

1. We now come to the final story in the book of Judges. Back in my first lesson on Judges, I said if this book was made into a movie, it'd deserved an "R" rating. If you've read my last few lessons, I might guess you'd say, "What's the big deal?" We'll make up for it in this final Judges story that covers the last three chapters. As a warning, these chapters include such events as a homosexual gang rape, gang rape of a woman, murder, chopping up a dead body and an Israelite civil war. If you're squeamish, these aren't your chapters. Anti-bible organizations have made efforts to get the bible banned from libraries based on these chapters. In short, this isn't a light, easy, section to get through. It's nasty. You're now warned. Proceed at your own risk!
2. With that said, let me try my lesson title on you: "What happens to a society that turns away from God?" I'm well aware I'm preaching to the choir here, but I'd like everyone to grasp the danger to our society when we as Christians fail to be a witness to the world around us. Dennis Prager, who I consider a mentor, states that there are three philosophies trying to dominate the world: The first is Islam. The second is leftist secularism for a lack of a better term. The third is Judeo-Christian values. The first two require conformity by force! The third desires conformity by our choice to live, as God desires. Unfortunately secularism is the most dominant in our culture as it is pushing by economic pressure and social pressure to get "non-believers" to conform to what's they're lifestyle. The reason I'm getting into all of this is I want all of us to see the consequences of what happens when people ignore living as God desires.
3. But John, even our secular society doesn't condone gang rape be it by a homosexual group or a heterosexual group. That's true. However, our society is involved in a civil war between people who want everybody to "do whatever they want whenever they want" versus those who teach it's a danger to ignore God and go live however you want. An underlying lessons of this story is that when we do our utmost to ignore God in our life, eventually we'll get to a point that whatever we want (e.g., "even gang rape") will occur because there is no higher authority to say "this is wrong" for people to do! In these chapters, we'll read of a civil war between people who want everyone to do whatever they feel like versus those who say society shouldn't tolerate certain horrid things among "God's people!"
4. OK, so what are we as believing Christians supposed to do about it? If history and the bible teach us anything, victory by the "sword" doesn't work. What we show by living the Christian lifestyle is the fact that caring for others is a better way to live than doing whatever we feel like. To preach the reality that we'll all be judged for our behavior will outweigh the desire to live however we're feeling like living. To teach that there's a God and here are His standards written in a book for us to live is the best way to live a life. By living how He desires and by believing the Gospel message and then living as a witness for Jesus after accepting that message is the only way to overcome all the evils of this world. Yes evil will exist. Yes horrid sin will always exist until as we Christians preach "Jesus returns to set up shop with Him ruling by force" over this world! Whether we want that ending, the bible is full of evidence that's how the world will play out.
 - a) To put all of this another way, I'd rather live this life with the assumption there's a heaven and I will be judged based on whether or not I used my life as a witness for Jesus than just to only live for pleasure (or fame, or whatever) in this life and take my chances when I get to the next one! Either there is a next life or there isn't. The "safe bet" is to live as if there's a next one and act accordingly. The good news is we end up with far greater joy living by that system, then trying to "fix the world" to our own view of how people should live. It's a matter of thinking, "I can either live how God wants me to live, or I can live however I'd like to live and ignore His rules for our lives.
 - b) What about Muslim option? It's the same problem I have with other major religions. One has to prove their worth to God by trying to be good enough". The problem is one can never know if they're good enough for God. How can imperfect people be good enough?

- c) Christianity is the only religion I'm aware of that says, "We can never be good enough for a perfect God", so stop trying to justify ourselves before Him in the first place!" So if that's impossible, what's the point of being a good witness for Jesus? It is not to try to earn our salvation, by works, but because it's the best way to live our life. It's because living as His witnesses to the world around us is what He desires of us. It's not about being perfect, it's to realize that living as God desires (as the bible teaches) is the best way to live life!
5. Gee John, that's a nice speech. What does any of that have to do with these chapters? I thought you'd never ask! In effect, everything. The really sad story that covers Chapters 19-21 (I need two lessons to get through it) is that it shows us what happens to any society including ours when we decide that we as a society don't need an authority higher than us to guide our lives! These three chapters are a vivid reminder to us as believers of what happens if we (yes us!) fail to live as God desires we live as a witness for Him. What happens to the society around us is always due to His people failing to be a good witness for Him! That's a reality we all must face. In the meantime I'd say it's time to give the details of what we'll read in these chapters!
6. Chapter 19 opens with a story of a Levite (a member of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. The one that was called to be the priests for the rest of them). He had a concubine. This was a legal term to describe a woman whose "sort of married" to a man, but had less rights than a regular wife. It wasn't what God desired, but "tolerated" as it was part of that culture. This concubine cheated on him and then went home to her father. After about four months, the Levite missed her and went to her father's house to get her back. Her father and the Levite hit it off. They spent five days "partying" together before the Levite finally said in effect, "It's been fun, but it's really time to go!"
- a) This went on for about ten verses. Then the Levite and his concubine hit the road to work his way up north to his hometown. When they stop for the night in a place that's full of nonbelievers, they were stuck in the "town square" as no one would let them spend the night there. Finally an Israelite who was coming home from work agrees to let the two of them stay with him.
