

Avoid Sinking

(March 20, 2023)

In our last article and podcast - *Easy to Fall* - we noted a systemic problem within Israel that defined that generation. It wasn't pretty. There was nothing redeeming about that generation (shortly after Joshua's death), and that was clearly seen in the life of the Micah and the Levite we read about. Their cares and concerns were solely wrapped up in their own lives. Nothing else seemed to matter. It was all about them, their wants and their needs. God was not considered.

As if the events in **Judges 17-18** weren't bad enough, we arrive at **Judges 19-21**, where the results of certain individuals' actions literally brought about civil war within the nation of Israel. The immediate event that started the ball rolling toward that civil war is found in **Judges 19**. Interestingly enough, it involves yet another Levite.

What's good about that section of **Judges**, according to Dr. Thomas Constable, is that it teaches Christians today how to live in a society that is increasingly godless, depraved having separated from godly spirituality or morality. Today's society is quickly becoming what existed during the days of the **Judges**.

1 And 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. He took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. 2 But 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. 3 Then 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. 4 Now 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 above verses - **Judges 19:1-4** - introduce us to several things. First, the writer of **Judges** reiterates to us there was no king in Israel (v1). There was no human king and certainly the LORD God was not seen as supreme King either. Because of this, many to most Israelites did as they pleased in life; whatever they thought was best and it was always centered around Self.

There is a reference to Phinehas, Aaron's grandson (**20:8**), which may indicate to us that this particular incident leading to national strife occurred shortly after the death of Joshua, so it was early on in the period of the Judges.

In this section of Scripture, yet another Levite ignored God's rules for where they were supposed to live (remember, from before, the 48 cities Moses said were to be set aside specifically for Levites?). Beyond this, the Levite should *never* have married a concubine. Additionally, the Levite in the narrative obviously treated his concubine like garbage. He was not the least bit nurturing or caring. Why the concubine played the harlot (v2), we are not told, but it very well could have been due to the way he treated her, literally chasing her away with his hateful behavior.

It's also possible that "played the harlot" really meant she was extremely upset with him and if the way he treated her later on in the story is any indication, then maybe she had a right to feel the way she felt. Because of the way she was treated she went back to her father's house instead of remaining "faithful" to her Levite husband. It becomes obvious that the Levite had absolutely no love for his wife/concubine so it is likely she left him because the situation for her was unbearable. Who can blame her?

What is also very interesting is the text tells us that the Levite, "*...went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back...*", but it seems these words must have been spoken dripping with insincerity.

When we meet the father-in-law of this Levite and he does everything he can to cause the Levite to stay with him numerous days. In those days, hospitality was huge. If someone was traveling through, it was customary to invite them in, feed their horses or donkeys, wash their feet, give them food and a place to sleep even if they were not known to you. This was the norm, expected when people traveled.

When the Levite finally left with his concubine and servant after a number of days, they traveled toward Jerusalem (Jebus, made up mainly of Jebusites at the time), and Gibeah. Apparently, the Levite thought he'd experience hatred by people living in Jebus, and so ignoring the advice of his servant, they went ahead onto Gibeah instead. Ironically enough, it was at Gibeah that the Levite and company received the hatred he thought they'd receive in Jebus.

Reading through what happened during the night spent in Gibeah reminds us of what happened in Sodom and Gomorrah with Lot and the angelic visitors who were sent there to destroy it. The angels also originally opted to remain out in the city square but Lot dissuaded them because he was aware of the hatred the people of Sodom and Gomorrah had for outsiders and visitors (**Genesis 19**). Gibeah was seemingly, another "Sodom."

The same situation seemed to exist here in Gibeah for the Levite and his company. They could find no place to stay. No one lifted a finger to help them except one old man. It wasn't as if the Levite was going to be a burden to anyone because he had all of his supplies and food with him that he would need, but just wanted a place to lay his head for the night.

Fortunately, an old man who was staying in Gibeah invited them in (vv **16-21**). The Levite took the old man up on his offer. While they were eating and relaxing, a bunch of "worthless fellows" (v**22**; literally "sons of Belial/devil"), found out strangers were in town and wanted to rape them ("know them" is an acronym for sexual intercourse). Again, this same situation occurred in Sodom and here we are with the men of Gibeah repeating the same sin. By the way, as I've written about before, the sin of Sodom/Gomorrah, while it included homosexual rape, was much larger. The sin of those twin cities was primarily a complete lack of concern for strangers. While some commentators refer to it as a "lack of hospitality," it goes well beyond that. The people of Sodom/Gomorrah weren't just to themselves and didn't have a care to help strangers in need. They wanted to be completely left alone by "outsiders" and to this end, they would go to great lengths to *harm* strangers. This included, but was not limited to groups of men raping men (or women), as they happened to come into the cities. In fact, there were numerous ways in which they predicated harm on innocent travelers and legend has it that the incident that became the last straw for God was when two young maidens were helping a traveler by bringing

him food and water when everyone else in town completely shunned him. These young maidens paid with their lives in agonizing, drawn out death by the townspeople.

