
JUDGES 19:1 In those days, when there was no king in Israel, there was a certain Levite living on the farther side of the hill country of Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Bethlehem Judah.

A Levite and his concubine disagree; and she leaves him and goes to her father's house, Jdg 19:1, Jdg 19:2. He follows to bring her back, and is kindly entertained by her father five days, Jdg 19:3-8. He returns; and lodges the first night at Gibeah, in the tribe of Benjamin, Jdg 19:9-21. The men of Gibeah attack the house, and insist on abusing the body of the Levite; who, to save himself, delivers to them his concubine, whose life falls a victim to their brutality, Jdg 19:22-27. The Levite divides her dead body into twelve pieces, and sends one to each of the twelve tribes; they are struck with horror, and call a council on the subject, Jdg 19:28-30.

Verse 1

There was no king in Israel - All sorts of disorders are attributed to the want of civil government; justice, right, truth, and humanity, had fallen in the streets.

Took to him a concubine - We have already seen that the concubine was a sort of secondary wife; and that such connections were not disreputable, being according to the general custom of those times. The word פִּילְגֶשֶׁתַּי pilegesh, concubine, is supposed by Mr. Parkhurst to be compounded of פָּלַג palag, "to divide, or share;" and נָגַשׁ nagash, "to approach;" because the husband shared or divided his attention and affections between her and the real wife; from whom she differed in nothing material, except in her posterity not inheriting.

JUDGES 19:2 His concubine played the prostitute against him, and went away from him to her father's house to Bethlehem Judah, and was there the space of four months.

Verse 2

Played the whore - Neither the Vulgate, Septuagint, Targum, nor Josephus, understand this word as implying any act of conjugal infidelity on the woman's part. They merely state that the parties disagreed, and the woman returned to her father's house. Indeed all the circumstances of the case vindicate this view of the subject. If she had been a whore, or adulteress, it is not very likely that her husband would have gone after her to speak friendly, literally, to speak to her heart, and entreat her to return. The Vulgate simply states, quae reliquit eum, that she left him; the Septuagint, ὠργισθη αὐτῷ, that she was angry with him; the Targum ובסרת עלוהי ubserath alohi, that she despised him; Josephus, ἀλλοτοιως ειχε, that she was alienated, or separated herself, from him. Houbigant translates the clause: quae cum ab eo alienata esset, vel irata in eum esset, eum reliquit; "who when she was alienated from him, or angry with him, left him;" and he defends this version in his note. I think the true meaning to be among the above interpretations. They had contentions; she ceased to love him, her affections were alienated from him; and she left his house, and went home to her father.

JUDGES 19:3 Her husband arose, and went after her, to speak kindly to her, to bring her again, having his servant with him, and a couple of donkeys: and she brought him into her father's house; and when the father of the young lady saw him, he rejoiced to meet him.

Verse 3

He rejoiced to meet him - He hoped to be able completely to reconcile his daughter and her husband.

JUDGES 19:4 His father-in-law, the young lady's father, retained him; and he stayed with him three days: so they ate and drink, and lodged there.

JUDGES 19:5 On the fourth day, they arose early in the morning, and he rose up to depart. The young lady's father said to his son-in-law, "Strengthen your heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward you shall go your way."

JUDGES 19:6 So they sat down, ate, and drank, both of them together: and the young lady's father said to the man, "Please be pleased to stay all night, and let your heart be merry."

JUDGES 19:7 The man rose up to depart; but his father-in-law urged him, and he lodged there again.

JUDGES 19:8 He arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart; and the young lady's father said, "Please strengthen your heart and stay until the day declines"; and they both ate.

Verse 8

And they tarried until afternoon - Merely that they might avoid the heat of the day, which would have been very inconvenient in travelling.

JUDGES 19:9 When the man rose up to depart, he, and his concubine, and his servant, his father-in-law, the young lady's father, said to him, "Behold, now the day draws toward evening, please stay all night: behold, the day grows to an end, lodge here, that your heart may be merry; and tomorrow go on your way early, that you may go home."