 - b) That's when things really went downhill. Some of the local men of that town, demanding that the host release the man so they could "gang rape him". As a strange response, those two hosts agree to release the concubine and the house owner's daughter maybe thinking since they're homosexuals, the women would be safe. Unfortunately, those set on doing evil don't think that way. They ended up gang raping the woman, and she ends up dead on the doorstep of this house. That's the Chapter 19 horror story in a few paragraphs.
 - c) Chapter 20 is essentially a civil war amongst the Israelites. The man whose concubine died in that incident chopped her up in 12 pieces, and sent those pieces all over Israel so all of the Israelites were aware of what happened. The Israelites who lived in the area where all this took place said in effect, "We tolerate all lifestyles here and we'll defend them because they live among us". Chapter 20 basically goes back and forth describing the victories and the losses that both sides of the Israelites felt due to this story. It's a story of God's people battling and killing each other as some of His people refused to stop tolerating evil that is existing amongst them! Like any civil war, it's a sad story involving lots of suffering and a lot of death and lots of details are given about how many Israelites died on both sides.
 - d) OK, all of this is sad! Why should I care about a civil war and all these sins that occurred a few thousand years ago? What does any of this have to do with me? The issue isn't about learning ancient history. It's to realize the danger to any society when we refuse to live as God desires. The consequences are horrid. Failing to be a witness for God will harm not only to our own lives, but to the society around us. The lesson is realizing the danger of failing to be a witness for God. It was wrong for the Levite to offer his concubine to a big group of "sinners". It was wrong of one of the tribes of Israel to defend what is evil. It's wrong for us to ignore how God wants to live. He lets us suffer the consequences to teach us first hand, what the danger of not living as He desires. OK, now that we're all feeling guilty, it's a perfect time to start the verse-by-verse study. Let's begin!

7. Chapter 19, Verse 1: In those days Israel had no king.
- a) OK, why open with that statement? It's not saying that if we elect the right leader, we will never have evil in our world! Bible verses do exist about the benefits of a good leader over us, but I don't think that's the point here! It's essentially a reminder that when those of us who are called to be His people "act like it", it repels us from committing evil acts.
 - b) But John, I'm a devout Christian and I'm still suffering right now. As I like to say welcome to the club! Jesus said in effect that if they persecuted Him, what do you think the world's going to do to believers! If that isn't bad enough, there are demonic forces that don't want you to be a good witness for Jesus, so they work to prevent us from being that witness! It's all true, but has nothing to do with my point here!
 - c) The point has to do with how we should act as believers. When we don't look to Jesus as a king over our lives, that's when tend to go down the wrong path in life. We may not be a "gang rapper", but evil goes rampant when good people fail to act! That's a "truism" that has been around as long as man has been around. The point here is God's people failed to act as a witness for Him and evil is rampant. Remember that the "motto" of Judges is that the Israelites pretty much "did whatever they felt like doing". That in effect is another way of saying, "There was no king in Israel" back then. After beating that point to death we can now start on the horrid story that is the last three chapters of this book.
8. Verse 1b: Now a Levite who lived in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. ² But she was unfaithful to him. She left him and went back to her father's house in Bethlehem, Judah. After she had been there four months, ³ her husband went to her to persuade her to return. He had with him his servant and two donkeys. She took him into her father's house, and when her father saw him, he gladly welcomed him. ⁴ His father-in-law, the girl's father, prevailed upon him to stay; so he remained with him three days, eating and drinking, and sleeping there.
- a) The story opens with some unnamed people. We have a Levite, who in essence is trained as a priest. He had a concubine who's like a wife with less rights. I'll explain that better in a bit. The text says she was unfaithful to him. After that "she ran home to daddy" as I bet she had nowhere else to turn. The Levite missed her, (be it the cooking or the sex) and he went to her father's house to get her back. I'm also speculating that her father wanted her "married again", and he invited his potential son in law to spend a few days with him.
 - b) So what did the men do for those three or four days? I suspect it's what most men do: they sat around "solved the world's problems", discussed politics, sports, women and what it is they should do with the girl. I'm guessing the women cooked for them while the guys sat there and didn't do much of anything!
 - c) Before I move on, a few words on "Concubine". It's best to describe it as a wife with less of a wife's rights. A concubine was often brought in to increase the size of man's family. The concubine wasn't entitled to an inheritance. I can ramble off a lot of Old Testament heroes who had concubines, including Jacob, David, and Solomon. Genesis 2:24 said a man shall leave his mother and father and "cling to his wife". While concubines were never formally prohibited, I'd say based on Genesis 2:24 it wasn't God's ideal desire. My view is God did tolerate it. Think of it like a parent's "ideal will" for their children compared to "what they will tolerate". Bottom line, it was part of that culture and we must accept that it was.
 - d) She wasn't the most faithful of concubines. The text implies she was a "whore" as used in a few other translations. She cheated on the Levite and when she didn't have anywhere else to go, so she went back to her father's. That's where we are in the story.
 - e) A few geography notes. The Levite was living in Ephraim, which essentially is part of the northern edge of Israel. Bethlehem, (yes that one) is in effect a suburb of Jerusalem as it's more to the southern part of the country. By the way, this is the second time Bethlehem is mentioned in Judges. It's in effect a "nothing" of a town, but went from being notorious in these stories to one of the most famous places in the world due to Jesus being born there!

