

Judges

Lesson 34

The interpretation that there must have been an argument that caused the concubine to be unfaithful to the Levite seems much more plausible with the previous passage. The Levite sought to bring her back with “*tender words*.” In addition, the concubine’s father seemed to be thrilled by the Levite’s presence in Bethlehem and wanted the Levite to stay until all the issues were resolved with his daughter. The father did all he could to keep the Levite there until the problems were resolved and his daughter would return to her married home in Ephraim.

b) The Invitation to Spend the Night in an Old Man’s Home (19:10-21)

The sad part of this story comes next. We come to the invitation to spend the night in an old man’s home. He knows the sin in his city of Gibeah, a city he was in on a working visit for he was from Ephraim, and he had a genuine concern for this Levite man. Verse 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.”*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.”*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.”*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.”*¹⁴ *So they passed along and went their way, and the sun set on them near Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin.*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.*

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.*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 *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 am now going to my house, and no man will take me into his house.”*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.”*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.”*²¹ *So he took him into his house and gave the donkeys fodder, and they washed their feet and ate and drank.”* (19:10-21)

The city of Jebus was on the border of the tribal area of Judah and Benjamin. It was about five miles from Bethlehem. Half of the city was in Judah; half was in Benjamin. The divide between the two was a valley or ravine. Israelites of Judah lived in the city on the Judah side, but the Canaanite Jebusite people lived in the citadel of Jebus on the Benjamin side. It was a sinful, godless city that the nation of Israel was unable to take and destroy when the Promised Land was taken by the nation of Israel under Joshua. Neither did the Benjamites destroy the city and its occupants as ordered by the LORD when Joshua sent each tribe to their tribal territories to complete the order. The Levite was right not to want to spend the night in Jebus. Gibeah was just up the road another few miles north of Jebus. Ramah was just a little further than Gibeah from Jebus.

The old man in this passage was in Gibeah because he was working in the fields. He was from Ephraim. No doubt, he was staying in a rented house in Gibeah. When he saw the Levite, his servant, and the concubine woman, settling down in the open square of the city to camp for the night, the old man had a genuine concern for the three. No doubt he knew of the evil sinful men living in the city who came to the square at night to take advantage of traveling men camping in there. These godless men did not care if the man was a Levite or an ordinary Israelite. They did not

care if the man was a foreigner. Their hearts were set on sexual relationships with male flesh, and they sought it nightly in the square. The old man offered his home to protect the Levite and his companions.

c) The Invitation to Spend the Night with the Levite's Concubine (19:22-30)

No doubt, the Levite and his companions had already been spotted in the square before the old man was able to get them into his home. The grapevine ran quick, and all the godless men gathered to assault the Levite and his companion sexually. They followed them to the old man's home and knocked on the door. The sad story continued with the old man giving the invitation to spend the night with the Levite's concubine and his daughter. Verse 22. *"While they were celebrating, behold, the men of the city, certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the 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.'"*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."*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."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.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." (19:22-26)

We do not need to repeat this story. It would only add to the disturbing tale that we have already read. However, there are two things that we cannot discern from the text. We do not know if the old man's daughter was sent out the door to be used by the vile men of Gibeah. Next, we do not know if it was the old man or the Levite who seized the concubine and forced her out the door. Perhaps both the virgin daughter and the concubine were sent out together, but we are not told. It seems that the virgin daughter was not sent out because there is no mention of her fate at the end of the night as morning dawned.

d) The Invitation to Speak Up (19:27-30)

When the sun had risen, the Levite opened the door to find his concubine dead. What did the Levite do? He did something so horrifying that he successfully garnered the full attention of all the tribes of the nation of Israel to do something. We hear the people of the tribes of Israel give the invitation to speak up against the evil found in Gibeah. Verse 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."*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.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.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!"* (19:27-30)

Being a Levite, he was trained in slaughtering animals for sacrifice on the altar for worship. In reality, in those days, the slaughter of animals for food was taught to every male and was not considered as gruesome as we might think today. Only professional butchers and hunters dress animals regularly today. But on the day of this story, all males in a household dressed animals this way. However, the dressing of a human was not common. The Levite knew how to dress her out in the slaughter. He also knew that it would send a message to the whole nation and generate a great concern about the homosexual men in Gibeah of the tribe of Benjamin. It did. We will learn of the nation's response in the next chapter.

Chapter 20

C. A Nation's Defense of the Law

1. The Gathering of the Nation

a) The Examination

After the Levite priest sent a different part of his dead concubine's body to each tribe in the Promised Land, all of a sudden, the ungodly nation came to their senses and became moral for once. We see a nation's defense of the law, the law of the LORD, the law, followed in the people's actions, but not in the hearts of the people. The shocked leaders called for the gathering of the nation for an examination. Chapter 20, verse 1.

"Then all the sons of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, came out, and the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah. ² The chiefs of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, took their stand in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 foot soldiers who drew the sword. ³ ~~(Now the sons of Benjamin heard that the sons of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.)~~ And the sons of Israel said, 'Tell us, how did this wickedness take place?' ⁴ So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, 'I came with my concubine to spend the night at Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. ⁵ But the men of Gibeah rose up against me and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me; instead, they ravished my concubine so that she died. ⁶ And I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout the land of Israel's inheritance; for they have committed a lewd and disgraceful act in Israel. ⁷ Behold, all you sons of Israel, give your advice and counsel here.'" (20:1-5)

Had the writer not told us about the tribe of Dan expanding to the northern tip of the Promised Land in chapter 18, the first part of verse 1 would not have made sense to us. It says, *"Then all the sons of Israel from Dan to Beersheba."* If we did not have the previous story, this verse would have been interpreted through the years to mean from the tribal area of Dan down to the city of Beersheba. But, with the previous story revealed before this story, we know that the writer is telling us that the sons of Israel, from the northernmost city of the Promised Land called Dan to the southernmost city in the Promised Land called Beersheba, gathered together for a meeting. These were cities. To be accurate, there were villages further south in the Promised Land, but they looked to Beersheba for protection and sustenance in difficult times. If you will remember, when Joshua was dividing the Promised Land to the tribes, the major landmarks were named as the cities with their villages. The cities were named, but not the villages. Therefore, in the first part of this verse, the writer has correctly stated that the word went out to assemble to the whole nation of Israel on the west side of the Jordan River from the major city in the north to the major city in the south.

