

Dr. David Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 30

Judges 19-21 second appendix, Benjaminite Outrage

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This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on the books of Joshua through Ruth. This is session 30, Judges 19-21, second appendix, Benjaminite Outrage.

Greetings once again, and in this segment we're going to complete our discussions of the book of Judges.

There's one final story going across the chapters 19 to 21. There are several facets to the story, but it's basically all one, kind of one thing leading to another through this. So we've talked about the downward cycle of corruption and apostasy throughout the book.

We see it coming to a head in Jephthah and especially Samson among the judges. Chapters 17 and 18 show the corruption of Micah and his Levite and his personalized religion that he did and the Danites' involvement in that. And now in chapters 19 and 21, we have further moral and spiritual corruption.

And we might talk about this in terms of the Benjaminite outrage because bad things happen in Gibeah, which is a city within the Benjaminite tribe. And then the aftermath of that, the Israelites, the rest of the Israelites came against the tribe of Benjamin, and it's this big civil war. Lots of people are killed.

But it begins with another Levite. Chapter 17 begins with a Levite, with a man named Micah from Ephraim, but he hires a young Levite. In chapter 17, verse 7, a young man from Bethlehem in Judah of the family of Judah who was a Levite and he sojourns and he leaves Bethlehem to go to the land of Ephraim.

Chapter 19, verse 1, begins with the Levite. The first thing we'll just notice again, we're again told in those days there was no king in Israel. Things are getting to this bad point because of a lack of real godly leadership.

19, verse 1 continues by saying, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim who took unto himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. So interesting, in 17 we have a Levite from Judah going to Ephraim. Here in 19, we have a Levite from Ephraim going to Bethlehem to take a wife, concubine, from there.

And immediately we're told that she's unfaithful to him and leaves him and goes back to her family home in Bethlehem. And that kicks in a series of events that eventually snowball into really bad things happening through the rest of the book.

So, in verse 3, chapter 19, her husband rose and went after her to speak kindly to her and he arrived at the young woman's home and her father welcomed him in.

And then there's this long kind of repetitive cycle where he stays overnight, then wants to leave, and his father joins him to stay longer and longer and longer and he basically ends up staying pretty close to a week. And you never know, the young woman is not really mentioned here, but the father must like the Levite enough to want him to stay longer and maybe during this time he's trying to persuade the daughter to go back with her husband. But finally, at the end, the Levite decides he's had enough and he's actually going to leave.

And so, in verse 10 it says he would not spend the night. He rose up, departed, and arrived opposite Jebus, that is, Jerusalem. So, Jerusalem is right about here, a little farther to the west.

And it says that he had with him a couple of saddled donkeys and his concubine was with him. And there's an interesting little insight into the status of Jerusalem at this point because we have over the next few verses him with the servants and as they get near Jebus, in verse 11, the servant says, let's go stay here at the city of the Jebusites. And the master, the Levite says, no, we're not going to turn, verse 12, we're not going to turn aside into the city of foreigners who do not belong to the people of Israel.

We've mentioned earlier that Jerusalem, Jebus, was on the border of Judah and Benjamin, Judah to the south, Benjamin to the north. In chapter 15, verse 63, it says that the Judahites were not able to drive out the Jebusites from their territory. And Judges chapter 1, verse 21, says that the Benjaminites were not able to do the same thing.

So, they both had some sort of claim to the city. But here we see that in a sense it was kind of a neutral ground and it didn't really belong to either one. And the Jebusites still maintain their own sovereignty there, it seems like.

And so here we have a Levite and his servant. And the Levite is unwilling to stay in that city because he considers it to be a foreign city. And again, it's not until years later that David captures the city and makes it his own, makes it a Jewish city, an Israelite city, the capital of the country, of course.

So, they pass on to Gibeah. Gibeah is about four miles west of Jerusalem. It's in the territory of Benjamin.

And they're going to stay there. So, they get there. They turn to the side there.

And he goes into the square because nobody welcomes them in. Verses 16 to 21 tell us about the hospitality of an old man that he meets there. And the old man, as they go back and forth, eventually invites him into his home.

And that is how this section ends. And there they've settled into the night. And the old man brings the Levite into his house.

And they, end of verse 21, wash their feet, ate and drank. So, they're making merry during this time, verse 22. And then the men of the city, the men of Gibeah, and it calls them worthless fellows.