- i) I admit I'm fascinated by the fact this is the second story in a row that just happens to mention Bethlehem as a background reference. Could it be a hint that this city is going to be famous one day? No idea. I just hold the view that nothing in the bible is a "coincidence" and it's referenced twice in a few chapters!
 - f) Meanwhile back to the story. The girl's father was happy to see him. Maybe he wanted a little male company as I jokingly said early to discuss politics, sports and women. Maybe he just wanted him to take his cheating daughter off his hands and wanted to have a good relationship with the Levite priest! Whatever the reason, we read of several days of what I suspect is "party time" among these men. My guess is they went to bed drunk each night and woke up thinking, "Hey, no hurry to get out the door, let's do it again". That leads us right into Verse 5:
- 9. Verse 5: On the fourth day they got up early and he prepared to leave, but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Refresh yourself with something to eat; then you can go." ⁶ So the two of them sat down to eat and drink together. Afterward the girl's father said, "Please stay tonight and enjoy yourself." ⁷ And when the man got up to go, his father-in-law persuaded him, so he stayed there that night. ⁸ On the morning of the fifth day, when he rose to go, the girl's father said, "Refresh yourself. Wait till afternoon!" So the two of them ate together.
 - a) By the forth day, the Levite was getting tired of this routine. At this point, he just wanted to take his concubine home, despite her unfaithfulness and get on with his life. However, "dad" was still bored, and I suspect he wanted some more discussion of "politics, sports, and women". Yes it's what men do when they drink. They sit around with too much time on our hands. I picture the father thinking, "Hey don't leave yet, I'm bored. Come drink some more." Then I picture the Levite thinking, "It's been fun but it's time for me to take her home now! That is the setting and it lasted two more days.
 - b) OK, time for the "why" question: Why does the bible give us these details of a 5-day delay in their plans? A number of reasons. God's setting up the next big scene and it required a time delay for the events to happen as they did. Another is to show the effect of people in Israel "doing whatever they felt like" (i.e., ignoring God). Levites were not supposed to be in possession of a concubine, let alone Israelites. Another is to show the waste of life that we can have when all we care about is for example, drinking alcohol and spending many a day sitting around discussing sex, politics and sports. I'm not against downtime. What I'm preaching about is only using our time with things that are essentially a waste of time!
 - i) Remember the "next day" motto. Do you want to wake up the next day regretting all the time you spent doing something or do you want to look back at your life as we realize we used it to make a difference for the God who created us? My point here is simply that life requires balance. Yes "down time" is needed, but so is using our lives for the purpose God created us, to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) Anyway, it's almost "saddle up" time for the Levite and his concubine:
- 10. Verse 9: Then when the man, with his concubine and his servant, got up to leave, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said, "Now look, it's almost evening. Spend the night here; the day is nearly over. Stay and enjoy yourself. Early tomorrow morning you can get up and be on your way home." ¹⁰ But, unwilling to stay another night, the man left and went toward Jebus (that is, Jerusalem), with his two saddled donkeys and his concubine.
 - a) Verse 9 has one more day of "stalling" by dad and finally the Levite says in effect "Enough is enough, I need to sober up and hit the road! By sir, thanks for all your hospitality and I will take your daughter off your hands, so let me go now!" With that said, he hit the road and that'll lead us to our next big plot point coming up in a few verses.
 - b) First a few words on "Jebus" (what Jerusalem was called at that time). That city was not controlled by Israel at that time. King David, who came relatively soon after the judges, is the one who conquered Jerusalem. The point as its relative here is that the couple traveled near it, but not to it, as it's not far from Bethlehem where the party was taking place!

11. Verse 11: When they were near Jebus and the day was almost gone, the servant said to his master, "Come, let's stop at this city of the Jebusites and spend the night." ¹² His master replied, "No. We won't go into an alien city, whose people are not Israelites. We will go on to Gibeah." ¹³ He added, "Come, let's try to reach Gibeah or Ramah and spend the night in one of those places." ¹⁴ So they went on, and the sun set as they neared Gibeah in Benjamin. ¹⁵ There they stopped to spend the night. They went and sat in the city square, but no one took them into his home for the night.
- a) Let's start with the fact that the traveling Levite, the man who traveled to Bethlehem so he could get his concubine back also had a servant traveling with him. So was this servant a part of the "Five-day drinking binge" or did he just busy himself another way during all of that time? Don't know. What we do know is he traveled with this couple and advised the boss, "Hey, why don't we spend the night in Jebus, again was what the non-Israelites called Jerusalem. The Levite said in effect, "They're not our people, so let's keep going to another city". When they reached another city, they camped out in the "town square" as they didn't know anyone there.
 - b) Let me say a few words about "hotels" in those days. Realize the Jewish word for hotels is in effect the same word as "brothels". My point is hotels were not good places to stay so it wasn't an option as far as the Levite was concerned. That's why they were stuck camping in the town square. The bad news is being out at in the middle of a town at night wasn't a good thing. Think of being in the worst location one can imagine where "bad people" can be found. Bottom line the choice between a "hotel" and a "town square" were both options that were not desirable. This leads to the next conversation in this story.
