

Judges 19A

- We've reached the final part of the book of Judges, the final episode recorded by Samuel, which exposes the evil nature of these days
 - Once again, we're involved in a review of how Israel's culture deteriorated in the years after Joshua led the people into the land
 - This review focuses on three incidents that took place during the days of Judges
 - We just finished our study of the first incident described in chapters 17-18
 - In those chapters, we learned how idolatry was introduced in the land, at the hands of an Ephraimite and the Danites
 - There are still two more incidents we will examine
 - The next three chapters tell the second story
 - While the third story is found in the next book of scripture, Ruth, which we will also study
 - But first, we will take time for our second incident found in chapters 19-21
 - This is a story of civil war in Israel
 - It's the climatic account in the book
 - But like our first incident, the timing of the story does not follow the prior chapter's events
 - In fact, the events of chapters 19-21 occurred even earlier in Israel's history than did the events of chapter 17-18
 - So why does Samuel leave them for the end of the book? In a word: shame
 - He's organized these accounts to create a sense of growing shame and depravity and self-destruction
 - He's moving the narrative from bad to worse
 - And in doing so, he's creating a growing sense of dread among anyone who hopes for better things among God's people

- What will save these people from themselves?
- So we begin in chapter 19

[Judg. 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.

[Judg. 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.

[Judg. 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 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.

[Judg. 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.

- The opening refrain of chapter 19 is Samuel's way of highlighting the source of Israel trouble
 - He says there was no king in those days
 - The days he's speaking about are the days of judges
 - More specifically, this story appears to have taken place not long after Israel entered into the land under Joshua
 - Chapter 20 will introduce a man named Phinehas, who is the grandson of Joshua
 - So just as the previous incident included Moses' grandson, this incident is connected to Joshua
 - Therefore, these are the days early in the period of Judges, and the absence of a king is simply shorthand for Israel's rejection of the Lord's authority
 - These people live as though they have no king
 - But they did have a King...the Lord was their King!
 - Israel was a theocracy, lead by God Who gave them a Law and judges to govern them
 - But Samuel reminds us that there was no king for these people,
 - They didn't have an earthly, human king

- But neither did they acknowledge their sovereign heavenly King
- And the story that follows, like the one that preceded it, reveals what happens when God's people fail to acknowledge the Lord's authority in their lives
 - This is a story of moral deterioration, social chaos and political anarchy
 - It reflects the worst of human depravity emerging from the hearts of a people only recently delivered from bondage
 - And it serves as Samuel's closing argument for why Israel is beyond saving itself
 - It's beyond the reach of human judges
 - It's even beyond the rule of human kings
- As with our last incident, this one also begins with a wayward Levite in Ephraim
 - It's no coincidence that the trouble is beginning in this tribe and with a Levite at the center of the action
 - Ephraim was the most populous tribe in Israel
 - As such, that tribe serves as a barometer for the entire nation
 - As Ephraim goes, so goes Israel in many cases
 - Secondly, the Levites were the custodians of Israel's moral and religious compass
 - As the priests for the nation, they were supposed to safeguard the people from sin and encourage holiness
 - They set the bar for the people and gave them charge to serve the Lord and His Law
 - So what does it mean for the nation when the fox is guarding the hen house?
 - And so in just the first verse of the chapter, we already find a Levite living with no regard for the commandments of God
 - Like the previous story, he's living in a place not designated for Levites

- Secondly, he's practicing a socially acceptable form of adultery by taking a concubine
- A concubine was a female servant or slave who was also granted the privileges of a wife, though held a lesser status in the home
- In this period of history, concubines were tolerated within the society, but the practice was always sinful in God's sight
- The fact that Israel's priestly tribe was engaged in sin to the same degree as the rest of the culture explains why the people are so unholy
 - God's word tells us that godly leadership among God's people is all important to the goal of holiness
 - While each person is responsible for his or her own sin before the Lord, it's also true that leaders can influence us for better or worse
 - When we are led by men and women with godly character and a devotion to God's word, then we are in the best possible position to obey as well
 - Conversely, when our leaders are corrupt, lazy or haphazard with God's word, then we are swimming upstream in seeking holiness
 - We can still get there on our own, and we're still accountable if we don't
 - Nevertheless, there's no denying that leadership can influence us for better or worse
 - That's why the Bible places such high and unrelenting standards on who may lead us within the body of Christ
 - And as these two stories are showing us, the Levites of Israel are leading the nation into sin rather away from it
- The sin of this Levite begins to compound upon itself, when the concubine decides to leave her husband
 - In v.2 the text she played the harlot, which means she committed adultery on her husband
 - How ironic, considering he committed adultery on his first wife in marrying this woman
 - Now she was doing the same to him

- Because sin always begets more sin
- As a result of her actions, an argument ensued which led the woman to leave her husband and go back to her father's house
- Josephus offered this commentary on this passage:

Now he [the Levite] was very fond of his wife [concubine], and overcome with her beauty; but he was unhappy in this, that he did not meet with the like return of affection from her, for she was averse to him, which did more inflame his passion for her, so that they quarreled one with another perpetually; and at last the woman was so disgusted at these quarrels, that she left her husband, and went to her parents in the fourth month.

