

Horror in Israel Rape and Murder

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[0 : 00] Our Father, we thank you for your word, even these difficult parts of it. We pray that you'd help us understand it and also help us to live properly and rightly in the light of it.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please sit down. Friends, I want to take you right back to the beginning of Scripture. Before I do this, it is a hard passage, isn't it?

And that's why I wanted to tell some of you about it if you're on our email list. I email people saying it's a difficult passage. It's a hard passage. It's a passage with lots of violence and sexual violence in it, so it's very difficult.

But it's part of God's word, so it's for our instruction and our guidance. So I want to start, though, by getting you to think a little bit about Genesis 1.

The picture in Genesis 1 is just magnificent, isn't it? Here is God, the creative craftsman, making his world. And you might remember that he makes a place and then he makes things to be in that place.

[1 : 03] And he works through six days and he gets to day six. And finally, he creates the pinnacle of his creation. He creates human beings, male and female, he creates them. And he gives them rule over his world together.

It's a beautiful picture. And then in chapter two, you get a sort of alternate picture, which hones in on Adam. And Adam is there and he's got lots of things to do.

He's got work to do. He's got animals to care for and name and so on. But God says it's not good for him to be alone. And so God creates a woman for him.

And she looks at her. He looks at her and he says to her, this is Isha, Isha, for she came out of Isha. This is woman, for she came out of man.

And he rejoices in her. And so, and it's then said by the narrator, for this cause, a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife.

[2 : 03] And the two shall become one flesh. And you get a bit of a glimpse within scripture of what that looks like in the Song of Solomon. Where it's right, it is beautiful. However, the Bible doesn't stop at Genesis 2.

It gives us Genesis 3. And Genesis 3 is the story of human sinfulness. And what happens then when you take the picture of Genesis 2 and you add human sinfulness?

Well, the potential is awful. And that's what we see today in this text. So let's move through this text today and have a look at it. Let me remind you that I've been warning you for some time about this particular chapter and the next.

They are not nice. However, God has been warning us as well. When you think about the book of Judges, God has been warning us. Do you remember back to the early chapters of the book of Judges where Israel had partially occupied the land and the Lord rebukes them because they hadn't done their job properly?

He tells them that the people that live in the land, they'll become traps for them and their gods will become snares for them. And then the cycle of interaction begins. That becomes somewhat typical of Judges.

[3 : 13] It has a rough pattern to it. Generally starts with downward human sinfulness. Israel does evil and becomes even more corrupt. The results are that God's anger is aroused. Then he gives them into the hand of a foreign aggressor.

And Israel in turn says, God, come and help us. The Lord then relents and he raises up for them a deliverer. And once often that deliver is filled with empowered by the spirit.

And the Lord then halts the tide of oppression and gives the foreign aggressor into the hands of the deliverer. And finally, they have rest for a number of years. Now, as we read through the book of

Judges, we've noticed that there was a critical turning point in this story.

That point came in chapter 10, where we're told that this pattern starts. But where it gets to the point where God should relent and send a deliverer, we're told that the Lord's soul was short with Israel. And there is no account of him relenting. And since then, our cycle has just disintegrated. It's fallen apart. It's almost non-existent by the time you get to the last judge, Samson.

[4 : 18] And yes, with Samson, we saw a new development. Do you remember? This judge of Israel who was to begin deliverance from the Philistines was a flawed figure right from the beginning almost.

We found him to be a man who did what was right in his own eyes. Then last week, we found that the whole nation was following suit. If you look back, if you've got your Bibles open, chapter 17, verse 6, twice we are told in the book of Judges this sentence.

This is the first. The narrator tells us this. In those days, Israel had no king. Everyone did as they saw fit. Now, literally that goes. In those days, Israel had no king. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

That's the first time. The last time is the very last verse of the book of Judges. And in between, there are two references to there being no king in Israel. Chapter 18, verse 1 and chapter 19, verse 1.

