

Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

There Was No King In Israel

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Judges 19

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Introduction:

This morning we are going to deal with one of the most unpleasant texts in all the Bible. It is generally viewed in the Bible as the “high water mark” in human depravity in the days before the Davidic Kings. In order to understand how this event functions in the story of the Bible we need to do a little bit of homework. This story in Judges 19 has obvious parallels with the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19.

Background Story: Sodom and Gomorrah

In Genesis 18 God shows up with two angels to speak with Abraham and to include him in the discussion about just how wicked a city needs to be before it occasions the judgement of the Lord. And they go back and forth a little bit about how much righteousness there would need to be in a city to forestall God’s judgement. After this dialogue the two angels are sent into the city to do a reconnaissance. We read the story of that in Genesis 19:1 and following:

¹Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw *them*, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground. ²And he said, “Here now, my lords, please turn in to your servant’s house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way.”

And they said, “No, but we will spend the night in the open square.”

³But he insisted strongly; so they turned in to him and entered his house. Then he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

⁴Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. ⁵And they called to Lot and said to him, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them *carnally*.”

⁶So Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind him, ⁷and said, “Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! ⁸See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof.”

⁹And they said, “Stand back!” Then they said, “This one came in to stay *here*, and he keeps acting as a judge; now we will deal worse with you than with them.” So they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near to break down the door. ¹⁰But the men reached out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. ¹¹And they struck the men who *were* at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they became weary *trying* to find the door. (Genesis 19:1-11. NKJV)

The angels decide that more than enough evidence has been gathered to justify the destruction of the city. They hustle Lot and his family outside the city limits and then the entire region is covered in fire and brimstone.

This story in the Bible is positioned at least in part to explain and justify the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites in the Book of Joshua. Sodom and Gomorrah are Canaanite cities and about these people God said this in advance of the conquest:

⁵*It is* not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart *that* you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Deuteronomy 9:5. NKJV)

The people of Canaan were viewed as intolerably wicked in the eyes of the Lord and history tells us it was primarily because of two things. The people of Canaan were known throughout the ancient world for child sacrifice and for ritual, homosexual practice. It is very obvious that the author of Judges is assuming that his readers are familiar with that story as he begins to describe the depths to which the Israelites have now sunk. Open your Bibles to Judges 19. I will read through the key verses of the text and then fill in the closing details from the remaining chapters in Judges and then we will spend some time at the end trying to make sense of this awful story. Hear then the Word of the Lord:

¹And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote mountains of Ephraim.

This introduction is incredibly important. The whole point of this story is to show that unrestrained by the central authority of a king, the people have slid hard and fast into total depravity. The author is saying that without a king, the people of God are no better than the Canaanites. Now, you need to know as well that this is not a story about good guys and bad guys. This is a story about bad guys and worse guys. Everyone in this story is totally messed up. Don't think for a second that this Levite we've just met is the good guy in the story just because he was "a holy man". This holy man is not holy in any sense of the word. Let's keep reading:

He took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. ²But his concubine played the harlot against him, and went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there four whole months.

Again, under the heading, "Bad Guys And Worse Guys" his wife is no great hero either. First of all, she's not even a real wife, she is a concubine, which is like saying: "legally sanctioned girlfriend". This is not a proper wife really. In today's terms we might say she was his common law wife or live in girlfriend. This is a breakdown in the original plan for marriage and surprise, surprise, this not quite wife girl was not herself super faithful and she left her husband to play the harlot and she ran back to dad's house who apparently had no great concern about the whole thing. This reads like the opening segment in a Jerry Springer episode.

³Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her *and* bring her back, having his servant and a couple of donkeys with him. So she brought him into her father's house; and when the father of the young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him. ⁴Now his father-in-law, the young woman's father, detained him; and he stayed with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there.

The father in law seems glad to have the Levite stay with him and he keeps trying to delay his departure but finally the Levite starts off on his journey homeward. We pick up the story in verse 10:

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. ¹¹They *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."

¹²But 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."

In those days Jerusalem was still in the hands of the Canaanites, it didn't become a city of Israel until the time of David. The Levite does not want to stay overnight in a Canaanite city because he remembers the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Staying overnight in a Canaanite city is a very bad idea so he says to his servant: "Let's find a nice Jewish city to stay in" and they travel on to Gibeah.

¹⁵They 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.

This is our first indication that something is very wrong in Gibeah. It was a sacred duty of all Jews to provide hospitality to travelling Jews. The Levite went to the city square and waited and no one offered them hospitality. That is a very bad sign.

¹⁶Just 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.

So a stranger comes along, a man who was not from this wicked town and he takes an interest in them:

¹⁷And 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?"

¹⁸So 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, ¹⁹although 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."

²⁰And 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." ²¹So he brought him into his house, and gave fodder to the donkeys. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

²²As 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!*"

²³But 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. ²⁴Look, *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!" ²⁵But the men would not heed him. So the man took his concubine and brought *her* out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until morning; and when the day began to break, they let her go.

²⁶Then 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.

²⁷When 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. ²⁸And 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.