So here is Gibeah with the same mindset as the previous Sodom/Gomorrah. Men came to the door and literally wanted to humiliate the Levite traveling through, so demanded he be brought out by the old man. Shockingly enough, the old man did what Lot had done by offering virgin daughters to the crowd for them to "violate" (rape repeatedly), to save the Levite from harm or death (v24). How does a father *do* that? I cannot imagine it but we have two examples in Scripture of this happening.

Of course the "worthless fellows" weren't mollified with that suggestion. They did not back down from their demands, so the Levite, who not long before had spoken to his concubine with such "kind" words a few verses before, grabs her, pushes her out the door and allows the crowd of men to have their way with her! How does this happen unless a person has become so depraved and so callous because of a hardened heart?? Folks, this did not happen overnight with the Levite. It occurred over time and that is the danger for us all.

Because we are in relationship with God (as believers), we need to make that relationship and calling sure. This requires us to talk with the Lord daily, to read His Word and invest time in studying, memorizing and meditating. Without this, our relationship with our Heavenly Father cannot progress or deepen. It will become stale and eventually obsolete. Imagine being married to someone you deeply love only to begin to spend less time with them each day, less time talking with them, less time doing things you used to do with them that you both considered fun and brought you closer together. Eventually, you would grow apart and ultimately come to a place where your attachment to that other person was nothing. In such a case, how difficult would it be to think that your care and concern for that other person would evaporate little by little until there was nothing?

The Levite was a Levite because he came from that tribe. He was not at all concerned about how God saw his life. He was not concerned about anything except what he thought was important for himself. He had probably grown to the point of using people for his own growth and if he could not get what he needed from others, he had no use for them. This is how the cares of this world can cause us to look inward all the time, so that we completely miss being God's voice, His hands and His feet in a world that desperately needs Him and the salvation that only He provides. This is exactly what we see in this chapter of **Judges**, a Levite who is only concerned for himself and instead of trying to protect and cherish his wife, he throws her to the wolves literally.

The upshot of the story is that the concubine is brutally and repeatedly raped until she dies. As a man, I cannot understand what that must feel like to a woman. I'm sure it is a terrible, terrible death where the woman is painfully used and mistreated over and over again until her body simply gives up because of that abuse. It is heart wrenching yet we see no evidence in the Levite that he is heartbroken or even mildly concerned.

Imagine the fight the concubine must have put up as her husband tried to wrestle her out of the door in order to save his own cowardly skin! Clearly he did not really love this woman, or he would have defended her, and even offered himself in her place. His actions

speaking volumes about his views of women, himself, and God's will. Now we can understand why this woman left him in the first place (v. 2).[1]

As if all this is not enough to become incensed over, the Levite has the audacity to bring the concubine home, then he uses what happened to her (as if he really cared), to exonerate himself! Instead of giving her a proper burial, to show some sense of honoring her, he cuts her up into 12 pieces as though he's cutting up an animal sacrifice and sends one piece to the elders of each tribe of Israel. They get the message and wonder aloud what to do about it.

The way the Levite treated the concubine is unfortunately, indicative of how anyone of God's children can sink to such a level *if* we continue to resolutely reject God's lordship over our lives. We cannot be content to think that we would never stoop to that low level. It *can* happen because we still have our sin natures and our freedom to choose.

The erroneous notion that man sets his own standards of morality goes all the way back to the Fall (Gen. 3). Actually God sets these standards. He does so based on His love and His desire for the welfare of humanity, and He reveals these standards in His Word. When people abandon God's standards, life breaks down, unravels, and disintegrates.[2]

So how do we continue to live in a way that honors God in a world that is quickly and stalwartly rejecting Him and moving away from Him? We do the *opposite*, by *embracing* God's standards in all areas of our lives. There really is no other way and unfortunately, as we do so, we will become further and further removed from the ways of this world, which will put targets on our backs. In the end though, who is it we want to please?

[1] 2023 Edition Dr. Constable's Notes on Judges pg 209

[2] Ibid, pg 211