

Outrage at Gibeah (c. 1380 – c. 1340 BC)

Judges 19:1–28

A Levite and His Concubine

1 In those days there was no king in Israel; there was a man, a Levite, who dwelled as a foreigner in the remote areas of the hill country of Ephraim. And he took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.

2 But his concubine felt repugnance toward him, and she left him and went to her father's house, to Bethlehem in Judah; she was there some four months.

3 So her husband set out, and he went after her to speak tenderly to her, to bring her back. He took with him his servant and a pair of donkeys. And she brought him to her father's house, and the father of the young woman saw him and was glad to meet him.

4 His father-in-law, the young woman's father, urged him to stay with him three days; and they ate and drank, and they spent the night there.

5 On the fourth day, they rose early in the morning, and he prepared to go, but the father of the young woman said to his son-in-law, "Refresh yourself *with* a bit of food, and afterward you may go."

6 So the two of them sat and ate and drank together, and the father of the young woman said to the man, "Please, agree to spend the night and enjoy yourself."

7 The man got up to go, but his father-in-law urged him, and he returned and spent the night there.

8 On the fifth day he rose early in the morning to go, and the father of the young woman said, "Please, enjoy yourself," and they lingered until the day declined, and the two of them ate.

9 And the man got up to go—he, his concubine, and his servant—but his father-in-law, the father of the young woman, said to him, "Please, the day has worn on to evening; please, spend the night, the day has drawn to a close. Spend the night here and enjoy yourself. You can rise early tomorrow for your journey and go to your home."

A Fateful Decision

10 But the man was not willing to spend the night, and he got up and went; and he arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). *He had* with him a pair of saddled donkeys and his concubine.

11 They *were* near Jebus, and the day was far spent, and the servant said to his master, "Please, come, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites, and let us spend the night in it."

12 But his master said to him, "We will not turn aside to the city of foreigners, who *are* not from the Israelites; we will cross over up to Gibeah."

13 And he said to his servant, "Come, let us approach one of these places; we will spend the night in Gibeah or in Ramah."

14 So they crossed over and went their way, and the sun went down on them beside Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin.

15 And they turned aside there to enter *and* to spend the night at Gibeah. And they went and sat in the open square of the city, but no one took them in to spend the night.

An Ominous Warning

16 Then behold, an old man *was* coming from his work from the field in the evening, and the man *was* from the hill country of Ephraim, and he *was* dwelling as a foreigner in Gibeah. (The people of the place *were* descendants of Benjamin.)

17 And the old man raised his eyes and saw the traveler in the open square of the city, and he said, "Where are you going, and from where do you come?"

18 And he said to him, "We *are* crossing over from Bethlehem in Judah up to the remote areas of the hill country of Ephraim, where I *am* from. I went to Bethlehem in Judah, but *now* I am going to Yahweh's house, but no one took me in to spend the night.

19 There is both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and also bread and wine for me, for your servant, and for the young man who is with your servant; there is no lack of anything."

20 And the old man said, "Peace to you. I will take care of your needs; however, you must not spend the night in the open square."

21 So he brought him to his house, and he fed the donkeys; they washed their feet, ate, and drank.

Echoes of Sodom

22 While they were enjoying themselves, behold, the men of the city, the perverse lot, surrounded the house, pounding on the door. And they said to the old man, the owner of the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house so that we may have sex with him."

23 So the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not do this disgraceful thing.

24 Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Please, let me bring them out; do violence to them, and do to them whatever you please. Do not do this disgraceful thing to this man."

25 But the men were not willing to listen to him, and the man seized his concubine and brought *her* out to them; and they had intercourse with her, and they abused her all night until the morning; they let her go at the approach of dawn.

26 And the woman came as the morning appeared, and she fell *at* the entrance of the man's house where her master was, until daylight.

27 In the morning her master got up, and he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his journey, and behold, his concubine *was* falling *at* the entrance of the house, with her hand on the threshold.

28 And he said to her, “Get up, let us go,” but there was no answer. So he put her on the donkey, and the man got up and went to his place.

A Call to Arms (c. 1380 – c. 1340 BC)

Judges 19:29–20:13

For Your Consideration

19:29 When he entered his house he took a knife, and he grasped his concubine and cut her into twelve pieces; and he sent her throughout the whole territory of Israel.

30 All who saw *it* said, “Nothing like this has *ever* been since the Israelites went up from the land of Egypt until this day. Take note of it, consider *it*, and speak *up*.”

The Council of the Eleven Tribes

20:1 All the Israelites went out, from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, and they gathered as one body to Yahweh *at* Mizpah.

2 And the leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand sword-bearing infantry.

3 (The descendants of Benjamin heard that the Israelites had gone up *to* Mizpah.) And the Israelites said, “Tell us, how did this evil act occur?”

