

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

Judges 19:1–28

A Levite and His Concubine

- 1 In those days Israel had no king. There was a Levite living temporarily in the remote region of the Ephraimite hill country. He acquired a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.
- 2 However, she got angry at him and went home to her father's house in Bethlehem in Judah. When she had been there four months,
- 3 her husband came after her, hoping he could convince her to return. He brought with him his servant and a pair of donkeys. When she brought him into her father's house and the girl's father saw him, he greeted him warmly.
- 4 His father-in-law, the girl's father, persuaded him to stay with him for three days, and they ate and drank together, and spent the night there.
- 5 On the fourth day they woke up early and the Levite got ready to leave. But the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Have a bite to eat for some energy, then you can go."
- 6 So the two of them sat down and had a meal together. Then the girl's father said to the man, "Why not stay another night and have a good time!"
- 7 When the man got ready to leave, his father-in-law convinced him to stay another night.
- 8 He woke up early in the morning on the fifth day so he could leave, but the girl's father said, "Get some energy. Wait until later in the day to leave!" So they ate a meal together.
- 9 When the man got ready to leave with his concubine and his servant, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, "Look! The day is almost over! Stay another night! Since the day is over, stay another night here and have a good time. You can get up early tomorrow and start your trip home."

A Fateful Decision

- 10 But the man did not want to stay another night. He left and traveled as far as Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). He had with him a pair of saddled donkeys and his concubine.
- 11 When they got near Jebus, it was getting quite late and the servant said to his master, "Come on, let's stop at this Jebusite city and spend the night in it."
- 12 But his master said to him, "We should not stop at a foreign city where non-Israelites live. We will travel on to Gibeah."
- 13 He said to his servant, "Come on, we will go into one of the other towns and spend the night in Gibeah or Ramah."
- 14 So they traveled on, and the sun went down when they were near Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin.
- 15 They stopped there and decided to spend the night in Gibeah. They came into the city and sat down in the town square, but no one invited them to spend the night.

An Ominous Warning

- 16 But then an old man passed by, returning at the end of the day from his work in the field. The man was from the Ephraimite hill country; he was living temporarily in Gibeah. (The residents of the town were Benjaminites.)
- 17 When he looked up and saw the traveler in the town square, the old man said, "Where are you heading? Where do you come from?"
- 18 The Levite said to him, "We are traveling from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote region of the Ephraimite hill country. That's where I'm from. I had business in Bethlehem in Judah, but now I'm heading home. But no one has invited me into their home.
- 19 We have enough straw and grain for our donkeys, and there is enough food and wine for me, your female servant, and the young man who is with your servants. We lack nothing."
- 20 The old man said, "Everything is just fine! I will take care of all your needs. But don't spend the night in the town square."
- 21 So he brought him to his house and fed the donkeys. They washed their feet and had a meal.

Echoes of Sodom

- 22 They were having a good time, when suddenly some men of the city, some good-for-nothings, surrounded the house and kept beating on the door. They said to the old man who owned the house, "Send out the man who came to visit you so we can have sex with him."
- 23 The man who owned the house went outside and said to them, "No, my brothers! Don't do this wicked thing! After all, this man is a guest in my house. Don't do such a disgraceful thing!
- 24 Here are my virgin daughter and my guest's concubine. I will send them out and you can abuse them and do to them whatever you like. But don't do such a disgraceful thing to this man!"
- 25 The men refused to listen to him, so the Levite grabbed his concubine and made her go outside. They raped her and abused her all night long until morning. They let her go at dawn.
- 26 The woman arrived back at daybreak and was sprawled out on the doorstep of the house where her master was staying until it became light.
- 27 When her master got up in the morning, opened the doors of the house, and went outside to start on his journey, there was the

woman, his concubine, sprawled out on the doorstep of the house with her hands on the threshold.
28 He said to her, “Get up, let’s leave!” But there was no response. He put her on the donkey and went home.

A Call to Arms (c. 1380 – c. 1340 BC)

Judges 19:29–20:13

For Your Consideration

19:29 When he got home, he took a knife, grabbed his concubine, and carved her up into twelve pieces. Then he sent the pieces throughout Israel.

30 Everyone who saw the sight said, “Nothing like this has happened or been witnessed during the entire time since the Israelites left the land of Egypt! Take careful note of it! Discuss it and speak!”

The Council of the Eleven Tribes

20:1 All the Israelites from Dan to Beer Sheba and from the land of Gilead left their homes and assembled together before the LORD at Mizpah.

2 The leaders of all the people from all the tribes of Israel took their places in the assembly of God’s people, which numbered four hundred thousand sword-wielding foot soldiers.

