

Are We Our Own Worst Enemy?

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[0:00] If you would open up your Bibles to Judges chapter 19, 20, and 21, it's on page 257 of your Pew Bible.

Well, in February 2023, there was a train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, and it resulted in a massive toxic waste spill.

It was quite a train wreck. And the cause, it turns out, was a failed wheel bearing in the train itself. This morning, we're going to look at the book of Judges, and the book of Judges ends in a train wreck. You could say the whole book of Judges is a train wreck. God's old covenant people, Israel, failing to dispossess the nations of the promised land, and they failed to dispossess them because they failed to trust that their king was in their midst.

They failed to trust Yahweh. It resulted in a train wreck with toxic waste all over the place. Cycle after cycle, throughout the Judges, we see Israel denying and disobeying their king who was in their midst.

[1:44] The tragedy is that Israel becomes like the Canaanite nations that they were to devote to destruction.

And at the end of the book of Judges, do you know who's devoted to destruction? Judges 19, 20, and 21 is a smoldering wreckage of God's people.

Israel has been Canaanite. Israel has been Canaanized. They've become just like the nations they were to dispossess. Israel's greatest enemy, it turns out, wasn't the surrounding nations.

It was themselves. They were the cause to their own train wreck. Now, if you were a railway inspector back in February 2023, and you showed up to East Palestine, you would have been given the responsibility to find out what was the cause of that train wreck.

And this morning, we get to see kind of the final kind of wreckage of this train wreck called Israel. So, the cause of their Canaanization is what we're going after.

[3:04] They were their own worst enemy. And you know what? It begs the question, church, are we our own worst enemy? Is there a train wreck for us just waiting to happen?

Four scenes. Scene 1, chapter 19, 1 through 10, we have an introduction, and you're going to smell something off. Scene 2, chapter 19, 10 through 28, we have one of the most graphic, wicked acts in your Bible.

Scene 3, chapter 19, 29 through chapter 20, verse 48, there is a holy war. And there's deep, dark irony.

Scene 4, all of chapter 21, damage control, according to what's right in your own eyes. The book of Judges poses a warning for the Christian church today.

Are we our own worst enemy? Let's look at scene 1. We've got a marital spat. Chapter 19, 1 through 10.

[4:20] And before we get into something, I just want you to notice verse 1. In those days when there was no king in Israel, that's the author being a little bit tongue-in-cheek.

There was not a human king in Israel. But Yahweh, the king of all, was in Israel. His people just weren't acknowledging him as king.

So we start off there. And then we learn about this marital spat. We are brought into, in verses 2 through 10, this marital spat between an unnamed Levite and his concubine.

Now remember, a Levite was the clergy of Israel. They were their own tribe. They were like the pastors of Israel. They were the spiritual leaders of Israel. So they were the ones who were to be leading the nation spiritually.

And this Levite, turns out, he's got a concubine who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem, 19. 1. A concubine was a second-class wife, usually a servant or a slave, and their primary responsibility was to generate babies.

[5:32] It was demeaning. And what should strike you out of the gate is that a spiritual leader of Israel has a concubine.

Smells a little off. Well, in verse 3, he goes from the hill country of Ephraim, where he's sojourning, and he goes to Bethlehem to where she went to be with her father because she had committed some kind of unfaithfulness.

He gets there. He speaks kindly to her. She welcomes him in, and it looks like things are getting patched up. And then verses 4 through 9, we are introduced to the concubine's dad who is, like, aggressively hospitable.

So in verse 4, we read that he made the Levite, his concubine, the daughter of the Bethlehemite, and his servant stay three days.

Come stay. Let's drink and be merry. Next day, verse 5, day 4, the Levite, his concubine, their servant, they get ready to go.

[6:45] This hospitable Bethlehemite says, no, no, come on. You don't want to go. He's kind of full-course press, hospitality. No, let's eat, drink. Let's enjoy each other's company.

The day passes. They stay another night. Verses 8 through 10, day 5 rolls around. They get up. They get ready to go. The day passes.

