

Judges 08-08-22b

Let's resume our study now in Judges chapter 19. We're looking at this story, and the first thing that jumps out, if you think about Lot and Sodom, you think, oh, those Sodomites surrounding the city, look at those guys and what no goodniks they are. When you come to Judges chapter 19, and you say, well, look at these men in the city of Gibeah and what rascals they are to be surrounding the city and asking for this man and his servant to come out.

But, there is a lot more going on in this story than these sort of, of course, I guess this one wouldn't go in the children's Bible necessarily, but you know, in the children's Bible, here's Daniel in the lion's den, here's the three friends, and you just have the little highlights, and you think, well, this is the prominent thing. Here's Noah with the animals in the ark, here's Moses with the tablets of the law, here's Daniel praying in the window three times a day, here he is in the lion's den. Well, there's much more in most of those stories than what you get in that superficial, you know, here is the big picture.

The same is true here. Now, we've already had a clue in the town of Origen, Bethlehem in Judah. Anybody, and remember, the book of Judges was edited and put together and distributed in the days of the monarchy.

It would be pretty silly to say in those days there was no king in Israel if there still wasn't a king in Israel, right? It'd be like saying, in those days there was no dictator in the United States of America. Well, we never had a dictator. If we have a dictator in the year 2050, and somebody after that says, well, you know, back in the 2000s or whatever they're going to call this decade, there was no dictator in the U.S., but you don't say that unless you are writing in the time where there is a king, right? It doesn't make any sense otherwise.

So we know that the story is edited in the days of a king. Now, do you think it was done in the days of King Saul? Everybody shake your head, no. It wasn't done in the days of King Saul.

They didn't have the luxury. The nation of Israel was in big trouble under Saul. It wasn't unified.

He was constantly running around putting out fires and trying to keep people's thumbs from being cut off or eyes put out or whatever. No, there was no time and collection of these things. The fact that both of these stories in chapter 18 and chapter 19 relate to Bethlehem in Judah, gives you a hint as to why they were included in the book.

Well, the king is going to like this one. It's about his hometown. You know, this is done in the days of David and perhaps in the days of Solomon, and it's got a lot of interest because of these historical references.

They had a plethora of stories they could choose from, but the author, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, chose these, and God probably used the contemporary environment of King David and his son on the throne at various times to condition and influence the way these

stories are compiled. So, I say all of that to point out that this book of Judges came into its final form during the days of the monarchy. It's a no-brainer.

It's during the days of the monarchy that it found its final form, particularly these chapters. Now, the first 17 chapters, you could say, well, maybe that had been written earlier. Well, somebody picked it up and added these stories from the early days because that's where they belong.

You can't put them in 1 Samuel. You can't stick them back in Numbers or Deuteronomy or Joshua. This is where they would belong.

So, these stories, both related to Bethlehem in Judah, are compiled in along with the seven cycles that comprise the first part of the book. So, now, we're back to this Levite. What should we be watching for here? It's more than the men of Gibeah out there saying, you know, bring out the guys.

Well, we've reviewed, we've gone back and we've seen where he's from, where he's going. He got married to this concubine. She's not a woman of standing.

She's not a princess in Israel. She's not from a prominent family. She's a commoner, so common that she only rates status as a concubine, possibly even a slave.

She might have been a very prominent slave in someone's household, and this is the best the Levite could do. He couldn't get a woman from an important family. So, anyway, she's a concubine.

He takes her up to the mountains of Ephraim. She's used to living in Bethlehem of Judah, and it's culture shock. Innumerable songs and stories and things have been made about, oh, how can you come to live in my world, and can I come and live in your world, and never the twain shall meet, because everybody's just too different.

She goes from Bethlehem of Judah, which is a known center of God-fearing, Bible-thumping, conservative, Israelite religion. That's where your grassroots, fundamental, we-still-believe-in-God-in-the-Bible people live. If they're not in Bethlehem, where are they? They're in Bethlehem.

That's where they are. So, if they're anywhere, they're in Bethlehem. Again, Boaz, Salmon, Obed, Jesse, all these guys, that's where they are.

That community is that way. So that's where she's from. He's from Ephraim.