We've come across that term a couple of other times. Abimelech is a worthless fellow, and Samson is associating with worthless fellows. One of the other judges actually is associated with worthless fellows.

So, we see that this is not going to end well, apparently. And what they say to this old man in verse 22, bring out the man who came into your house that we may know him. Now, in the Old Testament, the word to know has a number of different ways in which it's used.

It has to do with cognitive recognition. It has to do with relationship and knowing God. It also has to do with sexual union.

Adam knew his wife, and she conceived and bore a son. So that's there. A lot of debate about exactly what that means here.

And let me just say here also, this passage, there's a lot of very strong echoes in this passage of Genesis 19, where you have Lot and the men of the city coming into the Lot demanding to know the two men that he has as guests, and Lot instead offers his daughters to these men. Here, the same scenario is playing out, and the man, the master of the house, goes out and says, no, don't act so wickedly. Since this man has come to my house, don't do this vile thing.

Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. Now, the reason I pause here is because, in recent decades, there's been a lot of debate among Biblical scholars and others about whether this passage and the passage in Genesis are actually talking about homosexual activity or not. And it seems to be strongly condemned in Sodom in Genesis 19.

It seems to be strongly condemned here. Traditionally, it's been thought that this has been the desire to end the age of homosexual activity. But there have been other interpreters in recent decades that have suggested no, or that have argued no.

This is not homosexual activity at all. It's the request for bringing the men out so we may know them is more just sort of we can greet them. We are the neighborhood welcoming committee.

We want to just know who they are and get to know them. I think that's belied by the fact that both Lot's response and this man's response are offering young women to them. In this passage, it also says, don't act so wickedly, and don't do this vile thing.

If they were just wanting to get to know who these men were, that's not a wicked thing, that's not a vile thing. Others, so that was an argument that was made at some point. The response that I just gave has usually been given.

The argument has shifted a little bit, and now proponents of the legitimacy of homosexual relations will say, no, the issue is not the fact of homosexual activity, but rather promiscuous homosexual activity and this is homosexual rape. That debate continues on. It's also tied in with other parts of scripture that talk about homosexuality, especially Paul in Romans 1. I would say certainly here, that the activity itself is seen as a vile thing, and the man recognizes this, and we can't get around that fact.

He offers, in an outrageous fashion, he offers his virgin daughter and the man's concubine there, so he says, Violate them, do whatever you want with them, have your way with them, but don't do this against this man who is my guest. The men were not happy with that, so the master of the house, well, says the man, it's not clear who, but it sounds like the Levite grabs his concubine and makes her go out to them, and they knew her and abused her all night to the morning. She collapses on the doorstep when the master comes out in the morning.

Basically, she's there lying dead. This Levite is not covering himself with glory in this passage, because he's rather callous. He just says in verse 28, Get up, let's go.

No concern for her obvious distress. He may not know she's dead, actually, but he's certainly not solicitous of her. There's no answer, so he puts her on the donkey, and gets up and away.

When he gets home, takes a knife, cuts her up in 12 pieces, and mails the pieces out to the 12 tribes as a rallying point for this. But this gruesomeness of him doing this to this concubine, whom the woman he apparently purportedly loved, back in the early part of chapter 19, is rather callous here. He's lost any focus on his concern for her and is now making this more of a national issue.

Because Gibeah, the city where this outrage occurred, is within the tribe of Benjamin, this escalates into a confrontation between the other 11 tribes with the

tribe of Benjamin. This man has escalated to that point. Chapter 20, that's the whole subject matter of chapter 20.

Israel has now collapsed into a very destructive civil war. I mentioned earlier that chapters 2-16 are concerned with Israel's conflicts with the outside, enemies outside of themselves. Chapters 17-21 are about internal conflicts and self-destructive conflicts, and certainly, we see that here in chapter 20.

It's just a terrible, terrible sequence of things. So they gather together, chapter 20, verses 1 and following. And everybody comes, from Dan to Beersheba.

Dan is in the far north, and Beersheba is in the far south. They assemble at one place at Mizpah, which is in the central part of the country. And the chiefs of all the people, the tribes that present themselves to the Lord, there's 400,000 of them.

Men that drew the sword. And the Benjaminites apparently have not been invited, because verse 5 says they heard about this. And the people of Israel ask, how did this happen? And so, the Levite tells the story, verses 4 and following.

And so all the people arose as a result of that. Verse 7, the Levite says, because of this outrage, I want everybody to support me and give me your advice. And everybody gets up in arms.