The dad is putting full-court press hospitality on, and you start kind of asking, why is he being so hospitable? Does he know something that we don't know? But eventually in verse 10, the man, the Levite, would not spend the night.

So he rose and departs. And so this is well into the day. So here's the introduction. We've got a Levite, his concubine wife, and this very hospitable dad.

And this is how this account, this, the end of the book of Judges, this account starts. And there's something that you need to know is off here. First is this.

[7:51] We don't know the nature of the concubine's unfaithfulness. And so we learn that. Verse 2, and his concubine was unfaithful to him, but we're not told how.

And then, the second thing we notice that's kind of off is this kind of aggressive, over-the-top hospitality by the concubine's dad. Like, what's that all about? Does he know something we don't know?

But what should really get your attention is that the spiritual leader, one of the spiritual leaders of Israel, has a concubine. He is clearly ignoring Genesis 2, 24 and 25, which is very clear in saying God's design for marriage is one man married to one woman before him for life.

So we start with a bit of some compromise here. Moral compromise. Now, if you were inspecting a train wreck in Judges 19, 20, and 21, you're looking at a spiritual leader who's compromised.

Despite his sweet talking, something's off here. But what we're going to see is we're not looking at the cause of the train wreck.

[9:21] The failure of the train wreck is something else. So let's move on to scene two. Scene two is in chapter 19, 10 through 28.

And just to remind you that the Levite is concubine, and the servant with their donkeys, they have left Bethlehem, and they're going to go back up to the hill country of Ephraim. And so that's basically a 10 to 12 mile trek north.

They got a day started late in the day. And so in verses 10 through 15, what we see is they need to make a decision of where they're going to stay the night because they got to stop somewhere because it's too far to travel to get back to the hill country of Ephraim.

And so what we notice right out of the gate is that they get near to this place called Jebus. And we see the author chime in, that is Jerusalem.

And so what that means is this. This city, which is later to become Jerusalem, is in control of Canaanites, non-Israelites, or what the Levite will say is foreigners.

[10:38] Well, we see in verse 11 that the servant says, hey, Master Levite, hey, let's turn aside to this city of the Jebusites, Jebus, and we will just kind of bed down for the night.

To which the Levite said, absolutely not, verse 12 and 13. They're foreigners. They don't belong to the people of Israel. We're going to move past them and go another four or five miles to Gibeah. Let's go there because that's our people. And what he knows is they're going to be hospitable. The Jebusites, they're not going to be hospitable to us Jews. They're foreigners.

But when we get to Gibeah, which is of the tribe of Benjamin, they will treat us well. So in verse 15, we fast forward, they show up in Gibeah. They went into the square, which a traveling Jew would go into, and they would expect someone to be hospitable to them.

And look what happens. No one took them into his house to spend the night, verse 15. And what you need to know is that is a red flag.

[11:46] Their inhospitableness, that is not good. In verses 16 through 21, the story continues.

There's this old man, not from Gibeah, but from the hill country of Ephraim. He's a sojourner in Gibeah. He's doing some work there. And we learn in verse 16, he's coming back from his work in the field at evening, and he comes into the town square, and he sees the Levite, the concubine, and their servant in the square.

He engages them in conversation. And then eventually, he invites them into his home. He says in verse 20, peace be to you. I will care for all your wants.

And here's what you need. It's a person not from Gibeah showing hospitality to these kind of sojourners coming through. It's a bit odd. And then comes something of an ominous warning. Only, verse 20, only do not spend the night in the square. He knows something. He knows something that the Levite, the concubine, and their servant, does not know.

[13:03] And so I think it was more like, peace be to you. I will care for you. He's looking at his watch. All right, you don't want to be out here in the square. Let's get in my house. And then it's in verse 22 through 28 that we will see one of the most horrific scenes in your Bible.

Now, I need to let you know up front, it is graphic. But I also need to let you know that it's intended to make you think of another passage in your Bible. In Genesis 19, Sodom, God sends two angels to rescue Lot and then bring judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah.