3 The Benjaminites heard that the Israelites had gone up to Mizpah. Then the Israelites said, “Explain how this wicked thing happened!”

4 The Levite, the husband of the murdered woman, spoke up, “I and my concubine stopped in Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin to spend the night.

5 The leaders of Gibeah attacked me and at night surrounded the house where I was staying. They wanted to kill me; instead they abused my concubine so badly that she died.

6 I grabbed hold of my concubine and carved her up and sent the pieces throughout the territory occupied by Israel, because they committed such an unthinkable atrocity in Israel.

7 All you Israelites, make a decision here!”

The Verdict

8 All Israel rose up in unison and said, “Not one of us will go home! Not one of us will return to his house!

9 Now this is what we will do to Gibeah: We will attack the city as the lot dictates.

10 We will take ten of every group of a hundred men from all the tribes of Israel (and a hundred of every group of a thousand, and a thousand of every group of ten thousand) to get supplies for the army. When they arrive in Gibeah of Benjamin they will punish them for the atrocity which they committed in Israel.”

11 So all the men of Israel gathered together at the city as allies.

Benjamin Refuses to Submit

12 The tribes of Israel sent men throughout the tribe of Benjamin, saying, “How could such a wicked thing take place?

13 Now, hand over the good-for-nothings in Gibeah so we can execute them and purge Israel of wickedness.” But the Benjaminites refused to listen to their Israelite brothers. [cf. [Deut 13:12–18](#)]

Three Battles (c. 1380 – c. 1340 BC)

Judges 20:14–48

Marshaling the Troops

14 The Benjaminites came from their cities and assembled at Gibeah to make war against the Israelites.

15 That day the Benjaminites mustered from their cities twenty-six thousand sword-wielding soldiers, besides seven hundred well-trained soldiers from Gibeah.

16 Among this army were seven hundred specially-trained left-handed soldiers. Each one could sling a stone and hit even the smallest target.

17 The men of Israel (not counting Benjamin) had mustered four hundred thousand sword-wielding soldiers, every one an experienced warrior.

The First Battle—Benjamin Prevails

18 The Israelites went up to Bethel and asked God, “Who should lead the charge against the Benjaminites?” The LORD said, “Judah should lead.”

19 The Israelites got up the next morning and moved against Gibeah.

20 The men of Israel marched out to fight Benjamin; they arranged their battle lines against Gibeah.

21 The Benjaminites attacked from Gibeah and struck down twenty-two thousand Israelites that day.

The Second Battle—Benjamin Again Prevails

22 The Israelite army took heart and once more arranged their battle lines, in the same place where they had taken their positions the day before.

23 The Israelites went up and wept before the LORD until evening. They asked the LORD, “Should we again march out to fight the Benjaminites, our brothers?” The LORD said, “Attack them!”

24 So the Israelites marched toward the Benjaminites the next day.

25 The Benjaminites again attacked them from Gibeah and struck down eighteen thousand sword-wielding Israelite soldiers.

The Third Battle—The LORD Prevails

26 So all the Israelites, the whole army, went up to Bethel. They wept and sat there before the LORD; they did not eat anything that day until evening. They offered up burnt sacrifices and tokens of peace to the LORD.

27 The Israelites asked the LORD (for the ark of God’s covenant was there in those days;

28 Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, was serving the LORD in those days), “Should we once more march out to fight the Benjaminites our brothers, or should we quit?” The LORD said, “Attack, for tomorrow I will hand them over to you.”

29 So Israel hid men in ambush outside Gibeah.

30 The Israelites attacked the Benjaminites the next day; they took their positions against Gibeah just as they had done before.

31 The Benjaminites attacked the army, leaving the city unguarded. They began to strike down their enemy just as they had done before. On the main roads (one leads to Bethel, the other to Gibeah) and in the field, they struck down about thirty Israelites.

32 Then the Benjaminites said, “They are defeated just as before.” But the Israelites said, “Let’s retreat and lure them away from the city into the main roads.”

33 All the men of Israel got up from their places and took their positions at Baal Tamar, while the Israelites hiding in ambush jumped out of their places west of Gibeah.

34 Ten thousand men, well-trained soldiers from all Israel, then made a frontal assault against Gibeah—the battle was fierce. But the Benjaminites did not realize that disaster was at their doorstep.

35 The LORD annihilated Benjamin before Israel; the Israelites struck down that day 25,100 sword-wielding Benjaminites.

36 Then the Benjaminites saw they were defeated. The Israelites retreated before Benjamin, because they had confidence in the men they had hid in ambush outside Gibeah.