Verse 9

The day groweth to an end - חַנוּת הַיּוֹם chanoth haiyom, "the day is about to pitch its tent;" that is, it was near the time in which travelers ordinarily pitched their tents, to take up their lodging for the night.

JUDGES 19:10 But the man wouldn't stay that night, but he rose up and departed, and came over against Jebus (the same is Jerusalem): and there were with him a couple of donkeys saddled; his concubine also was with him.

JUDGES 19:11 When they were by Jebus, the day was far spent; and the servant said to his master, "Please come and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites, and lodge in it."

Verse 11

When they were by Jebus - This was Jerusalem, in which, though after the death of Joshua it appears to have been partly conquered by the tribe of Judah, yet the Jebusites kept the strong hold of Zion till the days of David, by whom they were finally expelled. See the note on Jdg 1:8.

JUDGES 19:12 His master said to him, "We won't turn aside into the city of a foreigner, that is not of the children of Israel; but we will pass over to Gibeah."

JUDGES 19:13 He said to his servant, "Come and let us draw near to one of these places; and we will lodge in Gibeah, or in Ramah."

JUDGES 19:14 So they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down on them near to Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin.

JUDGES 19:15 They turned aside there, to go in to lodge in Gibeah: and he went in, and sat him down in the street of the city; for there was no man who took them into his house to lodge.

Verse 15

No man - took them into his house to lodging - There was probably no inn or house of public entertainment in this place, and therefore they could not have a lodging unless furnished by mere hospitality. To say that there were no inns in those primitive times, is not true; there were such places, though not very frequent. Joseph's brethren found their money in their sacks when they loosed them at an inn, Gen 42:27. The house of Rahab was an inn, Jos 2:1. And the woman whose house Samson frequented at Gaza was a hostess, or one who kept a place of public entertainment.

JUDGES 19:16 Behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at evening: now the man was of the hill country of Ephraim, and he lived in Gibeah; but the men of the place were Benjamites.

JUDGES 19:17 He lifted up his eyes, and saw the wayfaring man in the street of the city; and the old man said, "Where are you going? Where did you come from?"

JUDGES 19:18 He said to him, "We are passing from Bethlehem Judah to the farther side of the hill country of Ephraim. I am from there, and I went to Bethlehem Judah. I am going to the LORD's house; and there is no man who takes me into his house.

JUDGES 19:19 Yet there is both straw and provender for our donkeys; and there is bread and wine also for me, and for your handmaid, and for the young man who is with your servants: there is no want of anything."

Verse 19

There is both straw and provender for our asses - In the countries principally devoted to pasturage, there was no hay; but as they raised some corn, they took great care of their straw, chopped it very small, and having mixed it with barley, beans, or the pounded kernels of dates, made it into balls, and fed their cattle with it. Straw, cut into what is called chaff, is not unfrequently used in England for the same purpose.

JUDGES 19:20 The old man said, "Peace be to you; howsoever let all your wants lie on me; only don't lodge in the street."

Verse 20

All thy wants lie upon me - Here was genuine hospitality: "Keep your bread and wine for yourselves, and your straw and provender for your asses; you may need them before you finish your journey; I will supply all your wants for this night, therefore do not lodge in the street."

JUDGES 19:21 So he brought him into his house, and gave the donkeys fodder; and they washed their feet, and ate and drink.

JUDGES 19:22 As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain base fellows, surrounded the house, beating at the door; and they spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may have sex with him!"

Verse 22

Sons of Belial - Profligate fellows. See the notes on Deu 13:13.

That we may know him - See Gen 19:5. These were genuine sodomites as to their practice; sons of Belial, rascals and miscreants of the deepest dye; worse than brutes, being a compound of beast and devil inseparably blended.

JUDGES 19:23 The man, the master of the house, went out to them, and said to them, "No, my brothers, please don't act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, don't do this folly.

JUDGES 19:24 Behold, here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. I will bring them out now. Humble them, and do with them what seems good to you; but to this man don't do any such folly."