He's been hanging out with Jonathan, the grandson of Moses, getting in all kinds of ne'er-do-well, rascally, son-of-Belial, completely pagan, off-scourings type of stuff. And he comes down, and he works some kind of charm. He's got charisma.

He's got a flashy smile. He says, Oh, I'm a big cheese up north. You come live with me, and you don't have to be a slave anymore.

Up there, they won't treat you as a concubine. They'll treat you as a wife. So she says, Well, okay, young Levite, I'll go with you.

And she goes up there. Well, it's horrible. She can't stand it.

He's a bad guy. She says, I have made a terrible mistake. I'm going home to Daddy.

And so she packs up and leaves. And she's gone four months. Well, he tries to go back to his bachelor way of life, and he can't take it anymore.

Hates his own cooking. Servant can't cook. She was probably a servant.

She knew how to cook and keep house and everything. He says, this is just dismal. I need to go get her back.

So he gets the servant, packs the two donkeys, gets a bunch of provisions, and he goes down there. And he says, I will speak to her heart. Oh, honey, things will be different this time.

I know that you were right. I was wrong. Please come back, and you'll never see such a transformation as I'm about to undertake.

We'll just have a wonderful golden glow in our home like you can't believe. So that's his plan. So he goes back down there, and he arrives, and she sees him.

And she says, oh, he's so cute. Come on in. She brings him in and introduces him.

Apparently, if we understand the account correctly, you notice she brought him into her father's house. And when the father of the young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him. Now, in plain English, we would think, meet him? What, did they elope? How does this work? Well, in Hebrew, it's not quite so clear that he had never seen him before.

But he's glad to see him. We're hail fellow well met. Come on in.

Take off your shoes. Light your pipe. Sit by the fire.

Refreshments are being served and so on. Everybody's happy. So that's where we left off.

Now, in verse 4, it says, his father-in-law, the young woman's father, detained him. And he stayed with him three days. Now, there's a lot of numerical significance going on here.

How many months has she been gone? Four months. Three days, I mean, you could spend your life counting all the places where three days occurs in Scripture and what it means. But among other things, I've told you all before, I learned this when I was in Lebanon.

When you go to visit someone in that part of the world, and they give you that little cup of syrup they call coffee, and you drink that, that's one. They say, oh, have another coffee, and that's two, and you drink that. And when they offer you the third cup, well, it's time to go.

That's the signal. Everybody understands it. Nobody will say it, but that's what you understand.

When they say, hey, have the third, three cups is the limit. Now, you can take the third cup, but you better throw it down and hiyacko on out of there, because you're done. That's the signal.

When they offer you the third cup, let's go. They'll offer you something else if they really want you to stay. Well, we've got a bowl of tabbouleh here.

We've got some of this, what do you call the uncooked meat? What is that stuff? Pate. They make a pate out of raw. They will have some pate.

They grind up different things. So you can eat that. But if they offer you the third cup of coffee, you are in danger of overstaying your welcome.

And if you accept it, throw that thing down and say, well, look at the time, and out you go. So three in the Middle East, and going back to the ancient Near East, that's your number of completion. That's why God is a trinity.

That's not why, but it's a reflection of this idea of completeness. You're done in a three-day visit, is my point. A three-day visit, that was the standard visit.

You stay two days, and on the third day, it's time to pack your stuff. It's like the third cup of coffee. It's like, OK, well, it's been fun.

Nice to see you. I hope you have a pleasant trip back. Goodbye, and away you go.

You pack your donkey and light out. So he stayed three days. Now, if he were, I'm actually getting to the point now.

If he was sensitive to the proprieties, if he was a man who observed what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad, he would say, I have been here three days, and despite any other protestations, it's time for me to go. I came here for a purpose. I came to get the woman.

I need to go back, and that's what I'm going to do. Now, he's all messed up. He's a rogue Levite in the wrong part of the country, doing the wrong thing at the wrong house of the Lord.

So it's not like he's missing out on some godly responsibility. I mean, he's just messed up. But in symbolic terms, after he has stayed the three days, he should be leaving.

Whatever else you want to say, he should be leaving, and he's not. Because he stayed three days. They ate and drank and lodged there.

