, and then seeks after her to win her back to himself. He goes to her father's house and woos her heart. This story should sound familiar as we remember that the Levite represents the Lord and the 'wife' represents Israel, the harlot-playing wife. Unfaithfulness has led to 'captivity' or 'exile.'

Delaying the Return (vv4-9) – There is nothing wrong with this display of hospitality in itself (quite a contrast to later in Gibeah). But the way the story is told, we sense the delay, and the anxiousness to get going. Pharaoh detaining Israel, and Laban detaining Jacob begin to come to mind. The Levite has a calling where he needs to return. "Get out of your country," God had told Abraham. "Follow me," Jesus later will command Matthew. There is a faithful sense of urgency we should feel to obey now, not later (Luke 9:62).

Parallels and Contrasts – Israel played the harlot throughout Judges, rejecting her Lord as husband, and returning to the gods of her fathers (Josh 24:2, 14).

Jebus, Not Jerusalem (vv10-13) – They should have been able to stay in Jebus, but it has not yet been taken by the Benjamites (1:21). Israel had failed to conquer the land, and there will be consequences because of this.

Sodom in Israel, Not Gibeah of the Benjamites (vv14-24) – They enter Gibeah and it is empty, dark and ominous (14-15). No one comes to offer a place to this servant of the Lord (Matt 25:45). There is no offer of hospitality in this whole city, but one from a foreigner of the city (16-21). Once again, this is sounding terribly familiar. Perverted men pound the doors in order to rape the representative of the Lord. The compromised response from the old man is awful, but the response from the Levite, because he is a Levite, is even worse (22-24).

The Cruelty of the Levite, the Wickedness of Men (vv25-28) – In Chapters 17-18 we saw the consequences of a Levite living for himself. Here we see the consequences of a Levite failing to protect his bride. He throws her out to be attacked all night by these wicked men (there is no king in Israel). He takes her home and there finds her dead.

Parallels and Contrasts – In Sodom, the messengers of the Lord struck the perverts with blindness. This Levite gives them his wife to save his own life. In great contrast, we know our Lord, our Mediator, was abused and crucified in our place. He protected and saved us out of our immorality. This Levite threw the concubine back into hers.

The Benjamites had failed to trust God and follow Him to battle against the Canaanites. Now, they have become *Canaanites* – they have become Sodom, the worst of the Canaanite cities. In Romans 1, Paul says that the wicked know God, but they don't honor Him or give thanks to Him, and God hands them over to their shameful lusts.

A Grotesque Symbol of Tearing (vv29-30) – Besides making us sick to our stomachs, what is the point here? Israel is dead, torn apart, in her sin and treachery. Sons of Benjamin have attempted to abuse a son of Levi and succeeded with his concubine. Idolatry has given birth to immorality, and that to captivity and death.

Grotesque Tearing Apart – What must we see here for us? How awful is it when brothers hate one another? Treachery within the church is the death-blow of a fellowship. Unity among brothers is a gift of God, and it is sweet and beautiful. Disunity ought to make us want to throw up.

Observations and Applications from a Horror Story – Most horror stories have little purpose to them other than to scare you. This one has a point.

Protect Your People – Husbands, Parents, and Elders must take heed. If you do not love those God has placed under your care, you are handing them (your wife, your children, your church) over to the world. The world will devour them or convert them, but in the end their sin will rest upon you as well, for you will give an answer for them before God. We must imitate Christ, our Husband-Redeemer, our Father as the new Adam, our Chief Shepherd.

God, Our Husband-Redeemer – He's a husband who will not let His bride go. He brings us out of exile in a new exodus. He protects, cherishes, loves and nurtures His bride. He establishes us in His New Covenant love by His own blood and promises a heritage, a land, and eternal life with Him.

New Jerusalem, Melchizedek, New Conquest, New Covenant – The final prophecies of the Old Covenant were prophecies of captivity, of exile, of divorce. This was the *telos*, the end, of the Old Covenant. But the promise of the New Covenant has a different *telos*. Do not take lightly your calling, for souls are at stake. But walk and serve by faith in the promises of God, not in your own flesh.