12. Verse 16: That evening an old man from the hill country of Ephraim, who was living in Gibeah (the men of the place were Benjamites), came in from his work in the fields. ¹⁷ When he looked and saw the traveler in the city square, the old man asked, "Where are you going? Where did you come from?" ¹⁸ He answered, "We are on our way from Bethlehem in Judah to a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim where I live. I have been to Bethlehem in Judah and now I am going to the house of the LORD. No one has taken me into his house. ¹⁹ We have both straw and fodder for our donkeys and bread and wine for ourselves your servants--me, your maidservant, and the young man with us. We don't need anything."
- a) We get introduced to another new character here. A man who lived in Gibeah, this is the city where the Levite and his gang was parked in the town square traveled past the town square coming home from work in the fields. That man asked the group, "Hey don't you three have a safer place to spend the night then here in the town square? The gang replied in effect, "No". Then the Levite wanted to sell himself and his gang by saying, "Hey we're not much of a burden! We've got food for ourselves and for our animals. We really don't need anything other than a roof over our heads for the night! He also explained his travel plans from "City A to City B" as if to say, "We won't be a long-term burden, we just need a place to spend the night so we can move on the next day!
 - b) The Levite also mentioned he's "going to the House of the Lord". There was no temple at that time. The "House of the Lord" was the portable tabernacle structure the Israelites did take through the desert and was now parked somewhere in Israel apparently is not in the town where they were at, at this moment. The whole point of this speech was a sales pitch in effect to say, "Let us stay with you, it's a short term and no cost commitment!"
13. Verse 20: "You are welcome at my house," the old man said. "Let me supply whatever you need. Only don't spend the night in the square." ²¹ So he took him into his house and fed his donkeys. After they had washed their feet, they had something to eat and drink.
- a) The short version is "the deal was closed" and the Levite and his party got out of the town square and got to spend the night at his house. Gee John this is all interesting, why should I care? The answer is it's setting up a horrid story that's told in the rest of this chapter and the next one. It shows that God's "pulling the strings" of our lives to make events occur!

14. Verse 22: While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him."
- a) Speaking of tragedies, we now come to the horrid part of this story. I don't care if you are homosexual or heterosexual, "gang rape" is never an acceptable thing! At the house where the Levite and his girl are spending the night get approached by a "homosexual gang" as we read in the text. What I kept thinking is, why would such a gang exist? Especially in a town that's supposed to be "Pro-God"! I'm reminded of an expression that goes, "If you are walking down a dark street late at night, and you're about to be approached by a gang of young men, would you prefer that they just came out of a bar or a bible study? It's an analogy that came from Dennis Prager and a good one to share with anti-bible people!
 - b) The point being that such men existed then as they do today. Yes this story reminds us of the Sodom and Gomorrah story as in effect it's the same type of evil being described here!
 - c) Now think about the story from the perspective of the men in the house. I'm sure they're greatly outnumbered. They must be thinking, "How do we get out of this situation alive?" or at the least be thinking, "How do we get out of this without being raped?"
 - d) Also keep the "Middle East" custom in mind that once a person is a guest in one's home it means that person is to be protected at all cost! Unfortunately women are considered to be second-class citizens and don't get the same rights as we'll see in the next set of verses!
15. Verse 23: The owner of the house went outside and said to them, "No, my friends, don't be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don't do this disgraceful thing. ²⁴ Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But to this man, don't do such a disgraceful thing."
- a) I have to admit, as the father of two daughters, I can't imagine ever saying to anyone, take my daughter instead of me. Most fathers would much rather give up their own lives then let their daughters suffer. I suspect this is a case of "Fear of my own life and willing to do anything to save it" and thinking, "they are homosexuals, so if we offer them girls instead of us, that would save everyone's lives!" Yes that was a sinful offer, but again it's another of the many examples in this book about people doing "Whatever they felt like" without any consideration of the consequences.
 - b) The point here is two women were offered to this gang instead of the young man. One has to grasp that the custom of protecting the male houseguest is such a strong custom that to offer the women instead was a sign of how much it meant! Maybe the men were thinking if the homosexual rape gang grasped the serious of that custom, they might back off.
 - c) Of course, the drive to do evil is strong and as we'll read they accepted the female offer!
16. Verse 25: But the men would not listen to him. So the man took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and they raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go. ²⁶ At daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, fell down at the door and lay there until daylight.
- a) I warned you this is a tough chapter, and it doesn't get any easier. Here we read that this gang of homosexuals raped and mistreated the concubine all night long! In fact the Levite took his concubine and offered her to them. Yes it's sin on many levels. It's curious why he'd travel all that way to fetch this girl back, spend a week partying with her father, and at the first sign of trouble, "out you go". The sad part is yes this gang raped her probably over and over again and she ended up dying at the doorstep of the house. With so many things wrong with this picture, it's best to let the story speak for itself.
17. Verse 27: When her master got up in the morning and opened the door of the house and stepped out to continue on his way, there lay his concubine, fallen in the doorway of the house, with her hands on the threshold. ²⁸ He said to her, "Get up; let's go." But there was no answer. Then the man put her on his donkey and set out for home.
- a) Apparently the Levite had a good night sleep and then said to her, "let's get going".

- b) There was no, "Are you safe?" How did they treat you? I wonder if he really cared about her or just wanted her back to enlarge his family. Obviously the fact he sacrificed her to a bunch of "hoodlums" is a sign he didn't really care about her that much. The text implies the fact that she died there, but doesn't blatantly state it.
