

Judges 19:16-24 + 20:27

This is a story similar to the attack on Lot's angelic guests in Sodom in Genesis 19.

The story shows how much Israelite society had adopted Canaanite values, even early in their occupation of the Promised Land (Phineas was High Priest at this time). In fact, the closing verse of this tale says in those days, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25)

(See <https://bible.org/seriespage/17-israel-s-sodom-and-gomorrah-judges-19-21> for a more detailed discussion of this whole episode)

The differences in the stories in Genesis and Judges are significant.

First, the Levite's concubine had "played the whore" against him, then ran away back to her father's house. The Levite went to fetch her, and her father, hoping to assuage the Levite's anger, entertained him for days. It was on their way back that they arrived in the Benjamite city of Gibeah.

Like Sodom, Gibeah was unkind to travelers and was without hospitality. It was an old man from the remote hill country who offered the Levite and his concubine a place to stay.

Judges 19:22 - "Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him."

Eventually, the Levite pushes his concubine out the door, and the men brutally attack her and leave her for dead.

1. The Levite shockingly cuts up the body of his concubine to send pieces to each tribe as a call to arms. This shows at best a complete disregard for human dignity, almost as much as his throwing her to the crowd to save himself.
2. The story he tells leaves out his own culpability and accuses the leaders and the whole town of Gibeah instead of just some "sons of Belial." This influences the Israelites to send messengers to all the people of Benjamin, demanding they turn over the culpable men.

(It may well be that the entire city of Gibeah should have been destroyed, but not until after careful inquiry was made, and not until the city leaders had been given the opportunity to deal with the wicked men who committed the terrible act - Deut. 13:12-18).

3. The Benjamites, responding in arrogance to this demand, refuse to investigate, and gather together to do battle.

4. After Joshua's death, Israel had asked God who should lead the attack on the Canaanites. With similar language, Israel now asks the same about their war against the Benjamites. But in this instance, God doesn't assure them of victory. So we go on to read that the Benjamites prevailed in the first and second battles, slaughtering 22,000 Israelite soldiers in the first and 18,000 in the second. He is consulted only after they had decided what they were going to do. Only after the third time they petition does God promise that Israel will prevail.

Devious schemes

The second part of the story is like the second part of the Sodom story.

In **Genesis 19**, Lot's daughters devise an unlawful way to carry on the lineage of Lot. Here, the Israelites realize that they will be missing a whole tribe now, and devise a way to carry on the lineage of the Benjamites, who they had just pretty much wiped out.

They vow not to give any of their daughters to Benjamites. They also vow to put to death any who do not gather to do battle with them.

The men of Jabesh Gilead apparently didn't get the message or refused, so they are killed, and their marriageable daughters given to the men of Benjamin who survived the war.

But they still need 200 more brides.

Since they had vowed not to "give" any of their daughters to the Benjamites, they devise a way for the Benjamites to "lay hold on" the daughters instead.

This wasn't a romantic episode of 'The Bachelor.' It probably resulted in 200 rapes, based on Deuteronomy 22:

Deuteronomy 22:28-29 - "If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; Then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days."

The Israelites "commanded" the remaining Benjamites to do this, so they were responsible.

Israel's near-genocide of Benjamin and the resulting 200 rapes was sparked by their outrage at the rape and murder of the concubine. The irony and hypocrisy of circumventing and twisting God's law can hardly be missed.