

CHAPTER 19

The three remaining chapters of this book contain a most tragical story of the wickedness of the men of Gibeah, patronised by the tribe of Benjamin, for which that tribe was severely chastised and almost entirely cut off by the rest of the tribes. This seems to have been done not long after the death of Joshua, for it was when there was no king, no judge, in Israel (v. 1, and 21:25), and Phinehas was then high priest, 20:28. These particular iniquities, the Danites' idolatry, and the Benjamites' immorality, let in that general apostasy, 3:7. The abuse of the Levite's concubine is here very particularly related.

I. Her adulterous elopement from him (v. 1, 2).

II. His reconciliation to her, and the journey he took to fetch her home (v. 3).

III. Her father's kind entertainment of him (v. 4-9).

IV. The abuse he met with at Gibeah, where, being benighted, he was forced to stop.

1. He was neglected by the men of Gibeah (v. 10-15) and entertained by an Ephraimite that sojourned among them (v. 16-21).

2. They set upon him in his quarters, as the Sodomites did on Lot's guests (v. 22-24).

3. They villainously forced his concubine to death (v. 25-28).

V. The course he took to send notice of this to all the tribes of Israel (v. 29, 30).

<791> JUDGES 19:1-15

ELOPEMENT OF THE LEVITE'S CONCUBINE

The domestic affairs of this Levite would not have been related thus largely but to make way for the following story of the injuries done him, in which the whole nation interested themselves. Bishop Hall's first remark upon this story is, *That there is no complain of a public ordered state but there is a*

Levite at one end of it, either as an agent or as a patient. In Micah's idolatry a Levite was active; in the wickedness of Gibeah a Levite was passive; *no tribe shall sooner feel the want of government than that of Levi*; and, in all the book of Judges, no mention is made of any of that tribe, but of these two. This Levite was of Mount Ephraim, v. 1. He married a wife of Bethlehem-Judah. She is called his *concubine*, because she was not endowed, for perhaps he had nothing to endow her with, being himself a sojourner and not settled; but it does not appear that he had any other wife, and the margin calls her *a wife, a concubine*, v. 1. She came from the same city that Micah's Levite came from, as if Bethlehem-Judah owed a double ill turn to Mount Ephraim, for she was as bad for a Levite's wife as the other for a Levite.

I. This Levite's concubine played the whore and eloped from her husband, v. 2. The Chaldee reads it only that she *carried herself insolently to him*, or *despised him*, and, he being displeased at it, *she went away from him*, and (which was not fair) was received and entertained at her father's house. Had her husband turned her out of doors unjustly, her father ought to have pitied her affliction; but, when she treacherously departed from her husband to embrace the bosom of a stranger, her father ought not to have countenanced her sin. Perhaps she would not have violated her duty to her husband if she had not known too well where she should be kindly received. Children's ruin is often owing very much to parents' indulgence.

II. The Levite went himself to court her return. It was a sign there was no king, no judge, in Israel, else she would have been prosecuted and put to death as an adulteress; but, instead of that, she is addressed in the kindest manner by her injured husband, who takes a long journey on purpose to beseech her to be reconciled, v. 3. If he had put her away, it would have been a crime in him to return to her again, ^{<2400>}Jeremiah 3:1. But, she having gone away, it was a virtue in him to forgive the offence, and, though the party wronged, to make the first motion to her to be friends again. It is part of the character of the wisdom from above that it is gentle and easy to be entreated. He spoke *friendly* to her, or *comfortably* (for so the Hebrew phrase of *speaking to the heart* commonly signifies), which intimates that she was in sorrow, penitent fore what she had done amiss, which probably he heard of when he came to fetch her back. Thus God promises concerning adulterous Israel (^{<2014>}Hosea 2:14), *I will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her.*

III. Her father made him very welcome, and, by his extraordinary kindness to him, endeavoured to atone for the countenance he had given his daughter in withdrawing from him, and to confirm him in his disposition to be reconciled to her.