²⁹When 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. ³⁰And 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!” (Judges 19:1-30. NKJV)

This is a story about the awful depths of human depravity. There is not a single good character in this story. At first we think the old man might be the good guy but then he shows himself willing to sacrifice his own virgin daughter to appease the wicked men. The Levite, who is supposed to be a holy man, a teacher of God’s law, he throws his own concubine outside to the wolves to save his own skin. More horrifying even than that is his total callous disregard for her the morning after. “Get up and let us be going” is not anywhere near what you would expect a decent human being to say to someone who has just spent the night in the pit of hell. He throws her limp body over his saddle and takes her home where he cuts her into pieces. The text doesn’t even say whether she was dead. He sends the pieces to all the tribes of Israel as a summons to holy war against Benjamin.

The story goes on to say that the tribes assembled, they heard the tale of what happened, they were outraged and they went out to make war on Benjamin. The war is surprisingly bloody, but eventually the Benjamites are virtually exterminated. It would be almost 100 years before the city was inhabited again. The judgment of God was severe. The story ends with the same words with which it began:

²⁵In those days *there was* no king in Israel; everyone did *what was* right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25. NKJV)

The main point that the narrator is trying to drive home is that the people of God have become no different than the Canaanites. Total depravity is not something out there anymore, where the pagans live; **TOTAL DEPRAVITY NOW LIVES IN OUR HEARTS!** The only solution he can imagine is for Israel to have a king. We need a king who can save us from ourselves. We’ll come back to that point in just a moment.

The story also provides us with a picture of the society that warrants the judgment of God. In the same way that the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative provided a picture of the society that warranted the judgement of God, so does this story, indeed it is held up as the standard by some of the later prophets. Hosea speaks of it in Hosea 9:9:

⁹ They are deeply corrupted,

As in the days of Gibeah.
He will remember their iniquity;
He will punish their sins. (Hosea 9:9. NKJV)

Centuries later Hosea the prophet says: “We’ve reached that same level of depravity again! We’ve hit the Gibeah standard and that means that God will now punish our sins.” The story of Gibeah thus becomes a picture of the culture that warrants the judgment of God. There are three key elements in this picture of depravity that we should note:

A Picture Of Depravity:

1. Marital breakdown

The opening verses of this story are intended to be jarring. We are supposed to be asking questions like: “What is a Levite doing with a concubine? That’s not in the Bible he is supposed to be teaching.” We are supposed to be asking: “What is his concubine doing playing the whore and leaving her husband to be a prostitute out of her father’s house?” What planet are we on? As the story progresses the narrator intends us to be horrified at the callousness of the husband. How could he throw his wife, even if she is a “second class girlfriend” type of wife – how could any man throw his wife to the wolves to save his own skin? What kind of husband says: “Get up woman, it’s time to go” to his wife who has just suffered the most brutal form of violation and abuse a person could imagine? The men in this story are callous and cowardly, the women are promiscuous and unfaithful, the parents are permissive and enabling. The author is telling us that men aren’t men and women aren’t women and marriage isn’t taken seriously in the society that warrants God’s wrath.

2. Rampant homosexuality

Now, in very recent years some advocates within the homosexual lobby have attempted to say that the Sodom and Gomorrah story and this story here in Judges 19 is really about failure to provide hospitality and that the homosexuality in these stories is entirely incidental. That is quite frankly, ridiculous. Obviously the narrator is summoning multiple pieces of evidence in arguing that these folks deserved the wrath of God and lack of hospitality is a part of that mix, but the coup de grace here is plainly the homosexual element. It has always been understood as such.

Two prominent Jewish writers writing 2000 years ago, before the homosexual lobby was allowed to re-write history for us, plainly stated that while arrogance and inhospitality were obviously part of the toxic mix in these cities, homosexual conduct was the most outrageous example of a much wider range of sinful excess that occasioned God's wrath. There is a reason that the word "sodomy" in the English language refers not to a failure to provide hospitality, but to the committing of homosexual acts. In Sodom and Gomorrah as in Gibeah, the widespread and rampant homosexuality of the culture was a large part of the evidence summoned to justify God's impending wrath.

3. Lack of hospitality towards God's people

We mustn't over react to the historical revisionism of the homosexual lobby and deny that lack of hospitality was a part of the sin of Sodom and Gibeah that in both stories occasioned God's wrath. That is clearly part of the mix. Now, in our day and age we struggle to understand why this is such a big deal. None of us would ever think of going to Calgary and just parking out in the city square waiting for someone to take us home. That would not turn out well, in all likelihood. But hospitality in that culture was a sacred duty; especially inside the covenant community. The fact that we don't "get this" does not lessen the importance of this part of the story. Consider for example what Jesus said in Matthew 10. When Jesus was sending out his disciples on their first Gospel mission he told them:

¹¹"Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. ¹²And when you go into a household, greet it. ¹³If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. ¹⁵Assuredly, I say to you, **it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!** (Matthew 10:11-15. NKJV)

Jesus says that the failure of a culture to show welcome and hospitality to the disciples of Christ will result in the wrath of God being poured out on those people in a way that makes showers of fire and brimstone pale in comparison. Now some might say that perhaps that warning only applies to the Apostles of Jesus – the Super Disciples, but when we read Matthew 25 we see that isn't the case at all. You've heard me reference the story of the sheep and the goats many times haven't you? What was the deciding factor in whether people entered the eternal blessing of God or experienced the eternal wrath of God? Showing welcome and hospitality to the least of the disciples of Christ:

‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of **the least of these My brethren**, you did *it* to Me.’
(Matthew 25:40. NKJV)

This principle of hospitality applies not just to the super disciples but to the LEAST OF THE DISCIPLES. And what happens to those who reject and despise the people of Christ?