- In the Law, which Levites were supposed to model for Israel, an unfaithful woman must be stoned
 - But instead of stoning her, this Levite pursues her
 - We're told he intends to speak with her tenderly to win her back
 - But later in the story we'll see that he has less compassionate intentions
 - She is her possession first and foremost, and he wants his possession returned
- He comes to the father's house riding a donkey and towing another, which indicate his expectation that she would return with him
 - The bride's daughter sees the Levite coming and rejoices
 - He's probably happy to see that this Levite was willing to reconcile rather than bring justice upon his daughter
 - Which shows us once more that this people are not living with concern for the covenant they have with the Lord
- They man stays with the father-in-law for three days eating and drinking, as if this was a family reunion
 - The celebration is entirely out of place in light of the circumstances
 - The woman has committed adultery
 - She has disrespected her husband by abandoning the home

- Now everyone is overlooking the sins that brought everyone to this moment
- Instead, they are having a party
- Certainly, the Lord has a heart of mercy and forgiveness for His people, and we can still find opportunity for celebration insight of the sin in our life
 - But the Lord grants mercy to a repentant heart and forgiveness to those who love Him
 - He doesn't celebrate our imperfections and He certainly doesn't give us license to do the same
 - This threesome is in the midst of ignoring their collective sin and living as if the Lord and His law doesn't even exist
 - That's not a reason for celebration...it's a recipe for serious consequences

Judg. 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."

Judg. 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."

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

Judg. 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.

Judg. 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."

Judg. 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.

- The concubines father was especially hospitable to his guest, which was the honorable thing to do in this day
 - This man's lavish hospitality would reflect honor upon him under most circumstances

- Hotels were few and far between in this day
- So travelers usually gained accommodation in the homes of strangers who were expected to receive a stranger with kindness
- This was a custom, and in that sense we expect the father-in-law to do what he's doing
- And at first, the father's hospitality proceeds as expected
 - But after a few days, his insistence for more eating and drinking becomes more a nuisance to the husband than honor
 - After three days the husband is ready to return, but the father-in-law convinces him to delay a fourth day
 - Now it's the husband who is forced to show respect by accepting the hospitality even beyond what was truly helpful to him
 - And by the fifth day of delay, he's ready to leave one way or another
- This scene is odd and leaves us wondering why it matters to the story, but we can piece it together if we notice a few key details
 - First, notice that all the celebrations take place between the men only
 - Notice in v.6 the text refers to "both of them" eating and drinking together, referring to the two men only
 - Secondly, the woman is never mentioned in this account, except at the very end of v.10 when we hear she has left with her husband
 - So it appears that the father-in-law is the one desiring to extend this visit, not the daughter
 - And the father is the primary beneficial from the ongoing party
 - Through this encounter Samuel is showing us the underlying cause for the daughter's disobedience and sin against her husband
 - The daughter committed unfaithfulness against her husband
 - When he discovered her sin, he was angry and contended with her

- Rather than face up to her mistake, repent and accept his judgment against her, she ran away
- And where did she run? Into the waiting arms of her loving father
- How did she know she would be received gladly by her father?

- Matthew Henry observed:

"...She went away from {her husband], and (which was not fair) was received and entertained at her father's house. Had her husband turned her out of doors unjustly, her father ought to have pitied her affliction; but, when she treacherously departed from her husband to embrace the bosom of a stranger, her father ought not to have countenanced her sin. Perhaps she would not have violated her duty to her husband if she had not known too well where she should be kindly received. Children's ruin is often owing very much to parents' indulgence."

- All this nonstop eating and drinking is evidence of this father's inability to say no and set limits, either on himself or his daughter it seems
 - The Lord commands parents in His word to strive to raise obedient, respectful compliant children
 - We can't produce perfect kids, of course
 - And aren't to blame for what our adult children do after they leave our care
 - But as much as we can, while we have them in our homes, we must seek to mold their character and behaviors toward godliness
 - That requires teaching them the principles of godliness from God's word
 - And Modeling it for them in our own lives
 - But it also means contending with their sin when they disobey, not turning a blind eye to their mistakes
 - Bringing meaningful discipline when necessary and encouraging them to repent
 - This father has evidently failed to do these things, and Samuel seems to be placing a measure of the blame at his feet by relating this encounter
 - And therefore the blame for the supreme tragedy that will follow for this girl in our story will be shared at least partly by her father

- Moreover, Samuel is passing judgment on the culture as a whole
- Because when a culture forgets how to raise godly children, then it's only a matter of time before society faces certain ruin
- It's no coincidence that in Paul's list in 2Timothy 3 of the sins that characterize the society of the last days he includes the sin of disobeying parents

2Tim. 3:1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.