1. He entertains him kindly, *rejoices to see him* (v. 3), treats him generously for three days, v. 4. And the Levite, to show that he was perfectly reconciled, accepted his kindness, and we do not find that he upbraided him or his daughter with what had been amiss, but was as easy and as pleasant as at his first wedding-feast. It becomes all, but especially Levites, to forgive as God does. Every thing among them gave a hopeful prospect of their living comfortably together for the future; but, could they have foreseen what befel them within one day or two, how would all their mirth have been embittered and turned into mourning! When the affairs of our families are in the best posture we ought to rejoice with trembling, because we know not what troubles one day may bring forth. We cannot foresee what evil is near us, but we ought to consider what may be, that we may not be secure, as if to-morrow must needs be as this day and *much more abundant*, ²⁸⁶²Isaiah 56:12.

2. He is very earnest for his stay, as a further demonstration of his hearty welcome. The affection he had for him, and the pleasure he took in his company, proceeded,

(1.) From a civil regard to him as his son-in-law and an ingrafted branch of his own house. Note, Love and duty are due to those to whom we are related by marriage as well as to those who are bone of our bone: and those that show kindness as this Levite did may expect to receive kindness as he did. And,

(2.) From a pious respect to him as a Levite, a servant of God's house; if he was such a Levite as he should be (and nothing appears to the contrary) he is to be commended for courting his stay, finding his conversation profitable, and having opportunity to learn from him the *good knowledge of the Lord*, hoping also that *the Lord will do him good because he has a Levite* to be his son-in-law, and will bless him for his sake.

[1.] He forces him to stay the fourth day, and this was kind; not knowing when they might be together again, he engages him to stay as long as he possibly could. The Levite, though nobly treated, was very urgent to be gone. A good man's heart is where his business is; for *as a bird that*

wanders from her nest so is the man that wanders from his place. It is a sign a man has either little to do at home, or little heart to do what he has to do, when he can take pleasure in being long abroad where he has nothing to do. It is especially good to see a Levite willing to go home to his few sheep in the wilderness. Yet this Levite was overcome by importunity and kind persuasion to stay longer than he intended, v. 5-7. We ought to avoid the extreme of an over-easy yielding, to the neglect of our duty on the one hand, and that of moroseness and wilfulness, to the neglect of our friends and their kindness on the other hand. Our Saviour, after his resurrection, was prevailed upon to stay with his friends longer than he at first intimated to be his purpose, ⁴²⁸Luke 24:28, 29.

[2.] He forces him to stay till the afternoon of the fifth day, and this, as it proved, was unkind, v. 8, 9. He would by no means let him go before dinner, promises him he shall have dinner early, designing thereby, as he had done the day before, to detain him another night; but the Levite was intent on the *house of the Lord at Shiloh* (v. 18), and, being impatient to get thither, would stay no longer. Had they set out early, they might have reached some better lodging-place than that which they were now constrained to take up with, nay, they might have got to Shiloh. Note, Our friends' designed kindnesses often prove, in the event, real injuries; what is meant for our welfare becomes a trap. *Who knows what is good for a man in this life?* The Levite was unwise in setting out so late; he might have got home better if he had staid a night longer and taken the day before him.

IV. In his return home he was forced to lodge at Gibeah, a city in the tribe of Benjamin, afterwards called *Gibeah of Saul*, which lay on his road towards Shiloh and Mount Ephraim. When it drew towards night, and the shadows of the evening were stretched out, they began to think (as it behoves us to do when we observe the day of our life hastening towards a period) where they must lodge. When night came they could not pursue their journey. *He that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goes.* They could not but desire rest, for which the night was intended, as the day for labour.

1. The servant proposed that they should lodge in Jebus, afterwards Jerusalem, but as yet in the possession of Jebusites. "Come," said the servant, "let us lodge in this city of the Jebusites," v. 11. And, if they had done so, it is probable they would have had much better usage than they met with in Gibeah of Benjamin. Debauched and profligate Israelites are

worse and much more dangerous than Canaanites themselves. But the master, as became one of God's tribe, would by no means quarter, no, not one night, in a city of strangers (v. 12), not because he questioned his safety among them, but he was not willing, if he could possibly avoid it, to have so much intimacy and familiarity with them as a night's lodging came to, nor to be so much beholden to them. By shunning this place he would witness against the wickedness of those that contracted friendship and familiarity with these devoted nations. Let Israelites, Levites especially, associate with Israelites, and not with the *sons of the stranger*.