Now, what is the attraction? Does it say, and behold, he went into marriage counseling with his concubine. They took walks in the garden. They fed each other, sliced peaches.

No, he's not spending it with the daughter. He's spending it with the father. He came, he said,

I'm going to speak to her heart.

There's no indication that he spoke to her at all. He and the father are like, oh, they're telling hunting stories and regaling each other with things. And it's all man-to-man stuff.

And she's who knows where, but she's not in view, is she? Notice what it says. She brought him into her father's house, and after that, it's all guy stuff. When the father of the young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him.

Hey, man, after my own heart, I'm glad you're here. So the young woman's father detained him, and he stayed with him three days. Doesn't say he stayed with her three days.

He stayed with him. And they ate and drank and lodged there. Then it came to pass on the fourth day that they arose early in the morning.

This is the man, the concubine, the servant. The guy said, we've been here three days, time to go. Everybody knows it.

Pack the donkeys, we're leaving. He stood to depart, but the young woman's father said to his son-in-law, oh, come on now. Refresh your heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward, go your way.

Don't leave without a sandwich. Let's sit down and have a piece of French toast or something. So he offers him some more bread.

And so what does the guy do? Is this a man of clear-sighted resolve, and oh no, I really must be going? Isn't there a song, Hello, I Must Be Going? Was that from? But he should be going, and he's not. He allows himself to be dissuaded. He allows himself to be deflected.

Now this seems like, well, so what? What does it matter if he eats a piece of bread or not? We're being told about the man's character. He may think that he's going to do one thing, but he's easily dissuaded. He's easily distracted.

He is easily persuaded to do something else. The father says, oh, we're having such a good time. Have a piece of bread.

So they sat down, and the two of them, no concubine in sight, the two of them sat down and ate and drank together. So then the young woman's father said to the man, ah, look, the morning's shot. Why don't you just stay for the rest of the day? It's too hot to travel now.

Look at the sun. Look at the heat you're going to boil out there. Be content to stay all night, and let your heart be merry.

So the man says, oh no, I really must be going. And the father-in-law urged him. And so he let himself be talked out of leaving.

So now the fourth day has been spent. Fourth day is gone. So he lodged there again.

So he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart. But the young woman's father said, please refresh your heart. So they delayed until afternoon, and both of them ate.

OK, five days now. When the man stood to depart, this is the afternoon of the fifth day, he and his concubine and his servant, father-in-law of the young woman's father, said to him, look, the day is now drawing toward evening. Please spend the night.

Spend another night. Leave tomorrow. I mean, this is the same song and dance he's been getting every single day.

See, the day is coming to an end. Lodge here that your heart may be merry. Now, did you catch that in the previous instance, up in verse six? Please be content to stay all night, and let your heart be merry.

Refresh your heart, up in verse five, with a morsel of bread. Afterward, go your way. He's appealing to the man's sensual appetite.

Hey, a little bread, a little wine, that's too late to travel. Stay the night. Try again tomorrow.

A little bread, a little wine, eh, it's too late. Stay the night. So we're now on the fifth day, and the father-in-law gives him this same spiel.

Tomorrow, go your way early so that you may get home. However, verse 10, the man was not willing to spend that night, so he rose and departed. Now, when should he have left? When is the time for traveling? I mean, he should have left a couple of days ago, but even on this day, when he's leaving, when do you leave a place to make a journey of this length? Early in the morning.

Travel, heat of the day, take a little siesta, throw up a little shade, rest your donkeys and so on. Gets to be on, you know, 233 in the afternoon, a little bit of that Mediterranean breeze starts blowing across the land as it does there. You get a little convection, cool breeze coming off the water in the afternoons.

Now you can travel again. You go on, you make your destination by nightfall. But he dallies around.

Why? Because he's wishy-washy. This is probably why the lady left in the first place. You can't make up your mind about anything.

And so he waits too long to start. He doesn't start till afternoon. Is he going to make it to the mountains of Ephraim by dark? There's no way.

He can't do it. And as the sun starts going down, he's only made it as far as Jebus. Now whose fault is this that he's in the middle of a godforsaken part of the country where there's no place

to stay, unless you're going to stay with the Jebusites? Whose fault is that? That's his fault.