⁴⁶And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:46. NKJV)

Jesus is saying that people give damning evidence that they have rejected Christ when they turn on God’s people. A culture that turns on the disciples of Christ and makes them no longer welcome occasions, invites and WARRANTS the judgment of Almighty God according to the Bible. There is a picture of that in Revelation. Look at Revelation 11:7:

⁷When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. ⁸And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city **which spiritually is called Sodom** and Egypt, where also ⁹our Lord was crucified. ⁹Then *those* from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations ¹⁰will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. ¹⁰And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

¹¹Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. ¹²And ¹²they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. ¹³In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven.

¹⁴The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly. (Revelation 11:7-14. NKJV)

Do you understand what is being said here? The word translated “bodies” in verse 8 is actually singular. It literally says “their dead body”. When the body of the church lies dead in the centre of the culture that is figuratively called SODOM – that is figuratively like the city of Sodom, like the city of Gibeah, then the wrath of God draws near. This is the story that invites the return of God in wrath in the Book of Revelation. When a culture rejects and hates the people of God, God comes in judgment and according to Revelation 11:14, he comes quickly.

Conclusion:

The contemporary relevance of this story is not hard to spot. We live in a culture where men are no longer men and women are no longer women and marriage is under assault. We live in a society that aggressively promotes homosexuality not just as something to be tolerated – no that

line was passed years ago – the new battle is for normalization and beyond that applause. Now we are being told that unless we line the parade and cheer for men dancing up and down in a cod piece we are bigots and haters. If we don't clap, then we are not welcome in this society. If you doubt that, go call the CEO of Chick Fil A. I am going to be dealing with this issue and some other social issues at length up at MBC at the end of August and if you want to hear more about that you can join us up there, but suffice to say, we are living in days that seem dangerously familiar. The Bible is clear that one of the signs that the judgement of God is warranted and near is when sexual and gender lines are crossed in ways that represent and arrogant affront to the obvious design and intention of God. By the way, we saw that in the Sodom and Gomorrah story but that is not the first time that this theme of arrogantly trampling upon sexual boundary markers has been noted as a precursor to judgment. Where else did we see that? In the story of the flood. The daughters of men had sex with the sons of God – the sexual boundary between angels and humans was crossed in the days of the flood and Jude the brother of Jesus understood this as a typical prelude to judgment:

⁶And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; ⁷**as Sodom and Gomorrah**, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, **having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh**, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (Jude 1:7. NKJV)

Jude understood the gender bending and sexual excess of Sodom and Gomorrah as being the same as the sort of arrogant defiance of God's established boundaries in the days before the flood. Peter said much the same in his second epistle. According to the Bible, gross defiance of God's established sexual boundaries is a sign of impending judgment.

The relevance of the hospitality is issue is no less apparent. We are living in a day when once Christian lands like Europe and North America are making it very clear that Christians have worn out their welcome. To speak the truth about our faith in this culture will certainly be more expensive, more isolating and more hazardous in the next 30 years than it has ever been before. This story in Judges 19, unpleasant as it is, speaks to our situation as a culture more plainly than just about any other that I can think of. We are Canaan.

We are as Canaan and the only cure for that kind of depravity is the presence of a godly king. We need a king who can save us from ourselves! I look out at our culture and I see that the more

our culture rejects the Lordship of Jesus Christ the faster they slide down the path to judgment and ruin. The same is true when I look in my own heart. Unless Jesus Christ reigns in my heart, Sodom and Gibeah lie right around the corner. I need a king to save me from myself. Our culture needs a king to save it from itself. This story tells us what kind of king we need. In the story we read in Gibeah, one of the pictures of depravity was a husband who sacrificed his wife to save his own skin. But in Jesus we meet the opposite of that – we meet the antidote to that kind of depravity and poison. In Ephesians 5 the Bible says:

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25. NKJV)

The Levite in our story sacrificed his wife to save himself. Our Saviour Jesus sacrificed himself to save his wife – the church. That is the King who can reverse the course of our sinful nature and who can save us from ourselves. He is as Righteous as we are depraved and in his death upon the cross God offers us a precious exchange. The Apostle said it this way:

²¹For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21. NKJV)

If you are like me and Sodom and Gibeah live in your heart then you need to know about this exchange. In Jesus Christ upon the cross God offers to absorb, pay for and obliterate your depravity and he offers in exchange the Righteousness of Christ. Applied to you. Born in you. Worked out in you by degrees through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. That is the Gospel. This is the King who can save us from ourselves. This morning we meet him at the table, but soon we will meet him in the air. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Jody will you come and help us prepare for the Lord's Table?