2. Having passed by Jebus, which was about five or six miles from Bethlehem (the place whence they came), and not having daylight to bring them to Ramah, they stopped at Gibeah (v. 13-15); there they sat down in the street, nobody offering them a lodging. In these countries, at that time, there were no inns, or public-houses, in which, as with us, travellers might have entertainment for their money, but they carried entertainment along with them, as this Levite did (v. 19), and depended upon the courtesy and hospitality of the inhabitants for a lodging. Let us take occasion hence, when we are in journeys, to thank God for this, among other conveniences of travelling, that there are inns to entertain strangers, and in which they may be welcome and well accommodated for their money. Surely there is no country in the world wherein one may stay at home with more satisfaction, or go abroad with more comfort, than in our own nation. This traveller, though a Levite (and to those of that tribe God had particularly commanded his people to be kind upon all occasions), met with very cold entertainment at Gibeah: *No man took them into his house*. If they had any reason to think he was a Levite perhaps that made those ill-disposed people the more shy of him. There are those who will have this laid to their charge at the great day, *I was a stranger and you took me not in*.

<07916> JUDGES 19:16-21

THE LEVITE ENTERTAINED AT GIBEAH

Though there as not one *of* Gibeah, yet it proved there was one *in* Gibeah, that showed some civility to this distressed Levite, who was glad that any one took notice of him. It was strange that some of those wicked people, who, when it was dark, designed so ill to him and his concubine, did not,

under pretence of kindness, invite them in, that they might have a fairer opportunity of perpetrating their villany; but either they had not wit enough to be so designing, or not wickedness enough to be so deceiving. Or, perhaps, none of them separately thought of such a wickedness, till in the black and dark night they got together to contrive what mischief they should do. Bad people in confederacy make one another much worse than any of them would be by themselves. When the Levite, and his wife, and servant, were beginning to fear that they must lie in the street all night (and as good have laid in a den of lions) they were at length invited into a house, and we are here told,

I. Who that kind man was that invited them.

1. He was a man of Mount Ephraim, and only sojourned in Gibeah, v. 16. Of all the tribes of Israel, the Benjamites had most reason to be kind to poor travellers, for their ancestor, Benjamin, was born upon the road, his mother being then upon a journey, and very near to this place, ^{<013516>}Genesis 35:16, 17. Yet they were hard-hearted to a traveller in distress, while an honest Ephraimite had compassion on him, and, no doubt, was the more kind to him, when, upon enquiry, he found that he was his countryman, of Mount Ephraim likewise. He that was himself but a sojourner in Gibeah was the more compassionate to a wayfaring man, for he *knew the heart of a stranger*, ^{<0230>}Exodus 23:9; ^{<0509>}Deuteronomy 10:19. Good people, that look upon themselves but as strangers and sojourners in this world, should for this reason be tender to one another, because they all belong to the same better country and are not at home here.

2. He was an old man, one that retained some of the expiring virtue of an Israelite. The rising generation was entirely corrupted; if there was any good remaining among them, it was only with those that were old and going off.

3. He was coming home from his work out of the field at eventide. The evening calls home labourers, ^{<0423>}Psalms 104:23. But, it should seem, this was the only labourer that this evening brought home to Gibeah. The rest had given themselves up to sloth and luxury, and no marvel there was among them, as in Sodom, abundance of uncleanness, when there was among them, as in Sodom, abundance of idleness, ^{<0169>}Ezekiel 16:49. But he that was honestly diligent in his business all day was disposed to be generously hospitable to these poor strangers at night. Let men *labour*,

that they may have to give, ^{<403>}Ephesians 4:28. It appears from v. 21 that he was a man of some substance, and yet had been himself at work in the field. No man's estate will privilege him in idleness.