He let himself be talked into something that his better judgment should have told him not to do. The reason he is in Gibeah, he's got scruples and prejudices. He's not going to stay with the pagans, where he probably would have been safe.

He goes up to the town of Gibeah amongst his own brethren, where his life is in mortal danger. Why does he not know anything about Gibeah? I mean, could this town really be this rotten and evil, and nobody knew about it? Why does he not know about it? Because in his previous travels back and forth, going down in nuptials and finding the concubine, taking her bath, he's never stopped here before. Why? Because he's always traveled at normal times.

But he let himself be wheedled into starting at the wrong time. Now he's at the wrong place at the wrong time. Here's the point.

Why is he at the wrong place at the wrong time? Is he just an intrinsically bad person, and bad things happen to bad people? Bad things happen to people who have poor judgment. And they say, those mean old men of Gibeah, look what are you doing in Gibeah? What are you doing chasing this concubine? What are you doing up in the mountains? I mean, you could go back. There's a series of bad decisions that have put him in this position.

Now he's in a bad, I mean, I don't go down Lemon Avenue to the seamy part of town as the sun is going down. Why do I not do that? Because I have been there after dark, and you will not catch me down there without some sort of weaponry and several spare magazines. After dark, that's not a safe place to be.

And I know that. You get down there where all those liquor stores and layouts and drug houses and things are down there by Bachman Lake, that area. I mean, there's a reason why that's where all of the XXX shows and things are, and the billboards proclaim it all over the place.

Well, it doesn't take an incredibly sensitive and nuanced person to say, this is probably not a great place to be after dark. Well, I could make the decision, OK, I'm not going to go down there tonight after Bible class, let's say. But what if I made a series of bad decisions? What if I messed up and lost my job, and I wound up having to get work, and the only place I could get work was, say, as a bartender at some nightclub down near Bachman Lake, and so then I've got to go down there to work.

And I mess up and burn the engine out of my car, and I have to walk home. And I'm down there after dark walking home, and I think, well, these mean old muggers mugging me down by Bachman Lake in the middle of the night. I mean, whose fault is that? I'm exaggerating for the point of emphasis.

This man has only himself to blame for being in Gibeah after dark. It is an inevitable, sooner or later, your series of poor judgment, godless decisions will catch up with you. And it's going to be easy to look around and blame the immediate cause of your troubles, and that's not valid.

This man and Israel itself, there's a whole separate issue with the Benjamites that we'll get into. But this man has only himself to blame for dallying in Bethlehem instead of leaving when he should have left. He would have never been here.

None of this would have happened. His concubine would have lived to a ripe old age, given him a whole mess of kids. He would have had a whole dynasty of godless Levites up there working for Micah or the Danites or whoever.

But it's never going to happen. This woman is going to lose her life, and we'll get into all the rest of the consequences. But here's my point.

Don't just say, bad old Gibeahites, bad old Benjamites, dumb Levite, dumb Levite. And this is what God's word gives us, is spiritual common sense. It is the small decisions that you make.

It's not the giant decisions, who will I marry, where will I work, what school will I go to, what town will I live in. Our small decisions, day by day by day, and they may seem inconsequential. They may not seem to have a moral component at all.

But it is the accumulation of small decisions that put us either where we should be or where we shouldn't be. And you start running out of options. The accumulation of bad decisions shuts your options down.

Pretty soon, you don't have options anymore. You don't have opportunities anymore. Because the accumulated weight of bad decisions crushes you.

And it is only the grace of God and the mercy of God that can turn that around. And sometimes God will do that in a spectacular way when we turn. If you're breathing air, it's never too late.

But just look at this man's situation. And who's going to pay the price for this? Is he going to get raped and murdered? No, someone near to him, someone he loves enough to make a trip after four months to go get. Someone, how's he going to explain this to the father that whined and dined him for five days? Oh, by the way, I threw your daughter out to the perverts.

And oh, yeah, let's not go into what happened to her. Do you think he's ever going to go back to Bethlehem and visit that guy? I think not. But who pays the price for that series of bad decisions? Somebody near at hand.