Our chapter for today. And this is the world, friends, that we are about to encounter. A world where everyone does what is right in their own eyes and there is no one to exercise restraint.

[5 : 21] Now, let me tell you in these chapters that the Lord is rarely mentioned. Humans are at the forefront. Humans dominate. Humans assert themselves. And this means that things are going to...

Humans do what is right in their own eyes. And this means that it is going to get gruesome. And they do. We find... What we find in this chapter is terror, horror, violence and more.

But let's have a look at it. It's part of God's word. We need to look at it and see what God is going to say to us. Have your Bibles open with me as we work through the story. The second sentence of verse 1 introduces us to a Levite.

Now, it's not a great start being a Levite because we've just read about a Levite in the last chapter and he wasn't a real star. So we think... And this one comes from the same place. So we think, well, you know, Levites weren't good last time.

Maybe they won't be good this time either. And this... Anyway, this Levite takes a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. Now, in our Bible, it says that he was unfaithful... She was unfaithful to him.

[6 : 25] There's some debate about the meaning of the words. And I think the NRSV has got it right. I think it probably is right to say this. But his concubine became angry with him. We don't know why.

But she became angry with him and she goes home. She wouldn't be the first or the last woman to do that, I guess. Anyway, she ends up back home. And then comes the bright light in the story. Let me tell you what I think is a better translation of this verse.

Again, it comes from the NRSV and it says this. Then her husband set out after her to speak tenderly to her and bring her back.

Now, that phrase, speak tenderly, means to speak to her heart. It's the same phrase that the book of Hosea uses to speak of God wooing Israel after harlotry. And it is just about the only nice thing said to this woman in the whole of this chapter.

The rest is gruesome. Anyway, it appears to do the trick. And she brings him into her parents' home.

[7 : 28] And her father sees him and gladly welcomes him. And then we get this very lengthy story of hospitality focused on these two men. It goes on so long, I wonder if it's intended to be actual comical, to hold us back from the rest of the story that's about to come.

Anyways, the overly gracious host tries to detain his guest. And the guest appears to get more and more desperate to get away.

I wonder if you've been in those sort of situations. Anyway, look at how it starts. Verse 4, the men eat, drink and sleep for three days. Verse 5, more food is offered. Verse 6, they sit down and eat and drink again.

Then the woman's father says, please stay tonight and enjoy yourself. One gets the feeling that the Levite's beginning to no longer enjoy himself at this point. Anyway, he's persuaded and he stays another night.

Verse 8, the fifth day arrives and the Levite's begged to wait until the afternoon. And more food is consumed. And then, as you do in these sorts of situations, the guy just stands up and makes a move.

[8 : 30] Anyway, the woman's dad tries again. This time he's unsuccessful. And in verse 10, the man leaves. Now, it's important to notice what's going on here, you see, because now it is late in the day, isn't it? He heads off toward Jebus.

And we're told that Jebus is the city that is later David's city, Jerusalem. I want you to notice the members of the party here. The Levite, his two saddled donkeys.

And notice the woman. She's not been mentioned for the five days of partying. And now she's only mentioned after the donkeys. It's not a great perspective, is it? And that brings us to verse 11. The travelers are nearing Jebus and we're introduced to another of their traveling companions, a servant.

And he says to the Levite, come, let us stop at this city of the Jebusites and spend the night. And his master won't have it. Although it's late and Gibeah is another nine or ten kilometers, he says, no, we won't go into any city whose people are not Israelites.

We'll go to Gibeah. Now, he fears going to a city where they're not Israelites. Why not go to the people you trust? Can you see the irony that's coming? Anyway, then he adds, come, let us try and reach Gibeah or Ramah and spend the night in one of those places.

[9 : 42] Anyway, in verse 14, we're told that the sun sets as they near Gibeah in Benjamin. So it's late in the afternoon, early evening. And the first city, Jebus, later known as Jerusalem, as I said, would be David's city.