And then the men of the city of Sodom surround the house and they demand to know the two men who are angels. and we see something very similar happen in verses 22 through 28.

22, as they are making their hearts merry, this is happening in Israel. This is happening in a city of the Benjamites.

They have not gone to Jabez in order to be among their own. The men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house, beating on the door, and they said to the old man, the master of the house, bring out the man who came into your house that we may know him.

[14:40] It's a demand. And it's what's called a euphemism. Have you ever heard about, you know, you're somewhere and you hear about Tim and Georgina hooking up?

That hookup language is a euphemism for having sex. This phrase that we may know him is a euphemism for this gang of violent, worthless fellows having sex with the Levite.

This is a threat of homosexual gang rape. Now typically, we're not exposed to homosexual gang rape outside of context of prison scenes.

What's being done here is showing you just how far Israel has fallen. these men are Sodom-like men.

They are Sodomite-like. This is a wicked act. In verses 23 and 24, the old man, he defends his guests.

[16:00] He says, no, my brothers, do not act so. Look it, wickedly since this man has come into my house. Do not do this vile thing at the end of verse 24, but against this man. Do not do this outrageous thing.

There are some people in the church that claim to be Christians who would say what is vile and wicked and outrageous is not the homosexual nature of this.

It is the rape of it because we don't have consenting adults. What's wrong here is the lack of consent, some people would say.

And that is wrong. But what's clearly being said as wicked and vile and outrageous is the homosexual nature of this.

make no mistake, the Bible is very clear on homosexuality. In Leviticus 18.22, the people of Israel are told a man cannot lie with a man nor a woman with a woman.

[17:11] It goes on in that same passage to talk about forbidding incest and bestiality. And then in 18.24, do you know what is written? Don't do this.

Don't become like the nations around you. Romans 1 in your New Testament 18-32 clearly forbid homosexuality and it points to homosexuality as a sign of forsaking God and giving them up and God handing people over to their sinful desires.

These men of Gibeah, these worthless fellows, were more like the men of Sodom. But the big difference is the men of Sodom didn't claim to be, to have Yahweh as their king. men. This is horrific. And it gets worse. Verse 24, the old man offers his virgin daughter and then the Levite's concubine to try to somehow satisfy the lust of this mob of men.

You know what he's doing? He's trying to protect this one man's honor by giving away to women. You know what that means? He was messed up.

[18:41] He's trying to do what's right in his own eyes, that old man. Not just these worthless fellows in Gibeah, but the old man too. Women are not of less value than men.

And then it gets just horrific. The men in 25, they don't listen. Like, no.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. And then the Levite, verse 26, the man pushes out his concubine. Pushes her out. Closes the door.

And we read that this gang of violent men rape her all night long. A daybreak. She manages the strength to get back to the old man's house.

She cannot get in. She doesn't have the strength. She's been horrifically abused. Horrifically abused. And then the next day rolls around.

[19:43] Verse 27. And her master, notice the language change, her master, he slept that night. What? He got up, made coffee, shaved, grabbed his briefcase, made sure he's got his day pack, and he's leaving the house to go on his way to the hill country of Ephraim, and he just happens to stumble across his concubine who's at the doorway.

And notice, verse 27, with her hands on the threshold, that should get into your brain. So close. And literally, this Levite walks over her.

Now, start looking back on that whole little line in verse 2 about she was unfaithful to her husband, you start to wonder, hmm, callous, uncaring, treating her like some kind of meat, demeaning, and you know what?

We don't know if she's dead or not. Look what he does. 28, get up, let's go! We gotta beat the morning traffic.

Talk about vile. He picks her up, puts her on her donkey, and they go all the way back to the hill country of Ephraim.

[21:22] This is a horrific scene. Gruesome in many ways. It's gonna get even more gruesome. Now, if you were inspecting this train wreck and you see this toxic waste all over the place, you're gonna notice a couple things.