Someone else is going to suffer. Well, turn aside to the city, the Jebusites, and log in. It says the servant, the master says, no, that's why you're a servant and I'm the master.

Don't you realize these people are pagans? As the master, let me tell you, oh, servant, where we should go? We should go to Gibeah, which turns out to be far worse. Another little lesson there is sometimes you need to listen to the help, listen to the people who you may outrank, but they're smarter than you. So the master says, we will not turn aside here into a city of foreigners.

He's making this decision about where to lodge based on not are they hospitable, can they be trusted, what are the opportunities, it's a prejudice. They're foreigners. This is what the Israelites did later on in the days of Jesus with the Samaritans.

The good Samaritan is a man of great integrity, great wealth, by the way, great compassion, great sensitivity. He would be a guy that would make a good lifelong friend for any man in Israel. Oh, well, I'm not going to have any truck with a Samaritan.

I mean, what a shallow criteria for deciding where to go or who to associate with. Well, they're not Israelites. Jebus, who knows what would have happened if he had gone there? But he doesn't.

What he does instead is he goes to Gibeah. We'll go spend the night in Gibeah or in Ramah. So they pass by and went their way.

The sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin. So they turned aside there to go into lodge in Gibeah. Never been there before.

Strange town, sun going down, and of course, nobody takes them in because unbeknownst to them, they are way in the wrong place at the wrong time. We know what happens here. We know the old guy takes them in.

He is a wonderful man. He's a laborer. He's not pretentious.

He has compassion on this man, sight unseen, doesn't know him, doesn't know the story of the concubine. But he takes them in. He doesn't let them feed their own fodder to the donkeys.

He feeds them with his food, feeds the donkeys with his fodder. He takes great care of them. He's an honorable man.

He says, peace be with you. Your needs will be my responsibility. So he brings them in.

They wash their feet. They eat and they drink. As they are enjoying themselves, and once again, they are eating and drinking, which harks back to what he did with the father-in-law, this man loves a good meal.

He loves a good glug or two of wine along with his bread. And so he's in there eating and drinking. He's having a good time.

I suspect that this guy is probably corpulent. He's probably visibly a man who enjoys his food, because that's what is his undoing. Suddenly, certain men of the city, and it says perverted men, this is literally sons of Belial.

Now, Belial is a play and a corruption of Baal. And these are sons of worthlessness or whatever. This term will persist all the way down into the New Testament.

You find Paul using this in 2 Corinthians chapter 6. What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? Now, these perverted guys have conveniently all organized themselves into the town of Gibeah. That's where they all are. So if you want to enjoy the company of perverts, you can go live in Gibeah.

If you don't want to enjoy the company of perverts, you don't live in Gibeah. Well, if you end up in Gibeah by your own folly, guess what? You're going to be rubbing elbows with these sons of Belial. Now, we can avoid places.

We can avoid situations. We can avoid entanglements where there is a known problem. There is a known issue.

This is the principle of separation. You can separate from someone, and not out of malice, not out of vindictiveness, not to punish them, not with a lot of emotional conflict. But you simply have to put some distance to avoid being sucked into whatever they're into.

And it's self-preservation. It's that or sacrifice your ability to live your life in a way that's pleasing to God, because you just can't maintain that closeness. Well, I think it's great that so many gay people live in San Francisco.

That's a town that I don't really plan on making any hotel reservations in. I'm not going to go sightseeing in San Francisco. I don't want to walk down whatever streets they've got.

If they want to go have their city and do that, great. I don't go there. So he ends up here.

So they surround the house, beat on the door. They speak to the master of the house, the old man, saying, bring out the man who came to your house. We're going to have our way with him.

The man, the master of the house, went out to them and said, no, my brethren, I beg you, do not act so wickedly. Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage. And here's where there is some trouble in the text.

And the upshot of it is, the other guy comes out. The Levite comes out and says, look, here's the concubine. He offers his concubine.

The old man, there's no way, shape, or form that this man who took them in with his hospitality, fed them with his food, gave the fodder to the donkeys, is going to say, oh, by the way, this guy's got to concubine water and shove her out the door. He's not pictured in that way. It is the Levite who is a sensual man.