II. How free and generous he was in his invitation. He did not stay till they applied to him to beg for a night's lodging; but when he saw them (v. 17) enquired into their circumstances, and anticipated them with his kindness. Thus our good God answers before we call. Note, A charitable disposition expects only opportunity, not importunity, to do good, and will succour upon sight, unsought unto. Hence we read of a *bountiful eye*, ^{<1219>}Proverbs 22:9. If Gibeah was like Sodom, this old man was like Lot in Sodom, who *sat in the gate* to invite strangers, ^{<1191>}Genesis 19:1. Thus *Job opened his doors to the traveller*, and would not suffer him to *lodge in the street*, ^{<8812>}Job 31:32. Observe,

1. How ready he was to give credit to the Levite's account of himself when he saw no reason at all to question the truth of it. Charity is not apt to distrust, but *hopeth all things* (^{<4337>}1 Corinthians 13:7) and will not make use of Nabal's excuse for his churlishness to David, *Many servants now-a-days break away from their masters*, ^{<12510>}1 Samuel 25:10. The Levite, in his account of himself, professed that he was now going *to the house of the Lord* (v. 18), for there he designed to attend, either with a trespass-offering for the sins of his family, or with a peace-offering for the mercies of his family, or both, before he went to his own house. And, if the men of Gibeah had any intimation of his being bound that way, probably they would therefore be disinclined to entertain him. The Samaritans would not receive Christ because his face was towards Jerusalem, ^{<1153>}Luke 9:53. But for this reason, because he was a Levite and was now going to the house of the Lord, this good old man was the more kind to him. Thus he received a *disciple in the name of a disciple*, a servant of God for his Master's sake.

2. How free he was to give him entertainment. The Levite was himself provided with all necessaries (v. 19), wanted nothing but a lodging, but his generous host would be himself at the charge of his entertainment (v. 20): *Let all thy wants be upon me*; so he *brought him into his house*, v. 21. Thus God will, some way or other, raise up friends for his people and ministers, even when they seem forlorn.

THE WICKEDNESS OF GIBEAH

Here is,

I. The great wickedness of the men of Gibeah. One could not imagine that ever it should enter into the heart of men that had the use of human reason, of Israelites that had the benefit of divine revelation, to be so very wicked. “Lord, what is man!” said David, “what a *mean* creature is he!” “Lord, what is man,” may we say upon the reading of this story, “what a vile creature is he, when he is given up to his own heart’s lusts!” The sinners are here called *sons of Belial*, that is, ungovernable men, men that would endure no yoke, children of the devil (for he is Belial), resembling him, and joining with him in rebellion against God and his government. Sons of Benjamin, of whom Moses had said, *The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him* (^{<48312>}Deuteronomy 33:12), have become such sons of Belial that an honest man cannot lodge in safety among them. The sufferers were a Levite and his wife, and that kind man that gave them entertainment. We are strangers upon earth, and must expect strange usage. It is said *they were making their hearts merry* when this trouble came upon them, v. 22. If the mirth was innocent, it teaches us of what uncertain continuance all our creature comforts and enjoyments are; when we are ever so well pleased with our friends, we know not how near our enemies are; nor, if it be well with us this hour, can we be sure it will be so the next. If the mirth was sinful and excessive, let it be a warning to us to keep a strict guard upon ourselves, that we grow not intemperate in the use of lawful things, nor be transported into indecencies by our cheerfulness; for *the end of that mirth is heaviness*. God can soon change the note of those that are making their hearts merry, and turn their laughter into mourning and their joy into heaviness. Let us see what the wickedness of these Benjamites was.

1. They made a rude and insolent assault, in the night, upon the habitation of an honest man, that not only lived peaceably among them, but kept a good house and was a blessing and ornament to their city. They beset the house round, and, to the great terror of those within, beat as hard as they could at the door, v. 22. A man’s house is his castle, in which he ought to be both safe and quiet, and, where there is law, it is taken under the special

protection of it; but there was no king in Israel to keep the peace and secure honest men from the sons of violence.

2. They had a particular spite at the strangers that were within their gates, that only desired a night's lodging among them, contrary to the laws of hospitality, which all civilized nations have accounted sacred, and which the master of the house pleaded with them (v. 23): *Seeing that this man has come into my house.* Those are base and abject spirits indeed that will trample upon the helpless, and use a man the worse for his being a stranger, whom they know no ill of.