There's a lack of hospitality. You notice the men of Gibeah who are Sodom-like, but they're Israelites, Canaanized.

And you can't help but notice how this Levite, so callous, how he treats his concubine, he demeans her. Do you know what, gang?

When we leave our first love, brothers, when we leave our first love, when we leave King Jesus, do you know who will suffer? The women in our lives.

Man, don't you wish they just stopped at Jabez, the foreign town? But we're not seeing the cause of this train wreck.

[22:33] Scene three, holy war. this is 1929 through 2048. We pick up where we left off.

The Levite has put this woman, we're not sure she's dead or not. He brings her back to his house in the hill country of Ephraim and he takes out a knife and he dismembers her and he sends the members of her body all throughout Israel.

Gruesome. Even in her death, he demeans her. You know what it is? It's a call to war. He goes out to all the tribes and all the tribes see this and they've never seen anything like this before.

And then in chapter 20, 1 through 7, there's this holy gathering of God's people. We have not seen this in the book of Judges. Not one judge was able to do this.

We have the tribes of Israel in a holy convocation coming together in Mitzpah, which is right in between the tribe of Benjamin, the land of Benjamin and the land of Ephraim.

[23:49] they gather as one people, one man, verse 1. Well, almost one man because in verse 3, the Benjamites hear about this and they don't go.

So this is like 11 of the 12 tribes in almost unified Israel. The leaders of all these tribes that have gathered in verses 4 through 7, they want an explanation from the Levite.

What's behind all this? And he tells them. In verses 4 through 7, he gives an explanation. What I want you to see is in verse 5. And he says, and the leaders of Gibeah rose against me.

This is the Levite. And the leaders of Gibeah rose against me and surrounded the house against me by night. They meant to kill me and they violated my concubine and she's dead.

Do you know what that is? That's keeping people from incriminating him language. language. He doesn't say how she died.

[24:54] And it leaves us, the readers, thinking, uh, Mr. Levite, it looks like you're leaving out something pretty significant here, which means this whole thing is under suspicion of false pretense.

in verses 8 through 11, he presents, well, he presents his case in the verses 8 through 11. It gets its effect. One man responds.

The whole peoples are like, yes, we're going to do this. And they call together hundreds of thousands of men to battle, 400,000.

notice, nobody's calling on the Lord. Nobody. In verses 12 and through 13, there's a delegate sent from these 11 tribes to Benjamin.

They say, hey, would you please hand over these worthless fellows that did this terrible deed so that we can put them to death? And you know what Benjamin does? Verse 13, he says, they say, no.

[26:10] They're not going to give him up. Verse 14, then the people of Benjamin came together out of the cities of Gibeah to go out to battle against the people of Israel. They would not listen to the voice of their brothers.

There's something wrong here. Terribly wrong. And so, in verses 14 through 17, the battle lines are formed. You have just over 26,000 Benjamites squaring off against 400,000 Israelites.

This, my friends, is a holy war and it is a highly ironic civil war because the Benjamins, Benjaminites, are acting like Canaanites.

Israel's greatest enemy is itself. There's a three-day war that follows. Day one, 19 through 23, Israel seeks God.

They go out to face the Benjamites and 22,000 Israelites are killed. Day two, verses 24 through 28, after seeking God, Israel goes to battle again.

[27:26] The Benjamites again defeat Israel, killing 18,000 Israelites. And then they respond by seeking the Lord, by weeping and fasting and they're presenting offerings and it's what they should have been doing all along at the beginning of the book.

When they couldn't push out the Canaanite nations, this is what they should have been doing. Day three, Israel engages Benjamin again.

This is 29 through 48. They change their tactics. They set up an ambush. The Benjamites think they're winning again and then the whole thing turns.

And that day, Benjamin was decimated. In verse 44, 18,000 killed. Verse 45, 5,000 Benjamites killed.

At the end of verse 45, 2,000 Benjamites fall. And so what you have left are 600 Benjamites left. Complete and utter decimation.