He loves good food. He loves good wine. He likes pleasure.

He likes his heart to be merry. This is a bad scene, as we would say in the 60s or 70s. This is very troublesome.

He's not happy anymore. His heart's not merry anymore. And in the moment, because he is a man of sensual appetites and of living in the moment, he says, well, at the moment, the thing that would settle my heart the most is to just get these guys to go away.

Take my wife, please, is basically what he says. And he shoves her out the door. And again, this whole verse 24 has been monkeyed with, but you're just going to have to take my word for it.

The Ephraimite man that's inside says, brethren, don't do this thing. This other guy kind of elbows him out of the way and says, look, if you're not going to be appeased, here, take the concubine. Humble them and do with them as you please.

But to this man, do not do such a vile thing. And you can tell that there's trouble between 24 and 25, because look at 25. But the men would not heed him.

Now, in the story, they do heed, because when he says, take the concubine, they do, and they go away, which is why she has to go back and stagger and fall down. They do heed him. They do take the woman, and they do go away.

So there's trouble here in the text. And the important thing is the Levite. Levite shoves her out the door.

You know what happens to her. They knew her and abused her all night until morning. When day began to break, they let her go.

Now, obviously, this is a violent crime. This is rape perpetrated multiple times. They do not, at least intentionally, murder her.

They violate and abuse her. But what is the real crime here? You know, when people think about on the night that Jesus was given over, paradidomi, and you think, well, who do you really think is the bad guy, the soldiers that came marching up to arrest Jesus or Judas who led them there and greeted the Lord with a kiss? Who is the real criminal here that shoved this concubine out the safety of the house to these animals? And it's an animal. They don't care if it's a man or a woman.

Just give me something to have my way with, and off they go. And they just take turns with her all night long. So who is the real criminal here? It's the Levite who has brought her twice now away from Bethlehem and Judah.

And her problem is ever agreeing to leave the first time and certainly the second time. But you know, sweet-talking, charismatic guy can make girls do things they shouldn't. And so she's up there with him, and she pays for it with her life.

But the Levite is the man that shoved her out the door to save himself. This is the antithesis and the opposite of what we would expect. There is no greater love than what? Jesus said, greater love hath no man than this, that what? A man lays down his life for his friend.

Now, if that's no greater love, how about laying down your life for your wife or someone else in your family? Well, this man says, no, she can lay down her life and her virtue and everything else so that I can stay inside in safety, and hey, where's the bread and wine? Let's get back to it. He finishes his meal, lays down, and sleeps all night, wakes up the next morning to find her dead on the doorstep. So this guy was sort of a petty criminal, so to speak.

He's participating in false worship in the mountains of Ephraim. He has done this concubine thing, which really isn't appropriate for a Levite, but it's just kind of on the edge. It's just kind of tacky, but it's not illegal.

But now look at him. He is responsible for the death of this girl that he thought he was going to go speak to her heart. Well, now she's dead.

So her master arose in the morning and opened the doors of the house and went out to find her. Is that what it says? Went out to find the concubine and see if she needed any help. No, he's ready to go home, but he can't get to the donkey because there's an obstacle in his way.

He's got to step over the dead body of his concubine, falling at the door of the house with her hands on the threshold. Now this is really a pathetic scene. Why are her hands on the threshold? She died banging on the door trying to get help from the man who professed love for her, who came to get her from her father's house.

Why do you think he really came to get her and take her back to the mountains of Ephraim? Because he loved her personally or because it made him have a wonderful meals and housekeeping. And this is a man of sensual appetites, and she provided what he needed. But when the chips are down, hey, throw her to the wolves.

So he said to her, get up and let us be going. It doesn't say he helped her up, he called his servant, and bring some water. It tells you who the real criminal is.

There was no answer, because of course she's dead. So he puts her onto the donkey, and he got up and went to his place. When he entered his house, he took a knife, laid hold of his concubine, and divided her into 12 pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel.

I've often, I say often, the two or three times that I've come to this passage to tell you that I've been to Israel to study it in detail, I've asked myself this question. Just imagine, well, to make it easier, my corpse is laying here in the floor, and it's dead. And you say, you know, I believe I'm going to divide that up into 12 pieces and mail it to the southern states here.

