



Lesson 89

The War Against Benjamin

Story Elements

- **Text:** Judges 19:1-21:25
- **Setting:** circa 1350 B.C.
- **Main Characters:** God, a Levite, his concubine, and an Ephraimite man.
- **Plot:** An atrocity committed against a Levite's concubine plunges the nation into war with one of its own tribes.
- **Key word(s):** *In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was _____ in his own eyes.* (vv 19:1; 21:25)
- **Climax:** **Judges 19:30** *And it was so, that all that saw it said, There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day: consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds.*

Introduction

1. (19:1) This story does not take place at the chronological end of the time of the Judges. Rather, this episode takes place not long after the Hebrews had conquered Canaan under _____ leadership.¹ The writer, it seems, has saved the worst for last.

APPLICATION → The purpose of this story is to show the depravity of the nation of Israel, their perversion of justice, and their twisted means of correcting injustices. By doing so, the Bible teaches us that our ways lead to destruction, but God's ways lead to life. We see how Israel quickly forgot the charge Moses gave them not long before the story takes place: *I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose _____, that both thou and thy seed may live, Deu. 30:19*

The Levite and His Concubine

2. (19:1-2) A Levite man married a concubine² from Bethlehem-Judah. But not long after their marriage, she was unfaithful to him and ran away back to her father's house.
 - a. (19:3-9) The Levite went after his concubine to try to win her back. Coming to her father's house, the Levite was hospitably received by his father-in-law. For four days the father-in-law convinced the Levite to stay and *let thine heart be _____*. But on the fifth day, the Levite insisted upon leaving, so he, his servant, and his reclaimed concubine began the journey back to their home in Ephraim.
 - b. (19:10-12) Because of their late start, the servant suggested that they lodge for the night in _____ (Jebus).³ However, the Levite was loathe to stay the night in a Canaanite town and insisted they push on to Gibeah.
 - c. (19:13-20) Arriving in Gibeah, they prepared to overnight in the town square, but a man from Ephraim saw them and invited them to spend the night at his place, warning them, *lodge not in the _____*.

APPLICATION → The old man knew the streets of Gibeah were not safe. It is a proof of the wickedness of Israel that the travelers would have been safer in the Canaanite Jebus than the Benjamite Gibeah. It is a mark of the righteous to be hospitable to strangers and travelers. *The stranger did not lodge in the street: But I opened my doors to the _____, Job 31:32.*

¹ Phineas the high priest is mentioned in 20:28. "A most important chronological statement, which makes it probable that these events occurred within twenty years of the death of Joshua."

Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Exodus to Ruth*, ed. F. C. Cook and J. M. Fuller (London: John Murray, 1879), 466.

² A concubine is often associated with a harem, but it can also be understood as a legal wife, but with less legal standing than a proper wife. Notice the concubine's father is called the Levite's father-in-law (19:4).

³ This story took place when Jerusalem still belonged to the Jebusites, hence the name *Jebus*.

3. (19:21-26) That night, the old man's house was surrounded by *sons of Belial* from Gibeah. In a scene reminiscent of _____ trouble (cf. Gen. 19) the men of the city demanded that the Levite be surrendered to them so they could abuse him according to their wicked lusts.
 - a. The Ephraimite refused on the basis of sacred _____, but his courage turned to shocking cowardice: the Levite's concubine was surrendered to the wicked men. The poor woman was villainously treated and left for dead the next morning.
 - b. (19:27-28) The Levite rose the next day, found his concubine dead on the threshold, and took her body home.
4. (19:29) In a bizarre expression of outrage, the Levite cut his wife's body into _____ pieces and sent them (by the hand of messengers) to the twelve tribes of Israel. Barnes remarks, "There is something truly terrible in the stern ferocity of grief and indignation which dictated this desperate effort to arouse his countrymen to avenge his wrong."⁴

The War with Benjamin

5. (19:30) The twelve gruesome messages were received by the tribal elders of Israel, *and it was so, that all that saw it said, There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day: _____ of it, take advice, and speak your minds.*
6. (20:1-47) The tribal leaders, incensed by the extreme wickedness of the men of Gibeah, assembled for war and demanded the Benjamites surrender the sons of Belial who were guilty of such a heinous crime. When the Benjamites refused, war was declared, _____ sacked, and thousands were killed on both sides.
 - a. The _____ survivors from Benjamin fled to the rock of Rimmon, where they hid for four months.
 - b. (20:48) The confederate Hebrew tribes laid waste to all the cities of Benjamin.
7. (21:1-4) The tribes of Israel soon regretted their severe treatment of the Benjamites and lamented that Benjamin would be lost as a tribe unless _____ were found for the male survivors.
 - a. (21:5-15) Since the tribal leaders had sworn that they would not allow their families to intermarry with the Benjamites, they decided that wives would be provided by _____ them from cities that did not answer the call to assemble, like Jabesh-Gilead.
 - b. (21:16-23) When the four hundred captive women from Jabesh-Gilead proved insufficient for the number of men in Benjamin, the remaining bachelors were instructed to _____ the wives they needed from the numbers of dancing maidens participating in a festival at Shiloh.

APPLICATION → When the unwise and immoral are tasked with punishing the wicked, the result is often more sin, misery, and wickedness. *Proverbs 27:3 A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; But a fool's wrath is heavier than them both.* Wise leadership bears the sword of justice with equity, but the wrath of a fool is "is unreasonable and _____."⁵

Answer Key: Key word(s): right • 1. Joshua's; → life • 2. a. merry; b. Jerusalem; c. street; → traveller • 3. Lot's; a. hospitality • 4. twelve • 5. consider • 6. Gibeah; a. 600 • 7. wives; a. stealing; b. kidnap; → excessive

⁴ Barnes, 464.

⁵ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, vol. 1* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 400.