3. They designed in the most filthy and abominable manner (not to be thought of without horror and detestation) to abuse the Levite, whom perhaps they had observed to be young and comely: *Bring him forth that we may know him.* We should certainly have concluded they meant only to enquire whence he came, and to know his character, but that the good man of the house, who understood their meaning too well, by his answer lets us know that they designed the gratification of that most unnatural and worse than brutish lust which was expressly forbidden by the law of Moses, and called an *abomination*, ^{<BIB2>}Leviticus 18:22. Those that are guilty of it are ranked in the New Testament among the worst and vilest of sinners (^{<S11D>}1 Timothy 1:10), and such as *shall not inherit the kingdom of God*, ^{<BIB>}1 Corinthians 6:9. Now,

(1.) This was the sin of Sodom, and is thence called *Sodomy*. The Dead Sea, which was the standing monument of God's vengeance upon Sodom, for its filthiness, was one of the boundaries of Canaan, and lay not many miles off from Gibeah. We may suppose the men of Gibeah had seen it many a time, and yet would not take warning by it, but did worse than Sodom (^{<BIB>}Ezekiel 16:48), and sinned just *after the similitude of their transgression*. Who would have expected (says bishop Hall) such extreme abomination to come out of the loins of Jacob? Even the worst pagans were saints to them. What did it avail them that they had the ark of God in Shiloh when they had Sodom in their streets — God's law in their fringes, but the devil in their hearts? Nothing but hell itself can yield a worse creature than a depraved Israelite.

(2.) This was the punishment of their idolatry, that sin to which they were, above all others, most addicted. Because they liked not to retain God in their knowledge, therefore he gave them up to these vile affections, by which they dishonoured themselves as they had by their idolatry

dishonoured him and turned his glory into shame, ^{<6124>}Romans 1:24, 28. See and admire, in this instance, the patience of God. Why were not these sons of Belial struck blind, as the Sodomites were? Why were not fire and brimstone rained from heaven upon their city? It was because God would leave it to Israel to punish them by the sword, and would reserve his own punishment of them for the future state, in which those that *go after strange flesh shall suffer the vengeance of eternal fire*, ^{<6107>}Jude 1:7.

4. They were deaf to the reproofs and reasoning of the good man of the house, who, being well acquainted (we may suppose) with the story of Lot and the Sodomites, set himself to imitate Lot, v. 23, 24. Compare ^{<6196>}Genesis 19:6-8. He went out to them as Lot did, spoke civilly to them, called them brethren, begged of them to desist, pleaded the protection of his house which his guests were under, and represented to them the great wickedness of their attempt: "Do not so wickedly, so very wickedly." He calls it *folly* and *a vile thing*. But in one thing he conformed too far to Lot's example (as we are apt in imitating good men to follow them even in their false steps), in offering them his daughter to do what they would with. He had not power thus to prostitute his daughter, nor ought he to have done this evil that good might come. But this wicked proposal of his may be in part excused from the great surprise and terror he was in, his concern for his guests, and his having too close a regard to what Lot did in the like case, especially not finding that the angels who were by reproved him for it. And perhaps he hoped that his mentioning this as a more natural gratification of their lust would have sent them back to their common harlots. But *they would not hearken to him*, v. 25. Headstrong lusts are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; they sear the conscience and make it insensible.

5. They got the Levite's wife among them, and abused her to death, v. 25. They slighted the old man's offer of his daughter to their lust, either because she was not handsome or because they knew her to be one of great gravity and modesty: but, when the Levite brought them his concubine, they took her with them by force to the place appointed for their filthiness. Josephus, in his narrative of this story, makes her to be the person they had a design upon when they beset the house, and says nothing of their villainous design upon the Levite himself. They saw her (he says) in the street, when they came into the town, and were smitten with her beauty; and perhaps, though she was reconciled to her husband, her looks did not bespeak her to be one of the most modest. Many bring mischief of