I'm going to mail one to Louisiana, and one to New Mexico, and I'll send one to Arkansas, and one to Oklahoma, and I'll send one over to Mississippi. I'm just going to send pieces of Sam 12 places. So now, how do you divide a corpse into 12 pieces? Now, if you cut off the arms and the legs, you've got four pieces.

Cut off the head, that gives you a total of six, right? You've got the torso, four limbs, and a head. Well, you need twice that many. So you've got to cut the limbs each in half.

Now you've got eight, nine, 10. You still need two more. Well, what are you going to do? I guess you could cut off the feet, or cut off the hands, or you could split the torso and send pieces of it.

But this is really an ugly business when you think about 12 separate pieces. So you're over here in Gilead, and you've got the half tribe of Manasseh, you're living over there or something. And all of a sudden, a messenger comes riding up.

And he's got, I don't know, a thigh, or an upper arm, or I mean, some piece of meat. And you say, what is that? And he said, well, this is one piece of a lady that used to live over in the, she's from Bethlehem, she's in the mountains of Ephraim. And everybody's just so grossed out and disgusted by this.

And they say, who would do such a thing to dismember a corpse? It's a violation of everything. I mean, even the Israelites in apathy and indifference are shocked by this. That's what happens.

So he divided her in 12 pieces, limb by limb, centered throughout all the territory of Israel. This is basically one piece for each tribe. Of course, he doesn't have to send one to the Levites, does he, that where are you going to send it? They're scattered all over, and none of them are doing their job.

So it was that all who saw it, verse 30, said, no such deed has been done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it. Let's get together and speak up.

Somebody needs to do something about this. There's never been anything to reunify and regather the justice system in Israel until now. So that galvanizes the people.

Chapter 20, all the children of Israel came out from Dan to Beersheba. Now, what does this tell us? There's some sort of an anachronism here, is there not? What does Dan to Beersheba mean? This story is being told in the days of David. The tribe of Dan has not yet moved up north to be Dan in the north, to Beersheba in the south, right? But I could be talking about the territory of Texas and talking about Stephen Austin or Sam Houston or whoever, and I could say, from Dallas to Fort Worth, there was a wagon train, well, maybe there wasn't a Dallas at that time.

Maybe it was called something else. I refer in modern terms to a territory that may have been something different at the time. There is no Dan up north, but this is the common term in David's day to refer to the whole of Israel.

And they just use it, because that's the time when you're telling the story. So I could be talking about Lewis and Clark, and they covered everything from Canada to Mexico. Well, that's a current term.

So from Dan to Beersheba, as well as from the land of Gilead, this is on the other side of the Jordan, everybody comes and gathers together as one man before the Lord at Mizpah. Somebody had a question just at the break. Where is the Ark of the Covenant? Where is everything? Is it at Shiloh, where it will be a couple hundred years later with Eli and Hophni and Phinehas and then Samuel and so on? Evidently not.

In these early days, evidently, when they pick a place to meet, it's at Mizpah. The leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God. When it says before the Lord, this is generally before the Ark of the Covenant.

So the Ark of the Covenant, wherever it has been, it's at Mizpah for this meeting. The children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel had gone up to Mizpah. So the children of Israel said, tell us, how did this wicked deed happen? So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, my concubine and I went into Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, to spend the night.

The men of Gibeah rose against me, surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me, but instead they ravaged my concubine so that she died. Now, years ago, I got a note from my brother that I've always remembered a phrase that he used in there because he was writing me a letter and talking about what he'd been up to, and he said, you know, I noticed in my previous paragraph that there's a preponderance of the first person pronoun, meaning I think I've been talking about myself too much.

Well, look at the preponderance of the first person pronoun in this statement. My concubine and I went into Gibeah. The men of Gibeah rose against me, and surrounded the house at night because of me.

They intended to kill me, but instead they ravaged my concubine so that she died. So I took hold of my concubine. I cut her in pieces.