The second city, Gibeah, was cities, the city of Saul. It was in Benjamin. Anyway, they make their way to the city square. Look at the last words in verse 15.

No one took them in for the night. Now, those words don't seem unusual for us. But let me tell you, they would be shocking in the ancient Near East. Hospitality in the ancient Near East is and was a way of life.

And it would be even more shocking to hear those words if you're an Israelite. You see, the scriptures were clear about hospitality. The Lord himself had been hospitable to his people Israel. In Deuteronomy, it says, he defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow.

He loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners. For you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. That's what you're meant to do with foreigners if you're Israelites.

[10 : 45] Love them. Care for them. Be hospitable to them. What about fellow Israelites? And then what about Levites, who deserve special consideration because they received no inheritance in the land?

Can you see the implications of this verse? You've got a Levite here. Something ought to be done. You've got a fellow Israelite. Something ought to be done. Even if they're a foreigner, you should do something.

There's something stark about verse 15. A Middle Eastern town, an Israelite town, and no one takes them in for the night. And then in verse 16, the attention shifts. We're diverted away from a small company, huddled and waiting in the city square, and we meet this old man.

Now, he's been returning home from his work in the fields. He's a Levite, an outsider. Like the Levite, he's from the hill country of... Sorry, the narrative focuses down on the old man, and we find that like the Levite, he's an outsider.

Like the Levite, he's from the hill country of Ephraim. And in verse 17, he sees the Levite in the city court. And he starts a conversation, as you do.

[11 : 51] He says, where are you going? Where did you come from? And the Levite explains, and the old man welcomes him to stay with him. In verse 20. And he says, don't spend the night in the square. Now, he doesn't say why.

He just takes him into his house, and he feeds the donkeys. Although, I should correct it. Have a look at it. Look at verse 21. The text says that he brought him to his house and fed the donkeys. The woman and the servant are not mentioned.

However, the problem looks solved, and he's now got lodgings, and everything seems okay. Now, let me tell you a bit about Gibeah. Gibeah is a walled city. Therefore, it's a place where you put up walls, and you try and keep the outsiders away.

Why? Why? Because evil comes from outsiders. And whatever happens after this, we have found some positive things, though, inside, haven't we? An old man who knows what to do.

A hospitable old man. And in such company, enjoyment can be found. A good time can be had. And that's what we're told in the first half of verse 22. They're enjoying themselves. However, the rest of verse 22 indicates that there is a problem, and it's inside the gates.

[12:57] The problem is not outsiders, no, the enemy is within the city gates. The enemy resides within this city of Israel. And we're introduced to them in the second half of verse 22. They are called here wicked men.

A literal translation would go like this. They are the men of the city, men, the sons of Belial. Now, the word Belial is probably a combination of a negative particle meaning nothingness, and a noun meaning worth.

So what do you think it means? It sounds like this. The men of the city, men, the sons of nothing and worthlessness. Okay, my equivalent would be thugs and louts.

That's what these guys are. Now, we can't be certain that they're all the men of the city. However, a later passage, chapter 20 next week, seems to suggest that all the men of Gibeah are implicated and involved.

So if they're not actually there, they certainly would know within the city what's going on, and they did nothing. But all the men of the city are responsible. These men of the city, they are sons of Belial.

[14:02] They are worthless thugs. And the story that unfolds of what they did is amongst the most gruesome and awful in Scripture. It is the closest and most striking parallel to the story of Lot at Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18.

And its echoes of that event here clearly indicate that Israel has now sunk to the lowest they can get, to the morality of those sort of places.

And if you want to name immorality in the Old Testament, you say Sodom and Gomorrah. Now you could say Gibeah in Israel. Israel has come to rock bottom.

Israel is Sodom. Now, friends, before we go on, I want to tell you something. I enjoy watching movies like most of you do. However, Heather, if you quiz her, will tell you that I have one particular sort of movie or section of a movie that I cannot handle.