37 The men hiding in ambush made a mad dash to Gibeah. They attacked and put the sword to the entire city.

38 The Israelites and the men hiding in ambush had arranged a signal. When the men hiding in ambush sent up a smoke signal from the city,

39 the Israelites counterattacked. Benjamin had begun to strike down the Israelites; they struck down about thirty men. They said, “There’s no doubt about it! They are totally defeated as in the earlier battle.”

40 But when the signal, a pillar of smoke, began to rise up from the city, the Benjaminites turned around and saw the whole city going up in a cloud of smoke that rose high into the sky.

41 When the Israelites turned around, the Benjaminites panicked because they could see that disaster was on their doorstep.

42 They retreated before the Israelites, taking the road to the wilderness. But the battle overtook them as men from the surrounding cities struck them down.

43 They surrounded the Benjaminites, chased them from Nohah, and annihilated them all the way to a spot east of Geba.

44 Eighteen thousand Benjaminites, all of them capable warriors, fell dead.

45 The rest turned and ran toward the wilderness, heading toward the cliff of Rimmon. But the Israelites caught five thousand of them on the main roads. They stayed right on their heels all the way to Gidom and struck down two thousand more.

46 That day twenty-five thousand sword-wielding Benjaminites fell in battle, all of them capable warriors.

47 Six hundred survivors turned and ran away to the wilderness, to the cliff of Rimmon. They stayed there four months.

48 The Israelites returned to the Benjaminite towns and put the sword to them. They wiped out the cities, the animals, and everything they could find. They set fire to every city in their path.

The Crisis (c. 1380 – c. 1340 BC)**Judges 21****Recognition of the Crisis**

1 The Israelites had taken an oath in Mizpah, saying, “Not one of us will allow his daughter to marry a Benjaminite.”

2 So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, weeping loudly and uncontrollably.

3 They said, “Why, O LORD God of Israel, has this happened in Israel?” An entire tribe has disappeared from Israel today!”

4 The next morning the people got up early and built an altar there. They offered up burnt sacrifices and token of peace.

A Bloody Solution

5 The Israelites asked, “Who from all the Israelite tribes has not assembled before the LORD?” They had made a solemn oath that whoever did not assemble before the LORD at Mizpah must certainly be executed.

- 6 The Israelites regretted what had happened to their brother Benjamin. They said, “Today we cut off an entire tribe from Israel!
7 How can we find wives for those who are left? After all, we took an oath in the LORD’s name not to give them our daughters as wives.”
8 So they asked, “Who from all the Israelite tribes did not assemble before the LORD at Mizpah?” Now it just so happened no one from Jabesh Gilead had come to the gathering.
9 When they took roll call, they noticed none of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead were there.
10 So the assembly sent 12,000 capable warriors against Jabesh Gilead. They commanded them, “Go and kill with your swords the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead, including the women and little children.
11 Do this: exterminate every male, as well as every woman who has had sexual relations with a male. But spare the lives of any virgins.” So they did as instructed.
12 They found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young girls who were virgins—they had never had sexual relations with a male. They brought them back to the camp at Shiloh in the land of Canaan.
13 The entire assembly sent messengers to the Benjaminites at the cliff of Rimmon and assured them they would not be harmed.
14 The Benjaminites returned at that time, and the Israelites gave to them the women they had spared from Jabesh Gilead. But there were not enough to go around.

More Brides for Benjamin

- 15 The people regretted what had happened to Benjamin because the LORD had weakened the Israelite tribes.
16 The leaders of the assembly said, “How can we find wives for those who are left? After all, the Benjaminite women have been wiped out.
17 The remnant of Benjamin must be preserved. An entire Israelite tribe should not be wiped out.
18 But we can’t allow our daughters to marry them, for the Israelites took an oath, saying, ‘Whoever gives a woman to a Benjaminite will be destroyed!’
19 However, there is an annual festival to the LORD in Shiloh, which is north of Bethel (east of the main road that goes up from Bethel to Shechem) and south of Lebonah.”
20 So they commanded the Benjaminites, “Go hide in the vineyards,
21 and keep your eyes open. When you see the daughters of Shiloh coming out to dance in the celebration, jump out from the vineyards. Each one of you, catch yourself a wife from among the daughters of Shiloh and then go home to the land of Benjamin.
22 When their fathers or brothers come and protest to us, we’ll say to them, “Do us a favor and let them be, for we could not get each one a wife through battle. Don’t worry about breaking your oath! You would only be guilty if you had voluntarily given them wives.”
23 The Benjaminites did as instructed. They abducted two hundred of the dancing girls to be their wives. They went home to their own territory, rebuilt their cities, and settled down.
24 Then the Israelites dispersed from there to their respective tribal and clan territories. Each went from there to his own property.

A Commentary on Judges (literary prelude to Samuel)

- 25 In those days Israel had no king. Each man did what he considered to be right.

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