2Tim. 3:2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,

2Tim. 3:3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good,

2Tim. 3:4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

2Tim. 3:5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

- Notice that God's word places a disobedient child on a par with reviling, or hating good or treachery or being unholy
 - And Paul's point isn't to condemn the child but the parent
 - He isn't talking about full grown adults who disobey their parents
 - He's talking about a society in which young children, who have no choice but to do what a parent requires, are nevertheless allowed to misbehave
 - A young child can only misbehave routinely when parents have chosen to ignore their God-given responsibility to keep a child's behavior within appropriate boundaries
- This woman is about to become the victim indirectly of her own father's indulgence, and right now we're witnesses his indulgence at work
 - But this husband can only take so much of this father-in-law
 - So on the afternoon of the fifth day, he finally decides he must leave now or he'll never break free
- So in v.10 he finally departs, but the timing of departure is troublesome for his traveling party
 - In that day (as it still is today), it was dangerous to travel through the wilderness at night

- Bad guys and wild animals would prey on night travelers
- So it was important to stay in a safe place overnight
- Since the typical means of conveyance in that day was by foot or on a slow donkey, you had to plan your trip carefully to ensure you arrived at a town before nightfall
 - Therefore, leaving so late in the day was a risky move
 - The father-in-law was depending on the late time of day to convince the husband to stay another day
 - It's a sign of the husband's frustration that he chose to leave despite the late hour
- So now he finds himself hurrying to get to a town where they can spend the night
 - The first town they reach is Jebus, which is the ancient name of Jerusalem
 - Bethlehem is about 6 miles south of Jerusalem, so it would have taken them about two hours to get there
 - And one of the husband's servants makes the logical suggestion they should stop here for the night

Judg. 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."

Judg. 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."

Judg. 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."

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

Judg. 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.

- In that day, Jerusalem was a Jebusite (Canaanite) stronghold, which didn't make it the ideal stopping place for a Hebrew

- So the husband decides they will keep moving north to more friendly towns
 - He hopes to reach either the Jewish town of Gibeah or maybe Ramah
 - Gibeah is another three miles north or about another hour's walk
 - Ramah was another 40 minutes beyond Gibeah
- But it's already late and the sun is setting, so their situation is becoming serious
 - They need to reach Gibeah and find a place that will take them in before dark
 - But as they come upon Gibeah, the sun sets
 - So now they have no choice but to stay in this city with or without shelter
 - And as it turns out, they will stay the night in the open city square since no home would take them
- Gibeah is a town in the tribal territory of Benjamin
 - Later, it's known as the hometown of King Saul, which is interesting because Bethlehem is the home town of King David
 - The juxtapositioning of these two towns in the narrative seems to be a foreshadowing of the lives of these two kings
 - Both towns have their problems, one more severe than the other
 - In this case, Gibeah's problem is their utter lack of hospitality in accommodating these fellow Israelites
 - We have difficulty appreciating how dishonorable it was for a town to refuse accommodation to a traveling family
 - In this day, this was a severe departure from custom and deserved condemnation
 - The disciples of Jesus were prepared to call fire down from Heaven upon a Samaritan town for refusing Jesus accommodation

- What's worse, this was a Levite man, and the scriptures had commanded Israel to be especially kind in treatment of this tribe
 - Because the Levites ministered to the spiritual needs of Israel and had no inheritance of their own, the Israelites were to take good care of the Levites
 - Yet this town did nothing for them
 - Perhaps they were refused accommodation because he was a Levite
 - Perhaps they were afraid to open up their homes and expose their sinful lifestyles to a religious leader
- But this situation is about to get much, much worse
 - This town has a dark secret that was apparently not widely understood among fellow Jews
 - But this poor family is about to discover it
 - The father's indulgent nature and the husband's rash decision-making has placed them in this jeopardy
 - And what follows will bring the horrible death of the concubine and the start of civil war in Israel
- Think back to the "ingredients" that have combined to create this stew of sin among the people
 - We have religious leaders failing to follow and model the rule of God's Law
 - They sin themselves, forgetting their place
 - And they do not hold accountable those in their charge
 - Then we have the daughter representing the children who rebel and run from authority
 - They are products of indulgent parents who give license for sin
 - They are walking in paths of self-destruction
 - And we have a culture that has ceased caring for those who provide ministerial guidance
 - They won't show hospitality

- They seem to fear religious authority
- And ultimately, we're going to discover how they harbor extreme depravity in their midst
- As you reflect on these ingredients, notice how many of them have reasserted themselves in our culture today
 - Ask yourself how long this situation can continue before something must change
 - And let's all ask if we are contributing to the problem in one way or another
 - Let's reflect on that this week and we prepare to return to our study