It is where a man sexually abuses a woman or abuses a woman in any way. I cannot handle it. Well, the Bible is similar but stronger.

[15:09] It abhors sexual abuse of women by men. It abhors it. Why? Because God abhors it. He hates it. It demonstrates, you see, how far a man has stooped when they are violent to a woman.

But more than that, it demonstrates how far a society has decayed and degraded. There are three tales of rape that are reported in the narrative of the Old Testament that we should take special note of in relation to this.

The first is the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34. Dinah is Jacob's daughter. The second is the one we read about here. And the third is the rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13 by her brother or a stepbrother. And each time the word for rape or ravishing is linked with another Hebrew word. Let me tell you what it is. It is vile or disgraceful. Vile or disgraceful.

It occurs in reference to all three of those rapes. It is a violation against the order of life and of community and of God's order for community. It is awful.

[16:15] Now let's return to the story. It's straightforward. And I'll not go into the details of it. In verse 22, the men pound at the door. They shout at the old man. They are depraved.

They want to have sex with the Levite. Now let me tell you what is going on here. These are God's people. And basically these men who belong to God's people are wanting to break three fundamental laws given by God to his people.

They are already in the midst of breaking one of them, the laws of hospitality. Now they want to have sex outside of marriage. And they also want to break the law that prohibits homosexual sin. Yeah, homosexual sin. It is not just an affront against this man, friends. It is an affront against God. They are breaking God's word. In verse 23, the old man, the owner of the house, the man who's taken the Levite in, he speaks to them.

And he identifies himself with those who are at his door. Literally he says, no, my brothers. Then he says, do not do this evil thing. Now the word for evil is the word that is generally used in Judges for when Israel does evil in the eyes of the Lord.

[17 : 23] And then he says, don't do this vile slash disgraceful thing. It is vile because it transgresses God's sexual norms.

It is vile because it violates the norms of hospitality. And the old man has rebuked these men. And in verse 24, he does something we can't understand.

But he offers them his virgin daughter and the concubine. Then he says that they can use them and do with them whatever they wish. Literally he says, you can violate them and do to them what is good or right in your own eyes.

Did you hear it? You can do to them what is good in your own eyes. What is right in your own eyes. This is that phrase we heard first with Samson.

And then again with Samson. And then in chapter 17, verse 4, we're told that all Israel did what was right in their own eyes. And now we get an example of what this might look like where people just do what is right in their own eyes.

[18 : 25] It looks like throwing away all constraint, breaking God's law, abusing people, rape, violence and disorder. Friends, these men have broken all else.

They are not going to respect this old man, are they? And so our passage tells us the man took his concubine. I think it doesn't mean the old man. I think it means the Levite.

He takes his concubine and presumably he does so to defend his host. And the rest of the story is gruesome. These thugs terribly abuse this woman.

And she crawls back to the door after it. And in verse 27, morning dawns. And we don't know whether this woman is alive now or not. The man who had started this story wanting to speak tenderly to his concubine now speaks harshly, coarsely, uncaringly and callously.

So he's the last one to abuse her. And with no expression of emotion, he just picks her up, places her on his donkey and goes home. And a raider apparently wants to leave us hanging.

[19 : 30] Whether he murders her or whether he simply treats her as if she were another of his corpses that he probably had to cut up as a priest. We just don't know. Certainly nothing he does leaves us with any positive attitude toward this man.

There is only one commendable man in this story, isn't there? The old man. The rest are rogues, thugs, worthless men who do what is right in their own eyes.

Now right at the beginning I warned you that there were bad things coming. And I want you to look at what Israel says when they see it. Verse 30. Everyone who saw it said to one another, were saying to one another, such a thing has never been done or seen.

Not since the day Israel came out of Egypt. Just imagine. We have to do something, so speak up. Friends, such violence is unfortunately not unimaginable. Is it?

We know. Because we read about it every day in our world. It is all too real in our world. And in fact, though these people, these Israelites should say it is terrible, they will go on to do more.

