

JUDGES—WEEK 16

DARKNESS FALLS



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is Samson and the Lion by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553)
On display in the Schlossmuseum, Weimar, Germany*

Late in the evening, the Levite chooses to press on past Jebus, and “the sun goes down on him” (in more ways than one). Fortunately, an old man takes the Levite and his entourage in. Unfortunately, he can’t protect them from a crazed mob, and the Levite’s concubine ends up dead.

The Levite cuts her up and mails out the pieces. When confronted, he challenges everyone to enact justice.

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Joshua, Week 16 — Darkness Falls
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1 Judges 19:10–15

However, the man was not willing to spend that night; so he rose and departed, and came opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). With him were the two saddled donkeys; his concubine was also with him. They were near Jebus, and the day was far spent; and the servant said to his master, “Come, please, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and lodge in it.”

But his master said to him, “We will not turn aside here into a city of foreigners, who are not of the children of Israel; we will go on to Gibeah.” So he said to his servant, “Come, let us draw near to one of these places, and spend the night in Gibeah or in Ramah.” And they passed by and went their way; and the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin. They turned aside there to go in to lodge in Gibeah. And when he went in, he sat down in the open square of the city, for no one would take them into his house to spend the night.

Jerusalem is called Jebus because it’s inhabited by the Jebusites, who are not Israelites. Gibeah is a Benjamite town a few miles north of Jebus. As we’ll see in 1 Samuel, Gibeah is Saul’s hometown.

So, the Levite and his family have to travel about another hour into the evening to avoid spending the night amongst foreigners. The day was already *far spent* when he made this call, *and the sun went down on them near Gibeah*.

The words “*on them*” are foreboding. Obviously, the sun didn’t literally go down on them. It went down on their plans, their hope to arrive before dark.

The first clue that this city isn’t the refuge they thought it would be is that no one will grant them lodging. The Levite thought that his people would treat them well. That turns out to be a bust, so *he sat down in the open square of the city*.

They’re in a safer city (or so they think) but now they’re stuck outside, in a place where they’re not safe from anything—the elements, marauders, even wild animals.

The Levite’s insistence on lodging in an Israelite city is a mistake born of either hubris, or chauvinism, or both. He simply refuses to even lodge in a city populated by Gentiles. He may be right to be skeptical of the Jebusites, but he’s not skeptical enough of the folks in Gibeah.

He obviously doesn’t understand the doctrine of total depravity.

In the 1980’s Ronald Reagan famously coined the phrase, “Trust, but verify.” He was using it with respect to the Soviet Union.

But that rule doesn’t apply to just international relations; it applies to everyone. The cold, hard truth is that trusting someone to the point of making yourself vulnerable is rarely advisable.

The prime exception is marriage, which is why that covenant should never be entered into on a whim.

2 Judges 19:16–21

Just then an old man came in from his work in the field at evening, who also was from the mountains of Ephraim; he was staying in Gibeah, whereas the men of the place were Benjamites. And when he raised his eyes, he saw the traveler in the open square of the city; and the old man said, “Where are you going, and where do you come from?”

So he said to him, “We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah toward the remote mountains of Ephraim; I am from there. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; now I am going to the house of the LORD. But there is no one who will take me into his house, although we have both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and bread and wine for myself, for your female servant, and for the young man who is with your servant; there is no lack of anything.”

And the old man said, “Peace be with you! However, let all your needs be my responsibility; only do not spend the night in the open square.” So he brought him into his house, and gave fodder to the donkeys. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

Note carefully what is and isn't said here. The passage notes that the old man is from Ephraim, *whereas the men of the place were Benjamites*. Then he doesn't ask the Levite who he is, only where he's from and where he's going.

The Levite answers the questions literally. So, the old man doesn't learn the Levite's identity as a Levite. His identity is where he's from. That fits with the passage identifying the old man by where he's from.

Given the lack of names in this whole story, it's obvious that this is a tale of tribes, not individuals. The Benjamites wouldn't take the Levite in, but the Ephraimite would.

And the Ephraimite's hospitality is notable. He insists on providing for his guests even though they brought their own provisions.

The contrast between these two tribes is the point of this passage.

Christians are ambassadors for Christ. Everything we do reflects on Him and His church.

And, of course, the things we do wrong are noticed and remembered much more than the things we do right.

This should weigh on us. We all make mistakes—embarrassing ones—and they don't just embarrass us; they embarrass Christianity. So, what should we do when we mess up?

Of course, we should do everything we can to seek His will and His blessing on our efforts to be good ambassadors and not mess up. But there's another key—admitting wrong and apologizing. If you're thinking about your own reputation, you may not feel like doing this.

But if your focus is on the church and its reputation, apologizing is obvious—and easier. Make amends.

3 Judges 19:22–25a

As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house and beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, “Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally!”

But the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, “No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act so wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage. Look, here is my virgin daughter and the man’s concubine; let me bring them out now. Humble them, and do with them as you please; but to this man do not do such a vile thing!” But the men would not heed him. So the man took his concubine and brought her out to them.

There was no 911 for them to call. We don’t know how many men *surrounded the house*, but obviously the people inside are outnumbered by the men outside. Furthermore, the men outside are violent and perverted. The old man and his guests are trapped.