In verse 8 and following, it says, none of us will go to our home, none of us will return to our house, but until we take care of this outrage. And so they send men through the tribe of Benjamin, and they first just say, what have you done? And the first request is just, to send us the offenders. Send us the worthless men who committed the outrage, and maybe this will be it.

But end of verse 13, the Benjaminites would not listen to that. And so it escalates to the next level. And so the people of Benjamin, verse 14 and following come out to engage in the battle.

There are lots of people involved here. There are 26,000 men, verse 15, of the Benjaminites. There's 400,000, it appears to be, of the rest of Israel.

And the citizens of Gibeah themselves had 700 elite men, end of verse 15. Verse 16, among them were 700 chosen men who were left-handed, who could throw the sling. And that would be an advantage, because normally in the battle, you're kind of used to being right-handed.

The stone's coming from a certain angle, trajectory, from the right-handed slingers. So, if you had left-handed slingers, it was an advantage. It would be more of a surprise.

A little bit like maybe in tennis, where most players are right-handed, and if you have a left-handed player, it kind of throws off the opponent. And the men of Israel, verse 17 again, again repeated, 400,000 men. And so, the people of Israel go up and inquire of God, who shall go first for us against the Benjaminites? And the answer again, remember that's stated already in chapter 1, who shall go first for us? And God says, Judah.

Same thing here in verse 18, it's Judah. So, they rose up in the morning, camped against Gibeah. And now there's a series of attacks and rebuffing and repeated attacks.

And it happens three times over the next few paragraphs. And things seem to get worse and worse at this point. The first two times, Benjamin is able to repel the rest of the Israelites.

The third time, they were routed. And they were subjected to the actual complete annihilation that was due. It was the lot of the Canaanites.

In the middle of this, we have a reference in verse 28 to Phinehas. Right before that, it mentions Bethel in verse 26. This is where the army came to in the middle of the land.

And the parenthesis at the end of verse 27, this is where the Ark of the Covenant of God was. So, God's presence was here at Bethel. And it mentions that Phinehas, the son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron, was ministering before the Ark in those days.

So that's also another little indicator that maybe the events here are not taking place at the end of the period, but earlier. Because Phinehas was the son of Aaron who lived hundreds of years earlier. And so that, along with the indicator about Moses' grandson in earlier chapter 18, are both indicators that these final chapters may have been taking place earlier in the period.

But they're placed here to show just the depth to which everything had sunk by this point. He inquires of the Lord, and the Lord answers in verse 28, saying, Go up for tomorrow, and I will give them to your hands. So they set an ambush, and they go in, and eventually, they are able to defeat them.

I can't see the verse numbers very well, sorry. Verse 35, says, the Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel. The men of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day.

So, despite the low depths to which everybody had sunk, we still see God on behalf of Israel fighting against Benjamin. And I think maybe the idea there is that for all the

problems that's happening in the country there, the nation has gathered together to confront an outrage. Maybe the same way that in the book of Joshua in chapter 22, when the tribes settling east of the Jordan had built up an altar, the rest of the nation bands together thinking this is an outrage because it's an altar of false worship.

And they, to their credit, are ready to defend the principle that there should be no false worship by going to war. Then that situation is diffused because it turns out the tribes east of the Jordan were not setting up a false altar. So, the one silver lining here, the one ray of light may be that as bad as things are going on here, the 11 tribes are united against this outrage, and God is therefore giving them, allowing them to prevail here against the Benjaminites.

So, verse 36, the people of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. But there's back and forth, back and forth, and there's more people that fall. Verse 44, 18,000 men of Benjamin fell, all the men of Valor.

There are 2,000 more that fall in verse 45. Everybody that falls on that day is 25,000 men, which seems to be in addition to the 25,100 of verse 35. So there's just a lot of slaughter at that time.

And again, the spark, the trigger that launched all this nationwide holocaust almost is the selfishness of one man, this Benjaminite, I'm sorry, this Levite, and the selfishness of the man who opens his home to the worthless fellows to come in and rape the concubine, and this Levite who doesn't really care what happens to his wife. So that's, again, the snowballing effect of things. And so, it ends up with the tribe of Benjamin pretty much seemingly to be wiped out.