4 The Levite, the husband of the murdered woman, answered and said, “I came to Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night.

5 The lords of Gibeah rose up against me and surrounded the house at night. They intended to kill me, and they raped my concubine, and she died.

6 Then I grabbed my concubine and cut her into pieces, and I sent her throughout all the territory of Israel’s inheritance; for they committed a shameful and disgraceful thing in Israel.

7 Look, all you Israelites! Make your decision and advice here.”

The Verdict

8 All the people got up as one body, saying, “Not one of us will go to his tent, or will any of us return to his house.

9 So then, this is what we will do to Gibeah: *we will go up* against her by lot.

10 We will take ten men of one hundred from all the tribes of Israel, and one hundred of one thousand, and one thousand of ten thousand, to bring provisions to the troops, to repay *them* when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin for all the disgraceful things they did in Israel.”

11 And all the men of Israel were gathered to the city as one body united.

Benjamin Refuses to Submit

12 Then the tribes of Israel sent men throughout all the tribes of Benjamin, saying, “What *is* this wickedness that happened among you?

13 So then, hand over the men, the perverse lot, who *are* in Gibeah, so that we may kill them and purge *this* wickedness from Israel.” But the descendants of Benjamin were not willing to listen to the voice of their relatives, the Israelites. [cf. [Deut 13:12–18](#)]

Three Battles (c. 1380 – c. 1340 BC)

Judges 20:14–48

Marshaling the Troops

14 And the descendants of Benjamin were gathered from the cities to Gibeah to go out for battle against the Israelites.

15 From the cities the descendants of Benjamin were counted on that day twenty-six thousand sword-wielding men, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who were counted seven hundred well-trained men.

16 From all these troops *were* seven hundred well-trained men who were left-handed; each one could sling with a stone at a hair and not miss.

17 And the men of Israel besides Benjamin were counted four hundred thousand sword-wielding men; all were warriors.

The First Battle—Benjamin Prevails

18 Then the Israelites got up and went up *to* Bethel, and they inquired of God, saying, “Who will go up first for the battle against the descendants of Benjamin?” And Yahweh said, “Judah *will go* first.”

19 And the Israelites got up in the morning, and they encamped against Gibeah.

20 Then the men of Israel marched out for the battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel took up positions against them *for* battle at Gibeah.

21 The descendants of Benjamin went out from Gibeah, and they struck down on that day twenty-two thousand men of Israel to the ground.

The Second Battle—Benjamin Again Prevails

22 But the troops, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves, and again they arranged *their* battle *lines* in the place where they had arranged themselves the first day.

23 The Israelites went up and wept before Yahweh until evening and inquired of Yahweh, saying, “Should we again draw near from the battle against the descendants of Benjamin, our relatives?” And Yahweh said, “Go up against them.”

24 And the Israelites drew near to the descendants of Benjamin on the second day.

25 And Benjamin went out from Gibeah to meet them on the second day, and they struck down the Israelites again, eighteen thousand men to the ground; all of these *were* sword-wielding.

The Third Battle—The LORD Prevails

26 And all the Israelites and all the troops went up and came to Bethel and wept; and they sat there before Yahweh and fasted on that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before Yahweh.

27 And the Israelites inquired of Yahweh (In those days the ark of the covenant of God *was* there,

28 and Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, *was* standing before it *to minister* in those days), saying, “Should we go out once more to battle against the descendants of Benjamin our relatives, or should we stop?” And Yahweh said, “Go up tomorrow; I will give them into your hand.”

29 So Israel stationed an ambush all around Gibeah.

30 And the Israelites went up against the descendants of Benjamin on the third day, and they took up positions against Gibeah as before.

31 The descendants of Benjamin went out to meet the troops, and they lured *them* away from the city and began to inflict casualties on the troops as before, on the main road, one of which goes up *to* Bethel, the other to Gibeah; *and* in the field *there were* about thirty men of Israel.

32 And the descendants of Benjamin thought, “They *are* being defeated before us as previously,” and the Israelites said, “Let us flee and lure them away from the city to the main roads.”

33 And all the men of Israel got up from their places and took up positions in Baal Tamar; and the ambush of Israel charged from their places, from the vicinity of Gibeah.

34 Then ten thousand well-trained men from all Israel came out against Gibeah, and the battle became fierce; they did not know that disaster *was about to* close in on them.

35 And Yahweh defeated Benjamin in the presence of Israel, and the Israelites destroyed on that day twenty-five thousand one hundred men of Benjamin, all of them sword-wielding.

36 The descendants of Benjamin saw that they were defeated, and the men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin because they trusted the ambush that they had set against Gibeah.