The writer goes on to reveal that the summons included *"the land of Gilead."* Gilead was on the east side of the Jordan River. But why does he tell us that the summons went even to the *"land of Gilead."* It was here that the writer was making sure that we know that the summons to come to Mizpah was explicitly sent to Gilead so that no one in Gilead would have an excuse for not coming to the meeting. We will see the importance of this statement in the last chapter of Judges. Moving on, the writer also told us in this passage where the meeting took place – Mizpah.

At least four villages in the Old Testament existed with the name Mizpah. We can identify them as Mizpah in the land of Gilead, Mizpah in the land of Moab, Mizpah in the land of Mizpah, which was in the Hivite territory in the northern part of the Promised Land on the western side of the Jordan River, and Mizpah in the land of Benjamin.

Because the writer tells us that the nation included the land of Gilead in the central area on the east side of the Jordan River, it could have meant that the nation met in Mizpah of Gilead. However, because the offense was in the tribal area of Benjamin, it just makes more sense that the nation met at Mizpah in the land of Benjamin, and the writer is simply stating that the Israelites

from the eastern side of the Jordan River joined with them in the meeting. Even with that, we cannot make a hard and fast statement about which Mizpah the men gathered.

When the leaders met in Mizpah, they came prepared. The writer tells us that their combined army was four-hundred-thousand-foot soldiers with swords. Let us just stop for a moment and analyze the population of the tribe of Benjamin. In Numbers 26, we learn that when the census was taken by Moses, before Joshua took over, the tribe of Benjamin had 45,600 men. That was a little more than three hundred years before this place in the story. At the beginning of the Exodus, Numbers chapter 1 tells us that the tribe of Benjamin had 35,400 men. The growth in forty years was 28 %. If that held true for the next three hundred years, Benjamin had grown to about 200,000 men in the tribe. A number that size would be a best-case scenario with a compounded growth rate of 28% over three hundred years. But, when we reach verse 14, we will learn that such growth over the three hundred years may not have happened! The tribe of Benjamin may have shrunk by about nine thousand men or so from Moses' last census. Nevertheless, in either case, the army of Israel should have been able to handle Benjamin's army without difficulty.

At the meeting at Mizpah, the leaders examined the Levite who divided his concubine and sent pieces of her through to the tribes. Let it be said and understood. The Levite was successful in his plan to expose the great unchecked sexual sin occurring in the nation, but culminating in the unnatural sexual sins in the town of Gibeah, in the tribal area of Benjamin.

b) The Determination

After hearing the testimony of the Levite, the determination was made that because the tribe of Benjamin had allowed the unnatural sexual desires of the men in Gibeah to go unchecked, no one would return home until the evil in Benjamin's land had been corrected. Verse 8.

"Then all the people arose as one man, saying, 'Not one of us will go to his tent, nor will any of us return to his house.'⁹ But now this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah; we will go up against it by lot.¹⁰ And we will take 10 men out of 100 throughout the tribes of Israel, and 100 out of 1,000, and 1,000 out of 10,000 to supply food for the people, that when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, they may punish them for all the disgraceful acts that they have committed in Israel."¹¹ Thus all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united as one man." (20:8-11)

What did the leaders of Israel do in this passage? What do all these numbers mean? The wording in English is a little challenging to follow, but the meaning is simple. Four hundred thousand soldiers were at the meeting. Back in those days, when people made a journey, they planned how long they would be gone and carried their food supplies. No doubt, the call to come to the meeting in Mizpah did not include the length of time for the meeting and a battle, so the men came with enough supplies for a short meeting and a return home. In this case, no one was going to go home until the "disgraceful acts" allowed in Benjamin's land were corrected. Therefore, the soldiers would need supplies. The numbers in this passage signify the Hebrew way of saying, ten percent of the soldiers were assigned for collecting and providing food for the ninety percent who would be fighting against Benjamin. The math is simple. Israel had four-hundred-thousand soldiers; forty thousand of them were to scour the surrounding villages and towns to gather food. The remaining three-hundred and sixty-thousand soldiers would be engaging in battle against Benjamin.

c) The Mobilization (20:12-17)

The writer tells us of the mobilization of Israel's plan. Israel would reach out to the tribe of Benjamin to do the right thing and deliver the sinful men so they could receive the death penalty for their sin. Verse 12. *"Then the tribes of Israel sent men through the entire tribe of Benjamin, saying, 'What is this wickedness that has taken place among you?'¹³ Now then, deliver up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove this wickedness from Israel." But the sons of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the sons of Israel.¹⁴ The sons of Benjamin gathered from the cities to Gibeah, to go out to battle against the sons of Israel.¹⁵ From the cities on that day the sons of Benjamin were numbered, 26,000 men who draw*

the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah who were numbered, 700 choice men. ¹⁶ Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.

“Then the men of Israel besides Benjamin were numbered, 400,000 men who draw the sword; all these were men of war. (20:12-17)