[28:38] We learn that it's verse 35, the Lord defeated Benjamin. In verse 48, and the men of Israel turned back against the people of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, the city, the men, beasts, all

that they found, and all the towns that they found, they set on fire. Devoted to destruction. Holy war on itself because they've been Ganonized. Israel has become its own worst enemy.

The destruction of this tribe of Benjamin is an outworking of God's justice. And you can't help but notice, if you're an inspector on this train wreck, a couple things, Benjamin refuses to listen to her brothers just as the men of Gibeah refuse to listen to the old man.

We got a tribe kind of characteristic there. It's not good. And you can't help but think, this whole thing started with a big question mark.

Was that Levite honest? Is this whole thing under false pretense, and yet God, God did what he wanted to do.

[30:15] And yet here, with civil war, we're not seeing the cause. What got him there?

What's behind all this? Scene four is the aftermath. 600 wives for 600 Benjamites.

There's a change of heart among the Israelites in two through four. We learn in verse one of chapter 21 that they made a vow that when they had all gathered in Mitzpah, they said, we're not going back to our homes until this is all done.

And by the way, vow number two is that we're not going to give our wives, any of our daughters, to these Benjamites for their wives, ensuring that they would be totally destroyed from the face of the earth.

But they have a change of kind of heart. In verses two through four, six and seven, they start having compassion on Benjamin. They start asking, wait, we don't want to see them wiped off the face of the planet.

[31:20] So now they start asking the question, wait, how can we provide wives for these Benjamites, 600, who escaped to the wilderness, and yet preserve our word?

that we don't have to break our vow? That we don't go back on what we say? It's completely ridiculous.

It's like the rash vow of Jephthah. These men have vowed not to give their daughters as wives to these Benjamites, and now they're going to protect their vow at all costs.

It would have been far better if they would just have confessed the foolishness of their vow and given their daughters as wives. But they don't. And what they do instead is awful.

In verses eight through twelve, they completely destroy another Israelite city, Jebesh Gilead, devoting it to destruction. And of all, the only ones that survived Jebesh Gilead were four hundred virgin girls.

[32:39] And they bring those four hundred virgin girls, which they essentially kidnapped as a result of murder, and they bring them to the Benjamites, the 600 in the wilderness. But there's 600 in the wilderness.

There's just 400 young ladies. They're short 200. And so, they bring up this other plan where they say, and this is verses 16 through 24, they tell this Benjamite, hey, you know what?

There is this feast in Shiloh. The daughters of Shiloh always come out and do the dance. You guys wait and ambush and then grab them for yourselves. And when the men of Shiloh come to us, say, what's going on?

We'll say, hey, we needed to do this. We kept you in the dark, men of Shiloh. We want to preserve our word. It's ridiculous. 200 women kidnapped.

400 women kidnapped. Hundreds of people killed so they can keep their word. They don't have to break their vow.

[33:45] They were doing what's right in their own eyes. They're not consulting the Lord at any point. They're more concerned about preserving their honor than the honor of King Yahweh.

If you're inspecting this train wreck, seeing the pride, doing it, making sure you are keeping your honor, being right at all costs, the killing, the kidnapping, you're seeing Israel as a smoldering wreck of a people, and the question is, why would they do this?

How does this get to be this? Scene one, we have a sketchy Levite. Scene two, we have these Sodom-like men. Scene three, we have this holy civil war of Benjamin being devoted to destruction.

Scene four is this trying to figure out how to damage control according to what's right in your own eyes. What's happened?

It's the last verse of the entire book. In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

[35:08] this last verse points to the very heart of this train wreck. It's apostasy.

It's the people of Israel rejecting Yahweh as their king. And they deny him, they disobey him. There may not be a human king in Israel, but there is a divine king in Israel and they have totally rejected him.

They give him lip service, but that's about it. You know, when you start looking at this toxic waste all over 1920 and 21, this compromised spiritual leader, the sexual abomination of homosexual rape and then heterosexual rape, you see the inhospitality, you see the peddling of false pretense, rash vows, men protecting their honor at all costs, the needless loss of life, and throughout this story is the demeaning of women time and time again.