Verse 24

Here is my daughter, a maiden - Such a proposal was made by Lot to the men of Sodom, Gen 19:8, but nothing can excuse either. That the rights of hospitality were sacred in the East, and most highly regarded we know; and that a man would defend, at the expense of his life, the stranger whom he had admitted under his roof, is true; but how a father could make such a proposal relative to his virgin daughter, must remain among those things which are incomprehensible.

JUDGES 19:25 But the men wouldn't listen to him: so the man laid hold of his concubine, and brought her out to them; and they had sex with her, and abused her all night until the morning: and when the day began to dawn, they let her go.

Verse 25

So the man took his concubine - The word קָחַזַק yachazek, which we here translate simply took, signifies rather to take or seize by violence. The woman would not go out to them; but her graceless husband forced her to go, in order that he might save his own body. He could have but little love for her, and this was the cause of their separation before. The men of Gibeah who wished to abuse the body of the Levite; the Levite who wished to save his body at the expense of the modesty, reputation, and life of his wife; and the old man who wished to save his guest at the expense of the violation of his daughter; are all characters that humanity and modesty wish to be buried in everlasting oblivion.

When the day began to spring - Their turpitude could not bear the full light of the day; and they dismissed the poor woman when the day began to break.

JUDGES 19:26 Then came the woman in the dawning of the day, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her lord was, until it was light.

Verse 26

Fell down at the door - She had strength to reach the door, but not to knock for admittance: when she reached the door she fell down dead! The reason of this abominable and horrid catastrophe is strongly signified by the original words, Jdg 19:25 : $\text{וַיִּדְעוּ אוֹתָהּ וַיִּתְעַלְלוּ בָּהּ כָּל הַלַּיְלָה}$: vaiyedu othah, vaiyithallelu bah col hallailah, which we modestly translate, and they knew her, and they abused her all the night. More literally, but still not fully: Illi cum ea rem habuerunt, et alternatim in eam tota nocte ascenderunt. The hithpahel used here in the verb עָלַל greatly increases the sense: Conjugatio hithpahel frequentiam actus et immanem libidinem designat. The Arabic is not too strong; the following is its meaning: Exercuerunt in ea cupiditates suas, et maechati, sunt in ea ad matutinum usque.

JUDGES 19:27 Her lord rose up in the morning, and opened the doors of the house, and went out to go his way; and behold, the woman his concubine was fallen down at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold.

JUDGES 19:28 He said to her, "Get up, and let us be going!" but no one answered. Then he took her up on the donkey; and the man rose up, and went to his place.

JUDGES 19:29 When he had come into his house, he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the borders of Israel.

Verse 29

Divided her - into twelve pieces - There is no doubt that with the pieces he sent to each tribe a circumstantial account of the barbarity of the men of Gibeah; and it is very likely that they considered each of the pieces as expressing an execration, "If ye will not come and avenge my wrongs, may ye be hewn in pieces like this abused and murdered woman!" It was a custom among the ancient Highlanders in Scotland, when one clan wished to call all the rest to avenge its wrongs, to take a wooden cross, dip it in blood, and send it by a special messenger through all the clans. This was called the fire cross, because at sight of it each clan lighted a fire or beacon, which gave notice to all the adjoining clans that a general rising was immediately to take place.

JUDGES 19:30 It was so, that all who 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 to this day! Consider it, take counsel, and speak."

Verse 30

There was no such deed done nor seen - They were all struck with the enormity of the crime; and considered it a sovereign disgrace to all the tribes of Israel.

Consider of it - Literally, Put it to yourselves; take counsel upon it; and speak. This was the prelude to the council held, and the subsequent operations, which are mentioned in the following chapter.

I Have passed over the abominable transactions of this chapter as lightly as I could, and shall make no apology to the learned or unlearned reader for leaving some things untranslated.

What a blessing are wholesome laws, and a vigorous and attentive magistracy! These wretched people had no form of government, and every one did what was right in his own eyes: their own eye (corrupt inclination) was the measure and rule of their conduct; and how bad a rule, the abuse and murder of the Levite's wife testify. Reader, bless God for a civil government.