this kind upon themselves by their loose carriage and behaviour; a little spark may kindle a great fire. One would think the Levite should have followed them, to see what became of his wife, but it is probable he durst not, lest they should do him a mischief. In the miserable end of this woman, we may see the righteous hand of God punishing her for her former uncleanness, when she played the whore against her husband, v. 2. Though her father had countenanced her, her husband had forgiven her, and the fault was forgotten now that the quarrel was made up, yet God remembered it against her when he suffered these wicked men thus wretchedly to abuse her; how unrighteous soever they were in their treatment of her, in permitting it the Lord was righteous. Her punishment answered her sin, *Culpa libido fuit, poena libido fuit* — *Lust was her sin, and lust was her punishment*. By the law of Moses she was to have been put to death for her adultery. She escaped that punishment from men, yet vengeance pursued her; for, if there was no king in Israel, yet there was a God in Israel, a God that judgeth in the earth. We must not think it enough to make our peace with men, whom by our sins we have wronged, but are concerned, by repentance and faith, to make our peace with God, who sees not as men see, nor makes so light of sin as men often do. The justice of God in this matter does not at all extenuate the horrid wickedness of these men of Gibeah, than which nothing could be more barbarous and inhuman.

II. The notice that was sent of this wickedness to all the tribes of Israel. The poor abused woman made towards her husband's lodgings as soon as ever the approach of the day-light obliged these sons of Belial to let her go (for these works of darkness hate and dread the light), v. 25. Down she fell at the door, with her hands on the threshold, begging pardon (as it were) for her former transgression, and in that posture of a penitent, with her mouth in the dust, she expired. There he found her (v. 26, 27), supposed her asleep, or overcome with shame and confusion for what had happened, but soon perceived she was dead (v. 28), took up her dead body, which, we may suppose, had all over it marks of the hands, the blows, and other abuses, she had received. On this sad occasion he waived his purpose of going to Shiloh, and went directly home. He that went out in hopes to return rejoicing came in again melancholy and disconsolate, sat down and considered, "Is this an injury fit to be passed by?" He cannot call for fire from heaven to consume the men of Gibeah, as those angels did who were, after the same manner, insulted by the Sodomites. There was no king in Israel, nor (for aught that appears) any sanhedrim, or great council, to

appeal to, and demand justice from. Phinehas is high priest, but he attends closely to the business of the sanctuary, and will be no judge or divider. He has therefore no other way left him than to appeal to the people: let the community be judge. Though they had no general stated assembly of all the tribes, yet it is probable that each tribe had a meeting of their chiefs within itself. To each of the tribes, in their respective meetings, he sent by special messengers a remonstrance of the wrong that was done him, in all its aggravating circumstances, and with it a piece of his wife's dead body (v. 29), both to confirm the truth of the story and to affect them the more with it. He divided it into twelve pieces, *according to the bones*, so some read it, that is, by the joints, sending one to each tribe, even to Benjamin among the rest, with the hope that some among them would be moved to join in punishing so great a villany, and the more warmly because committed by some of their own tribe. It did indeed look very barbarous thus to mangle a dead body, which, having been so wretchedly dishonoured, ought to have been decently interred; but the Levite designed hereby, not only to represent their barbarous usage of his wife, whom they had better have cut in pieces thus than have used as they did, but also to express his own passionate concern and thereby to excite the like in them. And it had the desired effect. All that saw the pieces of the dead body, and were told how the matter was, expressed the same sentiments upon it.

1. That the men of Gibeah had been guilty of a very heinous piece of wickedness, the like to which had never been known before in Israel, v. 30. It was a complicated crime, loaded and blackened with all possible aggravations. They were not such fools as to make a mock at this sin, or turn the story off with a jest.

2. That a general assembly of all Israel should be called, to debate what was fit to be done for the punishment of this wickedness, that a stop might be put to this threatening inundation of debauchery, and the wrath of God might not be poured upon the whole nation for it. It is not a common case, and therefore they stir up one another to come together upon the occasion with this: *Consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds*. We have here the three great rules by which those that sit in council ought to go in every arduous affair.

(1.) Let every man retire into himself, and weigh the matter impartially and fully in his own thoughts, and seriously and calmly consider it, without prejudice on either side, before he speaks upon it.

(2.) Let them freely talk it over, and every man take advice of his friend, know his opinion and his reasons, and weigh them.

(3.) Then let every man speak his mind, and give his vote according to his conscience. In the multitude of such counsellors there is safety.