 - c) Amongst all of this horror, there's a fact here I forgot to mention that becomes significant. It takes place in the tribe of "Benjamin" territory. (Verse 14). For newcomers, Israel as a territory is divided into 12 sections, one for each of the 12 tribes. It'll become significant as we get into the next chapter.
 - d) Personally as the father of two girls, I can't get past the horror of all this. He sacrificed his girl versus himself when the "homosexual rape gang" showed up at the door. The fact he had a good night sleep and said, "let's get going" to her in the morning when he spotted her on the porch. All of this is a sad commentary about not caring about whether or not their lifestyle is offensive to how they were supposed to be living as witnesses for God.
 - e) OK, just when you think this story can't get any stranger, or gross, it does. Verse 29:
18. Verse 29: When he reached home, he took a knife and cut up his concubine, limb by limb, into twelve parts and sent them into all the areas of Israel. ³⁰ Everyone who saw it said, "Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came up out of Egypt. Think about it! Consider it! Tell us what to do!"
- a) I was thinking how do you cut up a body in 12 parts. I guess each limb was cut in half as to make eight parts. Then the head makes nine so the middle section was cut in three. At that point each section was "Fed Ex'd" to different tribes in Israel. Realistically the Levite probably asked other travelers to take the body parts and deliver them to the "head guys" in each territory. Bottom line is either she died on the porch step or traveling back to the home where they lived.
 - b) When others saw the chopped up parts, I'm sure the messengers explained how she was "gang rapped" and that's what caused her demise! Maybe others thought that group did the chopping as well. However it was messengered, the Israelites got the message of her murder, and were furious about it. Notice no one said anything about the gang threatened him as well and the Levite sacrificing her to the "wolves".
 - c) So did the Levite explain about the homosexuality activity? We'll find out in Chapter 20. We mainly know at this point that this act "ticked everyone off" and now it became a call to arms to do something about it.
19. Chapter 20, Verse 1: Then all the Israelites from Dan to Beersheba and from the land of Gilead came out as one man and assembled before the LORD in Mizpah. ² The leaders of all the people of the tribes of Israel took their places in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand soldiers armed with swords. ³ (The Benjamites heard that the Israelites had gone up to Mizpah.) Then the Israelites said, "Tell us how this awful thing happened."
- a) When the text says, "Dan to Beersheba, it would be like an American saying, "From Maine to California". Dan was in the utter northern part of Israel while Beersheba was southern edge. Bottom line is this act united all of Israel. They formed an army of 400,000 soldiers, ready to fight the guilty party. Remember that the action took place in the territory of the Benjamites. It was explained to them what happened.
 - b) Time for a quick diversion to talk about the bible and homosexuality. The reason that the bible doesn't permit it, is it violates Genesis 2:24, "To fill the earth and multiply (as in men and women getting married and having children)". I don't condemn nonbelievers as they are not living by biblical standards. I'd be a witness to them, but it's essential to teach first on Jesus paying for their sins. The specifics of their sins can be worked on later!
 - c) Some argue that Jesus never condemned homosexuality. Yes, but He never condemned the act of rape either! It doesn't mean He endorsed it! Jesus definitely said Moses was a prophet of God, and Moses definitely condemned that act. Therefore Jesus is saying it's a sin by stating that the law is God's rules, deal with it!

- d) The big issue coming up in Chapter 20 is in effect, "What should we tolerate?" The tribe of Benjamin will end up going to war with the other tribes because they say in effect, "We're the tolerate ones and we will allow the "gang rappers" to do their thing if they want to! It is the false argument that they're not hurting anyone by practicing homosexuality! To me the issue isn't what we tolerate, but are we a good witness for God? With all that said, let's return to the story as a war is brewing over the issue of what shall we tolerate?"
20. Verse 4: So the Levite, the husband of the murdered woman, said, "I and my concubine came to Gibeah in Benjamin to spend the night. ⁵ During the night the men of Gibeah came after me and surrounded the house, intending to kill me. They raped my concubine, and she died. ⁶ I took my concubine, cut her into pieces and sent one piece to each region of Israel's inheritance, because they committed this lewd and disgraceful act in Israel. ⁷ Now, all you Israelites, speak up and give your verdict."
- a) I admit, I'm always fascinated by what the text doesn't say versus what it does say. Here we read of the unnamed Levite said he was scared for his life and gave his concubine to a point where they raped her and she died. He didn't mention the fact he offered her up to them! All of this is one big example of sinful behavior leading to more sinful behavior. It was a sin for a Levite to marry anyone other than another Levite, let alone have a woman as a concubine! Obviously she didn't mean that much to him other than a source to make a bigger family for him! The fact he offered her to the gang shows that he cared far more about saving his own life than he did for her life! Well, now that he had to speak to all of the leaders of Israel, it was time to tell half-truths. The Levite wanted the Israelites to go to war to end a "gang rape culture" to exist in their midst. It wasn't a desire to live as God wanted them to live. It does show that even when people do whatever they want, there is a limit they'll tolerate even when they ignore the God they're supposed to be serving!
- b) Now that I've stated the obvious, let's get back to the story.
21. Verse 8: All the people rose as one man, saying, "None of us will go home. No, not one of us will return to his house. ⁹ But now this is what we'll do to Gibeah: We'll go up against it as the lot directs. ¹⁰ We'll take ten men out of every hundred from all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred from a thousand, and a thousand from ten thousand, to get provisions for the army. Then, when the army arrives at Gibeah in Benjamin, it can give them what they deserve for all this vileness done in Israel." ¹¹ So all the men of Israel got together and united as one man against the city.
- a) The best way to describe this is the Israelites decided to "tithe" the men. Just like giving to God 10% of what we earn, the Israelites decided that 10% (that's what a tithe is) of all their men of fighting age to fight in this battle. This army was to fight against the Benjamites. It is the start of a civil war in Israel!
- b) Let's look at this from the other side's perspective. Why did the Benjamites defend those rapists? I suspect it was either out of fear of them attacking more in their backyard or simply, "They're our problem and they live amongst us, so we'll defend our lifestyle to the death even if no one else approves of it!" It's one of those things where one asks, what are we willing to tolerate in order to have peace? Again I don't know if the Benjamites did this out of fear of them or out of a desire to tolerate them. Either way, there's no excuse of what that gang did and they were on the wrong side of this war, as we'll see.
- c) Bottom line, a whole lot of Israelites showed up in a city that's a part of the area Benjamin controlled. Whether anyone liked it or not, a nation turning against God is now leading to a civil war. That's the underlying point: Turning from God's desire makes situations bad and eventually worse! With that understood, let's continue this sad story!
22. Verse 12: The tribes of Israel sent men throughout the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What about this awful crime that was committed among you? ¹³ Now surrender those wicked men of Gibeah so that we may put them to death and purge the evil from Israel."
- a) Here the Israelites were trying to prevent an all out war. They told the Benjamites that if they surrender the "bad dudes" to be tried and killed we'll all go home and that'll be that!

23. Verse 13b: But the Benjamites would not listen to their fellow Israelites. ¹⁴ From their towns they came together at Gibeah to fight against the Israelites. ¹⁵ At once the Benjamites mobilized twenty-six thousand swordsmen from their towns, in addition to seven hundred chosen men from those living in Gibeah. ¹⁶ Among all these soldiers there were seven hundred chosen men who were left-handed, each of whom could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. ¹⁷ Israel, apart from Benjamin, mustered four hundred thousand swordsmen, all of them fighting men.
- a) The men of the tribe of Benjamin responded by saying in effect, "We'd rather to go war to defend our territory than give up those evil men". The text doesn't say why: It could be a fear of what the survivor's of the bad men would do to them. It could be due to the view that "They're our problem and if we want to tolerate that lifestyle, who are you to lecture us on how to live?" Finally it could be simply to the fact the Benjamites wanted to defend the part where they lived and didn't care what the issue was.
 - b) The Benjamites raised an army of about 26,000. If you recall, the Israelites had an army of about 400,000. I don't know what they're thinking besides, "This is our territory and we'll defend it to the death!" Verse 16 says that among the 26,000, their "secret weapon" was 700 left handed men who were experts with a slingshot! I'd bet the Benjamites thought we've got better weapons, and we can defeat a large army with these trained men!
 - c) A thought crossed my mind here. Why did God want Israel divided up into the separate tribes? If He knows all things, then He'd know there'd be fighting within Israel. Why did He tolerate this? First it was easier to count and organize the Israelites if they got divided up that way. Second, the same way siblings fight, it's a reminder that we have to get along with family despite our differences. Third God "tolerated" this is He often allows our sin to play out as examples for others as a reason to say, "Here's what happens in your midst when you allow this to occur!"
 - d) Bottom line, "it is what it is" and a war is about to begin between those who think we can live however we want and tolerate whatever we want versus those who think their has to be some sort of rule of law in the land! With that said, back to the story.
24. Verse 18: The Israelites went up to Bethel and inquired of God. They said, "Who of us shall go first to fight against the Benjamites?" The LORD replied, "Judah shall go first."
- a) Here it gets fascinating. The Israelites outnumbered the Benjamites 400,000 to 26,000. It is a matter of thinking, "We outnumber them so badly, not all of us need to attack!" They are wondering who should attack first? Since they're divided by tribe, they asked God, who should attack them first? God responded that the tribe of Judah should go first. They are the largest of the 12 tribes and yes, Jesus came from that tribe. Still, we're about to read of the Israelites losing this first round of the battle. Therefore, the logical question is why did God say, "Go attack them and Judah go first", if God knew they were going to lose?
 - i) Part of the answer is that was orchestrating a victory over Benjamin, but it's going to take a bunch of battles to achieve that victory. Still for all those men who'll die in this battle, this wasn't good news. As I like to say every so often, if the next life didn't exist, this one is very unfair.
 - ii) It also shows that just because God says something doesn't mean it'll be painless to do it God's way! It's God's way of saying that the Israelites ignoring Him caused a lot of pain already and it's going to take more suffering to make it better!
 - iii) With that said, "Battle #1 is about to begin!"
25. Verse 19: The next morning the Israelites got up and pitched camp near Gibeah. ²⁰ The men of Israel went out to fight the Benjamites and took up battle positions against them at Gibeah. ²¹ The Benjamites came out of Gibeah and cut down twenty-two thousand Israelites on the battlefield that day.
- a) Short Version: Benjamin 1, Israel 0. The superior fighting skills of the Benjamites as well as the fact they knew the territory, they won. If one's familiar with the American civil war it started in a fairly similar way. As we'll read, it'll also end in a similar way.

26. Verse 22: But the men of Israel encouraged one another and again took up their positions where they had stationed themselves the first day. ²³ The Israelites went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and they inquired of the LORD. They said, "Shall we go up again to battle against the Benjamites, our brothers?" The LORD answered, "Go up against them."
- a) Never underestimate the male ego. The Israelites just lost badly. Instead of wallowing in their loss, they dug their heels in and said in effect, "Let's go at it again!" Again they went to God in prayer first and asked Him should we do "Round 2"? He said, "Go ahead". Yes the Israelites are going to lose again, but God was setting up the Benjamites for big defeat coming up. Yes that doesn't help the men about to die here, but again God usually has a much bigger plan in mind, than just our lives.
 - b) Notice the sincerity of the Israelites they "wept" before God. Let's be honest, they weren't crazy about dying! In effect God's saying to the Israelites, "I'd like to make life better for all the Israelites. However, I've been ignored for a long time, and it's going to take pain in order to make it better." Obviously God didn't say that directly, but that in effect what He is saying as He allowed the Israelites to lose before winning this battle.
 - c) With that said, we're about to read another round of this civil war.
27. Verse 24: Then the Israelites drew near to Benjamin the second day. ²⁵ This time, when the Benjamites came out from Gibeah to oppose them, they cut down another eighteen thousand Israelites, all of them armed with swords.
- a) Round 2: Benjamin 2, Israel 0.
 - b) For a small group of about 26,000 men, they kept winning again, because maybe they had better fighting skills, and knew the terrain. Despite the fact God told them to attack again, the score is still 2-0 against the Israelites.
 - c) Still, God knows what he's doing, and He allowed these losses in order to set up a victory coming up in Round 3. Yes that news doesn't help the families of those who died in these first two rounds, but again, God has the big picture in mind and often allows us to suffer in order to accomplish His greater goals. With that said, time for Round 3.
28. Verse 26: Then the Israelites, all the people, went up to Bethel, and there they sat weeping before the LORD. They fasted that day until evening and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the LORD. ²⁷ And the Israelites inquired of the LORD. (In those days the ark of the covenant of God was there, ²⁸ with Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, ministering before it.) They asked, "Shall we go up again to battle with Benjamin our brother, or not?" The LORD responded, "Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands."
- a) One can sense the desperation the Israelites had at this point. They're essentially crying to God and saying, "We don't want to die! Why are you having this and that group attack if we're not going to win!" The fact they made lots of offerings showed how serious they're at this point. If all of that wasn't enough, the portable tabernacle was there. The high priest was there. It's almost as if God was saying, "OK, you guys are serious this time. I'm going to make it so you win, because of My love for all of you!"
 - b) So does this mean we can talk God into doing something? First God is God and we're not Him. We can pray for whatever we want, but His will, is yes, His will! His will was for a victory the third time after the ego of the Benjamites was built up.
 - c) Remember that both sides were "God's chosen people!" Let's be honest, we're not being a good witness for Jesus when we're busy killing other witnesses for Jesus. To share an old joke, "The problem with Christians is we organize our firing squads in circles". Does that mean God wanted to tolerate the gang rape? Of course not! I suspect He just wanted the Israelites to suffer for a bit to make them realize what they're doing to each other. I can't say for sure this is the reason. I just know God worked it out this way, so that Israel did win in "Round 3".
 - d) As I said earlier, it's a little like the American Civil war. The South knew the territory, but the North eventually won simply by having far more men than the South did!

29. Verse 29: Then Israel set an ambush around Gibeah. ³⁰ They went up against the Benjamites on the third day and took up positions against Gibeah as they had done before. ³¹ The Benjamites came out to meet them and were drawn away from the city. They began to inflict casualties on the Israelites as before, so that about thirty men fell in the open field and on the roads--the one leading to Bethel and the other to Gibeah.
- a) Like the American Civil War there was still a lot of Israelites left to fight and it's time for Round 3. In this round the Israelites drew the Benjamites out of their town where they'd sprung a trap. The same way the Israelites won a war or two back when they conquered the land of Israel, so the same technique was used here to defeat the Benjamites as we will read in the next few verses:
30. Verse 32: While the Benjamites were saying, "We are defeating them as before," the Israelites were saying, "Let's retreat and draw them away from the city to the roads." ³³ All the men of Israel moved from their places and took up positions at Baal Tamar, and the Israelite ambush charged out of its place on the west of Gibeah. ³⁴ Then ten thousand of Israel's finest men made a frontal attack on Gibeah. The fighting was so heavy that the Benjamites did not realize how near disaster was. ³⁵ The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel, and on that day the Israelites struck down 25,100 Benjamites, all armed with swords. ³⁶ Then the Benjamites saw that they were beaten.
- a) Short version is Israel won this round by setting up an ambush. While they draw out the Benjamites making them think it's time for another route, another group of Israelites went "around the back" and burned down their town and the people living there. It's gruesome and I'll just leave it at that.
 - b) Stop and realize that most of the tribe of Israel died in this battle. Verse 35 says 25,100 did die. Earlier, the text said the size of the army was at 26,000. Therefore, the Israelites killed most of the tribe of Benjamin. Realize the few survivors did produce their first king (Saul) as well as Paul the Apostle many centuries later. My point is the tribe did survive this!
31. Verse 36 (cont.): Now the men of Israel had given way before Benjamin, because they relied on the ambush they had set near Gibeah. ³⁷ The men who had been in ambush made a sudden dash into Gibeah, spread out and put the whole city to the sword. ³⁸ The men of Israel had arranged with the ambush that they should send up a great cloud of smoke from the city, ³⁹ and then the men of Israel would turn in the battle. The Benjamites had begun to inflict casualties on the men of Israel (about thirty), and they said, "We are defeating them as in the first battle."
- a) Notice this story is being told as if one is on a hill watching the battle and seeing who the winning side is. It appears the Benjamites were about to get victory #3 here. Yet God is working "behind the scenes" to arrange an ambush so the Benjamites will lose.
 - b) I have to admit, this is one of those stories, that's pretty self explanatory. It doesn't require a lot of commentary. It's describing a war and how the side with more soldiers eventually won, not by overwhelming the enemy, but by trusting God to guide them to victory.
 - c) Now for the big question: Why is this story in the bible? To be honest, it's one big horrid story with rape, killing and a civil war. In fact the story isn't even over yet and we'll have to finish it in the final lesson on Judges. Why is this story in the bible? For starters, let us go back to my lesson title. Essentially it's about the danger of believers caving to society in order to be accepted. That's what the Benjamites did. Because they were winning so far, it became their ego that killed them as we'll read in the rest of the chapter!
 - i) Yes, we've got a lesson on the danger of our ego's, which as the old saying goes is the "last thing to die" before we turn our lives completely over to God. The reason the book of Judges ends on this story isn't because "It's all out of judges to describe as much as the bible wanted to teach us that even without external threats we are still likely to turn from God and do whatever we feel like doing. For us to turn our lives over to God, it requires complete surrender of our will. The Israelites had to learn this the hard way and in effect no one is the winner in this horrid story!

- ii) So what's the "take home" from this story? No matter how long we've trusted in God, the danger of our ego creeping in always exists! That's what God's trying to teach us here in this lesson. We may not have to deal with rape or murder or even something as horrid as gang violence, but when we fail to fully trust God for every aspect of our lives, and live however we feel like living, I promise that we too will suffer for turning our back on God. That's the related underlying lesson and why this horrid story is part of the bible. With that said, let's finish the chapter.
- 32. Verse 40: But when the column of smoke began to rise from the city, the Benjamites turned and saw the smoke of the whole city going up into the sky. ⁴¹ Then the men of Israel turned on them, and the men of Benjamin were terrified, because they realized that disaster had come upon them. ⁴² So they fled before the Israelites in the direction of the desert, but they could not escape the battle. And the men of Israel who came out of the towns cut them down there. ⁴³ They surrounded the Benjamites, chased them and easily overran them in the vicinity of Gibeah on the east. ⁴⁴ Eighteen thousand Benjamites fell, all of them valiant fighters. ⁴⁵ As they turned and fled toward the desert to the rock of Rimmon, the Israelites cut down five thousand men along the roads. They kept pressing after the Benjamites as far as Gidom and struck down two thousand more.
 - a) Here is the end of the battle story, where the Benjamites lost badly. When they figured out that the Israelites burned their city, they fled for their lives. The few survivors ended up in the desert at a place called "rock of Rimmon". While the war was going on realize the Israelites killed 7,000 more (5,000 plus 2,000 as stated in Verse 45). The short version is most of the men and I suspect most of the women and children were killed in this war!
- 33. Verse 46: On that day twenty-five thousand Benjamite swordsmen fell, all of them valiant fighters. ⁴⁷ But six hundred men turned and fled into the desert to the rock of Rimmon, where they stayed four months. ⁴⁸ The men of Israel went back to Benjamin and put all the towns to the sword, including the animals and everything else they found. All the towns they came across they set on fire.
 - a) Short Version: Israel 1, Benjamin 2, but the "one" was much bigger than those other fights as it was a major defeat for the Benjamites. After that, there was only a few of them left.
- 34. Congratulations, we made it through two of the toughest bible chapters in terms of grossness. If you can handle these, the rest of the bible is downhill.
 - a) I'd like to end this study with one important thought to consider: All of the ugliness we've read in these two chapters began with "problems in the home". It began with a Levite who took a wife he shouldn't have taken. It moved on to a "drinking party" with the father of the unfaithful wife. She got killed because the husband "gave her up" for death. Then we have lots of Israelites dying in a war all because of these events. The point is not having a "home in order" leads to worse disasters. What this means for us, is our first ministry is to our family as keeping that in order and being a good witness for God that way, prevents a lot of disasters from occurring.
 - i) Does this mean if we're bad parents, we'll experience these things? Of course not. I do believe this story is included in the bible as a reminder to us of what happens when we fail to be a good witness for God at home. The damage spreads. It's the big reminder that we're always to be good witnesses for God and hopefully a lot of horrid consequences can be avoided.
 - ii) So why didn't God step in to stop all this death and destruction? Free will. If God didn't allow free will, we'd be complaining that He doesn't give us a chance to be a good witness for Him in a horrid world.
 - iii) With that said, the epilogue of this story is the final chapter of Judges next time!
- 35. Heavenly Father, As Your witnesses to a lost and dying world, help us to be a good witness first in our homes, then in our communities and then to the world around us. Help us to learn from a horrid story and apply the lessons about the consequences of failing to be a witness to you to the world around us! We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.