It's the way of the world. It's doing what's right in your own eyes and it's the result of leaving your first love, King Yahweh.

The train wreck was caused by Israel's unfaithfulness. And the big question is, if Israel became its own worst enemy through apostasy, can the church, is there a train wreck waiting to happen for us?

[37:11] Are we going to deny and disobey King Jesus and have the same kind of toxic waste strewn about? It's already happening.

Spiritual leaders experiencing, committing sexual immorality, every three months it seems like we hear of another pastor who's committed sexual immorality.

Not to mention the plague of pastors succumbing to pornography. There's the waffling on sexual issues in the church.

Claiming that homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle instead of grievous in God's sight. It's not good.

The men of Gibeah and Benjamin who wouldn't listen to their brothers, they don't want to be corrected.

[38:21] Even the men of Benjamin kind of closing ranks around rapists to protect their own. And then there's civil war in the church allowing politics to demonize fellow believers.

Quick to judge, quick to spread false rumors, speculations, false pretenses. And then there's the demeaning of women in the church.

We believe the Bible is very clear about male headship in the home and in the church but that's not chauvinism. No, we believe male headship is exercised in a way that causes the ladies in our life to thrive.

Is the church a train wreck waiting to happen? Yes, we are. If we leave our first love, it's going to happen.

how do we not become a train wreck? The failure of Israel is that they forgot that their God was in their midst.

[39:54] There was no king in Israel. In the book of Revelation, chapter 1, we have this incredible vision of the risen, radiant, and reigning Christ from 12 through 16.

And John tells us in verse 12, then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands which we know in verse 20 are the seven churches.

And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man. in the midst of the lampstands, in the midst of the churches, one standing like the son of man. Do you know who's in our midst?

The risen, radiant, and reigning King Jesus. Do you know how we not become a train wreck? Do you know how we keep ourselves from becoming our own worst enemy?

By keeping Jesus as our first love. This same Jesus wrote seven letters to seven churches, chapters 2 and 3.

[41:02] And to the first church, Ephesus, he said, I have this against you, that you have lost your first love. They're doing everything right, but they wandered away from Jesus.

How do we become our own worst enemy? We will become our own worst enemy. We will become a train wreck if we leave Jesus. If we forget about him.

If we let secondary things become primary things. So do you know how to keep Jesus as our first love? We cry out to him.

We confess him as our first love. We ask him to show us his glory. And then we open up the Bible and we take big, long looks at our king.

When was the last time you read Revelation chapter 1? Revelation chapter 2 and 3? Revelation chapter 19? Take long, deep looks at your king.

[42:10] We got to keep him central. And when we keep him central, do you know what's going to happen?

Pastors will become examples of sexual faithfulness. Churches will speak courageously on issues of sexuality and the sifting sands of our culture. We will welcome rebuke.

We will not despise women brothers. We won't demean them. We will help them thrive in all areas. We won't fan the flames of civil war within ourselves but pursue peace, unity, maintaining the bond of the spirit and the bond of peace.

King Jesus is our answer. He's in our midst and he will keep us from becoming our own worst enemy, from keep us becoming a train wreck.

We've come to the end of Judges. It's been one long train wreck of God's old covenant people and the cause is apostasy. They left their first love.

[43:28] And Judges, it's a sober warning. what will happen if we forget our God. But it also points us to our perfect king who accomplished a forever salvation.

He's our first love. He's worthy of it. Let's not be a train wreck, church. Let's be a bright and beautiful bride of Christ.

let's pray together. God in heaven, we thank you for the book of Judges. We thank you that you have given it to us for our good, that we can learn.

God, would you help us to take this lesson to heart from Israel so that we can remain faithful to you. Lord Jesus, you are our king.

And you are the same today, yesterday, and forever. Lord, would you not just keep us from becoming a train wreck, but God, would you cause us to shine bright in this dark city for the glory of your name.

[44:39] Amen.