37 And the ambush came quickly and advanced against Gibeah, and it put the whole city to the sword.

38 Now the appointed time for the men of Israel with the ambush was that they sent up for them a great amount of smoke from the city.

39 And the men of Israel turned in the battle, and Benjamin began to inflict casualties on about thirty men of Israel because they thought, “They will be completely defeated before us as in the first battle.”

40 And the cloud of smoke began to go up from the city in a column of smoke, and Benjamin turned backward, and behold, the whole city was going up in smoke!

41 And the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were dismayed because they saw that disaster was closing in on them.

42 And they retreated from before the men of Israel to the way of the wilderness, but the battle caught up to them, and *those who came* from the cities destroyed them in the midst of them.

43 They surrounded Benjamin; they pursued them without rest *and* trod them down opposite Gibeah to the east.

44 And eighteen thousand men from Benjamin fell, all of them able men.

45 And they turned and fled toward the wilderness, to the rock of Rimmon, but they cut down on the main roads five thousand men; and they pursued after them up to Gidom, and they struck down two thousand men.

46 So all of Benjamin who fell on that day were twenty-five thousand sword-wielding men; all of these *were* able men.

47 But six hundred turned and fled toward the wilderness, to the rock of Rimmon, and they remained at the rock of Rimmon *for* four months.

48 And the men of Israel returned to the descendants of Benjamin, and they put them to the edge of the sword, both the inhabitants of city and *the* animals that were found; they also set on fire all the cities that they found.

The Crisis (c. 1380 – c. 1340 BC)

Judges 21

Recognition of the Crisis

- 1 The men of Israel had sworn at Mizpah, saying, “None of us will give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife.”
- 2 And the people of Bethel came and sat there until evening before God, and they lifted their voices and wept bitterly.
- 3 And they said, “Why, Yahweh, God of Israel, has it happened today in Israel that one tribe is lacking from Israel?”
- 4 On the next day the people rose early, and they built there an altar and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings.

A Bloody Solution

- 5 And the Israelites said, “Who in the assembly has not come up from all the tribes of Israel to Yahweh?” For a solemn oath was *taken* concerning whoever did not come up to Yahweh at Mizpah, saying, “He will certainly be put to death.”
- 6 But the Israelites had compassion for Benjamin, their relatives, and they said, “Today one tribe is cut off from Israel.
- 7 What will we do for them—for the *ones* being left over—for wives? For we have sworn by Yahweh not to give to them our daughters as wives.”
- 8 They asked, “Which one is there from the tribes of Israel who did not come up to Yahweh at Mizpah?” And behold, no one came from Jabesh-gilead to the camp, to the assembly.
- 9 The people were counted, and no one was there from the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead.
- 10 And the congregation sent there twelve thousand men from the troops, and they commanded them, saying, “Go, strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, and the women and children.
- 11 This is the thing you will do: you will destroy every man and every woman who had sex with a man.”
- 12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young virgins who had not had sex with a man, and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which *is* in the land of Canaan.
- 13 Then the congregation sent and spoke all *this* to the descendants of Benjamin who *were* at the rock of Rimmon, and they assured them they would not be hurt.
- 14 And Benjamin returned at that time, and they gave to them the women whom they kept alive from Jabesh-gilead; but they were not enough for them.

More Brides for Benjamin

- 15 And the people felt sorry for Benjamin because Yahweh weakened the tribes of Israel.
- 16 So the elders of the congregation said, “What should we do for the remaining *ones* for wives, since the women from Benjamin have been destroyed?”
- 17 And they said, “*There must be* a remnant for Benjamin, so that a tribe will not be blotted out from Israel.
- 18 But we cannot give them wives from our daughters.” (For the Israelites swore, saying, “Cursed be *anyone* who gives a wife to Benjamin.”)
- 19 And they said, “Look, the annual feast of Yahweh *is* in Shiloh, which *is* to the north of Bethel, east of *the* main road that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah.
- 20 They instructed the descendants of Benjamin, saying, “Go, lie in ambush in the vineyards,
- 21 and watch and look; when the daughters of Shiloh dance in the dances, come out from the vineyards and seize for yourselves a wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.
- 22 And if their fathers or their brothers complain to us, we will say to them, ‘Allow us to have them, because we did not capture a wife for each man in the battle, and because you did not give *them* to them, or else you would have been guilty.’”
- 23 The descendants of Benjamin did likewise, and they took wives for each of them from the dancers whom they seized, and they went and returned to their territory, and they rebuilt the cities and they lived in them.
- 24 So the Israelites dispersed from there at that time according to tribe and family; and they went out from there, each one to their own territory.

A Commentary on Judges (literary prelude to Samuel)

- 25 In those days there was no king in Israel; each one did what was right in his own eyes.

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