Their choice of action is disgusting. It’s massively less than chivalrous. The Levite sacrifices his concubine—the same one he so actively pursued just a few days earlier.

It’s a horrible choice, but all the choices are horrible.

The lesson here—and it’s a painful one—is that the threatened homosexual rape is such a great abomination that any alternative is better. One is horrible, but the other is an absolute no.

It’s not a cowardly choice; it’s a logical one.

This speaks strongly to God’s priorities. The creator sees things from a creator’s point of view. He cares about many things that we don’t even think about. More to the point, we can be surprised by what’s important to Him.

God invented sex. He created us male and female. He invented childbirth. He invented families. He invented love. He invented the parts that make sex work and make sex pleasurable. These things are all part of the design of His apex created being.

He also gave us a list of the ten things that are super important to Him. Adultery made His top ten list.

But the Ten Commandments are not verbose. The seventh commandment is only two words in Hebrew — לֹא תִזְנֶה, not adultery (masculine, second person singular, imperative). That’s a summary; it’s not the whole concept.

The whole concept is that God gave us a great gift and we are to use that gift the way it was designed. Anything else is an effrontery to its inventor.

Such a great and important gift should make the top ten.

4 Judges 19:25b–30

And they knew her and abused her all night until morning; and when the day began to break, they let her go.

Then the woman came as the day was dawning, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, till it was light.

When her master arose in the morning, and opened the doors of the house and went out to go his way, there was his concubine, fallen at the door of the house with her hands on the threshold. And he said to her, "Get up and let us be going." But there was no answer. So the man lifted her onto the donkey; and the man got up and went to his place.

When he entered his house he took a knife, laid hold of his concubine, and divided her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. And so it was that all who saw it said, "No such deed has been done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it, confer, and speak up!"

This isn't even about sex; it's about power. The men that surrounded the house demand to have sex with the man (whom they do not know is a Levite). The concubine is a perfectly good substitute because they just want to *abuse* somebody. Her death confirms this. Rape is horrible, but shouldn't be fatal.

So, the nameless Levite exits the home of the nameless Ephraimite and finds his nameless concubine lying dead on the front porch, having been *abused* to death by a gang of nameless Benjamites. His immediate response sounds like the actions of a heartbroken husband. He *lifted her onto the donkey; and the man got up and went to his place.*

But that's not the end of the story. Next, he butchers *her into twelve pieces, limb by limb*, and mails the pieces out to *all the territory of Israel*. This is psycho—literally. It would fit perfectly into the Alfred Hitchcock movie *Psycho*. The Levite's actions are not rational.

But the number 12 is.

This is how wars start. This one started with, "*No such deed has been done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it, confer, and speak up!*"

It's not clear whether the *deed* refers to the gang rape of the concubine or her butchering and distribution. The latter is more unique, but the response by the tribes later seems to be more about the gang rape.

The Levite has his heart set on punishing the people who did this to his beloved concubine. But he sees this as the fault of the entire tribe of Benjamin. (So does the book, which is why no one is named.)

The Levite has it out for the whole tribe of Benjamin, and he wants payback. "Don't get mad; get even."

The 12 tribes of Israel are now on alert. They've been challenged to respond to this crime.

5 Judges 20:1–7

So all the children of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, as well as from the land of Gilead, and the congregation gathered together as one man before the LORD at Mizpah. 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 foot soldiers who drew the sword. (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.)

Then the children of Israel said, “Tell us, how did this wicked deed happen?”

So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, “My concubine and I went into Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, to spend the night. And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me, but instead they ravished my concubine so that she died. So I took hold of my concubine, cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of the inheritance of Israel, because they committed lewdness and outrage in Israel. Look! All of you are children of Israel; give your advice and counsel here and now!”

Notice how the Levite spins the story. *They intended to kill me, but instead they ravished my concubine so that she died.*

He doesn't know what they “*intended*,” plus he leaves out the part where he “*took his concubine and brought her out to them*.” He doesn't want to talk about that.

And don't forget the disgusting thing he did with her body. At least that part he can't deny—even though he doesn't mention it.

But on the positive side, he does stand up as the one to answer their question. Then he gives a pretty good rabble-rousing speech, even if it doesn't rise to the level of Marc Antony's, “*I come to bury Caesar not to praise him*.”

And the best part is that he ends by challenging his audience. “*Look! All of you are children of Israel; give your advice and counsel here and now!*”

“Yeah, but what are you going to do about it?” That's the question Christians are often faced with.

We speak the truth. We stand for the truth. That's obvious. But when it comes to action, we're not so sure.

Some actions are obviously okay. Vote, or even run for office. Free speech is guaranteed in the first amendment. So is “the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances”. They're in there to show that they're okay.

But some things, such as suing someone, can be legal but not so obviously okay for a Christian.

The command to love our neighbors, even our enemies, weighs heavily on us.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. When have you seen trust be betrayed?

2. When have you seen an apology work wonders?

3. Do you know of a dreadful choice (personally or from history)?

4. Have you seen someone not handle grief properly?

5. When should a Christian not sue when regular ethics says they should?

Items for prayer: