

Mass Chaos

A Study of the Book of Judges

Session 11: A Levite & the Benjamites

Introduction

Describe the absolute worst, the absolute most chaotic, the absolute craziest congregation that you could ever possibly imagine. The group who gets the most creative gets the most points!

A Levite's Concubine

19:1-4, 14-30

Literary Note: The Book of Judges does not have a strict chronological outline. Instead, it opens with the cycle of the “four R’s” (chapter 2), and each of the life stories of the judges (generally) fit that pattern. The book concludes with two appendices or epilogues, both of which show just how far Israel has fallen. This is the second one, which focuses on their moral and political disintegration. The book’s theme, “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit,” coalesce in these two closing epilogues (17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25). In fact, this theme forms the bookends of this section.

Learning Activity: Word Cloud

If things ever go “from bad to worse,” this chapter illustrates that. **Describe your thoughts and feelings** about the events of this appalling chapter, listed below, **with a one-word emotional reaction**. We will combine all these words into a word cloud.

- A Levite, a religious leader, took a concubine, contrary to God’s design for marriage.
- The concubine was unfaithful to him, and they separated from each other.
- No one in the town of Gibeah offered hospitality to them other than one old man.
- The men of Gibeah wanted to gang rape and have sex with the Levite.
- The old man offers his innocent daughter and the innocent concubine to pacify the sexual ambitions of the townspeople.
- The townspeople raped the concubine and assaulted her so badly she died.
- The Levite dismembered his dead concubine and sent the limbs of her body throughout Israel to send them a message.

Battle against the Tribe of Benjamin

20:19–36a, 46–48

Geographic Note: “Gibeah” was the name given to several towns in Israel. This Gibeah was located in Benjamin. Although it was destroyed in this civil war, it was later rebuilt, and King Saul came from this city (1 Sa 10:26). The Bible’s account of destruction and rebuilding is confirmed by archaeological evidence at the leading contender for the town’s location. Due to the events of these chapters, the prophet Hosea referred to Gibeah as an example of its wickedness (Hos 9:9, 10:9)—much like Sodom and Gomorrah centuries earlier.¹

After the events surrounding the Levite’s concubine, Israel descended into all-out civil war. Old Testament law repeatedly told Israel to “purge the evil from among you” (Deut 13:5, 17:7, 19:19–20). More specifically, it required Israel to investigate “wicked men,” and if it was proven true they led Israel away from the Lord, they were to destroy the entire town (Deut 13:12–15). So would you consider how Israel handled this battle a “just war” or not? Defend your answer.

Wives for the Benjamites

21:1–25

Cultural Note: Children and tribal inheritances were much more important in the ancient world than today. In the ancient world, “possessions” were counted largely by land and livestock, but in the modern world, “possessions” are counted largely by money (which is transferred quite easily). Inheritances (i.e., the land) would be passed down from generation to generation. Without wives and children, the entire tribe of Benjamin was threatened with extinction, which would threaten Joshua’s allotment of the Promised Land to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Israel goes from killing the Benjamites to bitterly crying that they are close to being wiped out. Were their tears faked? a sign of genuine remorse? second-guessing? something else?

Agree/disagree: “Everything in Israel would have been better, if only they had a king to rein in this mass chaos.”

Conclusion

The book of Judges ends on an absolutely abysmal note. Where is the gospel of hope—here and throughout the book—for the Israelites and for us?

¹ “Gibeah” in Walther Kaiser & Duane Garrett, ed., *Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 380.