In the final verse of the chapter, verse 48, the men of Israel turned back against the people of Benjamin, struck them down at the edge of the sword, city, the men, the beasts, and all that they found, and all the towns that they found, they set on fire. So ironically, what Israel was to be doing against the Canaanites way back in the book of Joshua, they are now turning upon themselves within their own compatriots, their own brethren, and wiping them out and burning everybody with fire there. So that's the point that it's come to here at the end of chapter 20.

So, we have one final chapter. And it's kind of ironic because after all this, the Israelites realize and they ask themselves, hmm, what have we done? We've wiped out the tribe of one of our brethren. Maybe that's not such a good idea.

Maybe we shouldn't have done that. And that's the subject matter of the first paragraph of chapter 21, verses 1 to 7. And in verse 6, it says the people of Israel had compassion on Benjamin, their brother. It says, one tribe is cut off from Israel.

So, what are we going to do? What shall we do for wives for those who are left? Since we've sworn by the Lord that we're not going to give them our wives, our daughters, let somebody else contribute to the rejuvenation of the tribe of Benjamin. We're not going to do that. So, there's this ambivalence back and forth, and the people are kind of inconsistent themselves.

So, they decide to say, well, who was it that didn't come and muster with everybody else? And they realize, somebody points out, that the inhabitants of a place called Jabesh Gilead, which is east of the Jordan, weren't there. So, they're the ones who are selected to have the honor of contributing wives to Benjamin. I don't mean to trivialize the issue, but sometimes it reminds you of how committees get formed in businesses or faculties where we decide we're going to have a subcommittee or a chairman of somebody that the person that wasn't at the meeting gets assigned to be the chair or have the responsibilities.

And here we have it going on. So, the nation sends 12,000 of their bravest in verse 10, and go strike the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead with a sword, take their women, and devote everybody to destruction, but find 400 young virgins that have not known a man and bring them. So that's what they did.

Verse 12, the whole congregation comes together, and the Benjaminites return there. So, they gave him these 400 women, but they weren't enough for the Benjaminites. Again, in verse 15, the people had compassion on Benjamin because the Lord had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.

So, for all the backs and forths here, it appears that because of this, God has opened up this breach between them, and so they decide they need a second step, a second stage of finding wives for Benjamin. It wasn't enough to go destroy everybody in Jabesh Gilead and steal 400 of the young women. So, they say again, in verse 16, what are we going to do for the wives because the women of Benjamin have been wiped out?

There needs to be some inheritance, but we can't give them our wives, verse 18. And so, they said, well, let's go to Shiloh. There's an annual festival there, and the women are going to be dancing out there a harvest festival, and let's light an ambush and kidnap another 200.

And so essentially that's what ends up happening. And they tell the Benjaminites that they can go do this, so they do that, verse 23. And the people of Benjamin did so and took their wives according to their number from the dancers, which they carried off.

Then they went and returned to their inheritance, rebuilt the towns that lived in them, and they settled down. So, the ending of this chapter sounds rather peaceful, and like everybody's living happily ever after, verse 24, people of Israel departed

from there at that time, every man to his own tribe and family. They went out from there, every man to his inheritance.

That sounds very much like the ending of the book of Joshua. Everybody settles to their own, and returns to their own inheritance. Everything's in place.

And that was all good in Joshua, but it's a little misleading here because it comes at a great expense and a great cost of thousands, if not tens of thousands of people killed and dislocated, families broken up, and young women violated. And so, the author of the book ends by giving his own final take on this and saying, no, this is not a good thing. There was no king at that time.

Everybody is doing it right in their own eyes. All this is happening because they were doing what they wanted to do. There's no godly leadership in the land that was saying, you shouldn't be doing this.

Here's what we should be doing. And if there had been a godly king leading them in following the Lord and being rooted in the law, my view is that almost none of this would have happened. Yes, clearly, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and there would have been sin along the way in the nation, but certainly not the massive sin and the massive apostasy and the downhill slide of the nation as a whole, including the leaders, that there would have been if there had been a godly king.

So, as we conclude the Book of Judges, just to reiterate, the major theme being the spiritual apostasy of just abandoning the Lord gets worse and worse all the time, and the signal, the note being sounded, that the better things are to come, or things would have been better, if there had been a godly king. As we continue reading the scripture through the Book of Ruth and then Samuel, we realize that there are better days ahead when you get under kings like David and Solomon and some of the godly kings down the road. So that's the message of the Book of Judges.

It's one of the most tragic books in the Bible, but it's also very instructive to us.

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