I sent her throughout all the territory of the inheritance of Israel, because they committed lewdness and outrage in Israel. Look, all of you children of Israel, give your advice and counsel here and now. What little detail did he leave out here? Oh, by the way, as you make your deliberations and come up with your policy, just remember, I'm the guy that shoved her out the door to save my own skin.

But you can imagine that he, this, how did this chapter begin? There was no king in Israel. Every man is doing what is right in his own eyes. And in his own eyes, he's right.

Now, this is the danger for you and me. We can be going down a path, and there's a way that seems right. We trust our conscience.

We trust our inner compass. And we say, well, this seems right to me. I don't have any red flags going up in my mind.

But we know that the heart is deceitful. We know that we're corrupt. We know that we have appetites.

And we have, just like this fat old Levite here that went down there to get him a woman and eat and drink, and he can't hardly get him out of the house for eating and drinking. And he's got to stop and eat and drink some more. And his meal gets interrupted.

And he shoves his concubine out the door so that nothing bad happens to him. And then he's all outraged the next day, because now he doesn't have the gal that's going to go up and cook in some more meals. And so he, out of great love and respect for this wonderful woman, he chops her into pieces and mails her all over Israel.

And then when everybody gathers and says, what is going on? He says, well, these men of Benjamin, they're rascals. Somebody needs to do something about them. This is calling for action when he himself is by far the worst offender.

All the people arose as one man, saying, none of us will go to his tent, nor will any turn back to his house. But this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah. We will go up against it by lot.

We will take 10 men out of every 100 throughout all the tribes of Israel, 100 out of every 1,000, 1,000 out of every 10,000, to make provisions for the people that when they come to Gibeah and Benjamin, they may repay all the vileness that they have done in Israel. Wait a minute. The entire town is going to get wiped out because one concubine? There's more going on here than meets the eye.

Do you think nobody else in Israel has been murdered? Nobody else has had a crime committed against them? That suddenly this one crime has so incensed the entire nation that none of them are even going to return to their tent without splitting themselves up and mounting an army and going and wiping out the entire town over this one gal? No. There's more going on here. And there's also some interesting things with regard to our understanding of LF and one out of 100 and 1,000 and all the rest.

But for now, we're at the point where we need to close for this evening. Just remember this. The great gift that God has given us.

In thinking about all of this, you could say, well, none of that applies to me, the men of Gibeon and so on. You can't trust your conscience. You can't trust your feelings.

You can't trust what is appealing or what is desirable. You're going to end up like the Levite. All of us will.

This is the great gift God has given us is an objective standard of right and wrong in his word. Nobody has ended up on the short end of the stick. Nobody has ended up without peace, without joy, without blessing, without a bright future, without an inheritance by following the word of God.

You know who ends up in Gibeon after dark? You know who ends up in the grip of bad circumstances? Those who do what is right in their own eyes. Israel has been doing what is right in its own eyes. That's why there is a tribe of Benjamin.

That's why there is a city of Gibeon that is this vile, that is this willing to gang rape and essentially murder this woman. How did that happen? Everybody's doing what's right in his own eyes. The nation of Israel represents the individual believer's soul.

There needs to be a king in Israel. Who is the king of our soul? Who should be arbiting and looking at whether decisions are right or wrong, whether the small daily decisions should I stay or should I leave, should I cater to my appetites or should I do what is right? Who makes those decisions? Who is the king in your Israel? Or do you just let the various parts and components of the deceitful heart do what's right in their own eyes? And we have lots of different areas of life, lots of different places to make decisions, whether they're moral or operational or whatever they may be. You can let your soul, its little component parts, do what's right in its own eyes.

And destruction and dismay and horrible consequences always follow, because we are not smart enough to govern ourselves. That's why God has given us his word and given us his spirit. It's a wonderful gift.

It's for our blessing. That's why we have it. But we can't be like the Levite and just ignore our obligation to know and make use of God's grace.

Well, this is where we'll pick up next time in Judge's chapter 20, with the nation of Israel about to go to war against Benjamin. Is this going to make Israel a better place? Time will tell. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word and the graphic way that it illustrates for us truths that pertain to our lives each and every day. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these things on our hearts and enable us to live in a way that is pleasing in your sight and that glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask it in his name.

Amen.