[20 : 43] Friends, this is our passage for today. It is a very low time in Israel, isn't it? The individual is king. The individual reigns as monarch. And underneath all actions here is a very human sin of self-assertion and idolatry.

It is doing what is right in your own eyes and worshipping anything other than the real God. Our exploration of this passage and others in Judges show us that such dispositions inevitably find their focus in issues of acquisition of land and sexuality.

Of brutality. And as we have seen in Judges, such a focus on self and its associated sins is met by God's disengagement. You see, remember what I said right at the beginning? God has steadily disengaged.

It is met by a steady reluctance by God to intervene and to relent from judgment, but just to let people be judged by their own actions. As this chapter and our preceding one has demonstrated, God appears ready to hand his people over to their sin.

And let me tell you something. That is not something uniquely Old Testament. Flip with me in your Bibles to Romans chapter 1. Romans 1 verse 18 following. Paul talks about God's wrath being seen not in his engagement with the world, but in his withdrawal from the world.

[22 : 02] In Romans 1 verse 21, he hones in on idolatry. And he says, God has revealed himself in creation, but that all humans have suppressed what is evident in creation. That is his existence.

And he says that as a result of their rejection of him as the true God, he has given them over to sinful desires of their hearts. That is, he has withdrawn his goodness from them and given them what they wanted.

And he says that this has displayed itself in sexual impurity. And he talks of the very same sorts of breaches of sexuality that are mentioned in our passage today.

God's giving them over to their sinful desires shows itself in a depraved mind. It fills them with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity, says Paul. Humans cut off from God and left to do what is right in their own eyes become people, says Paul, full of envy, murder, deceit and malice. They gossip, slanderers, God haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful people that don't honor their parents. They have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Like the men of Gibeah, although they know God's righteous decrees that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but approve those who practice them.

[23 : 14] Can you hear it? Romans 1 is the same thing. If God does nothing, this is where humanity will go and where it will end.

That will be its end. A world where everyone does what is right in their own eyes is a terrifying prospect. Terrifying. And the question, of course, is will God do anything?

And the answer is, yes, he's already done it. He's done it in his son. But then we ask back, but what if humans don't accept that?

Friends, if humans do not accept the gospel of the Lord Jesus, I can see only two alternatives. The first is that he continues to hand us over to ourselves. And what will that look like?

It will look like a world where people do what is right in their own eyes sexually, morally, militarily and ethically. And you only have to read the paper to see it happening.

[24 : 16] A world where true religion will be shunned and despised. The second alternative? Judgment. Both are imagined and played out for us in the book of Revelation.

Read it. We looked at it earlier on this year. Friends, in the end, the only hope for our world is a saviour, isn't it? Such a saviour needs to do a number of things. He needs to bring atonement, that is, forgiveness, for our gross self-assertion and disobedience.

Such a saviour needs to provide a solution for our self-assertiveness. He needs to provide power for us to change. Friends, the book of Romans itself goes on to address those very things, to describe how Jesus has done this.

He has provided atonement, Romans 3. He's given us his spirit who transforms us to enable us to live not according to the flesh but according to the spirit, Romans 8. Such will transform our lives in every area, Romans 12 through to 15.

Friends, Christ has come. The ultimate terror of his death has brought the ultimate solution. Forgiveness. Lives. And new lives.

[25 : 25] Created around him rather than around ourselves. Lives filled with his Holy Spirit. The ultimate deprecating one. And the one who enables us to live rightly before God.

Lives that are therefore filled with the obedience that comes from faith. As Paul says at the beginning of Romans and the end. Lives that are therefore not for self. But for the glory of God. Let's pray. Father, we see in this story today our world. We see the world of Romans 1.

And we beg you, Father. To send out the gospel of your Son. Into all the world. So people might come to know the Lord Jesus.

And be filled with your spirit. And live lives before you that please you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.