

## The Vile and Wicked Men of Gibeah

Something happens when you lower the standard in your community — in any area, but especially child training. The fear of God is diminished. Stoning children in old Israel brought the fear of God for an entire generation. But if they said, “Oh, let’s give this rebellious, defiant child one more chance,” then everything would have been washed away. (You can see how we will have to judge perfectly lest we get the needy confused with the high-handed. We will bend over backwards for the needy, but the rebellious need to leave Israel).

There does not seem to be a time written about when a child was stoned. However, it is obvious from Israel’s history that both happened — the stoning and the false mercy, one cleansing and one destroying. In this light, it seemed that this is what must have happened in the city of Gibeah for sodomy, the disgusting sin of the Canaanites, to take root there. (However, there were times when both were destroyed, the parents and the children.)

The source for this was the teaching, *Righteous Lot*, taught July 10, 1991, and specifically the section, *The Vile and Wicked Men of Gibeah*, concerning Judges 19 and 20. If someone is going to tell this story, then they should carefully read this teaching.

### A Man and His Concubine

There is a section of the Bible where hardly any names are recorded. There are three chapters where not one person is named by name, and the two before that where only two names are named. In those days, every man did what was right in his own eyes. The knowledge of the law of our God, which would have protected them from defilement, was very faint.

This story is about two different groups of people, and how their story met one day, just like roads meet when your abba and you are walking along. It is quite a story and you are going to have pay attention, because each line of the story is important. The story begins in a remote (that means far away from other villages, like Island Pond is) hill country of Ephraim. There a man who was a Levite had a concubine, and he cared for her. She had been a slave but she was like a wife to him. Concubines were somewhere between wives and slaves, and their sons could even inherit their father’s wealth and land like a regular son. The law of our God took notice of them and protected them. Even though this man cared for her a great deal, she was still a slave in her heart, and she was unfaithful to her husband.

She actually was so evil that she had relations with another man as if he were her husband. As a result of this she left her husband and went to live with her abba in a city of Judah called Bethlehem. The man, after four months, went to speak to his wife’s heart to bring her back to him. Was this right or not, since the law says an adulteress should be stoned to death? No one knew in those days. No one knew very much about the law then. There wasn’t much glory upon Israel. But perhaps this was the way our God chose to set up the confrontation between Israel and Benjamin, upon which the whole fate of God’s people depended (like Shimshone’s desire to marry a Philistine woman).

So her husband made the journey from the hill country of Ephraim to Bethlehem. His route took him by certain cities where the Canaanites still dwelled, and by many cities and villages of his people as well. His father-in-law was happy to see him, and showered him with hospitality — he had to break away after the fifth day of it — it was getting to be too much, the young man felt. On the way home his servant wanted to stop in the city of Jebus (it would later be called Jerusalem) to spend the night, but the Levite said, “No, we will not spend the night among these foreigners. We will go to a city of the sons of Israel.”

So on they went until the setting sun found them in the city of Gibeah, and there they waited, surprised at the lack of hospitality. It was such a great contrast to what they had just experienced. There was plenty of light left in the sky, it was not like they were invisible. They were not unnoticed, however. Later, an old man came in from the fields at evening. (Why? Because that was how he grew to be old in the first place, instead of dying young. He knew you worked hard in the daylight hours to provide for your family. He still had a virgin daughter to marry, although he didn’t know who he would marry her to.)

He noticed the travelers there and determined to invite them into his house. When he invited them in, he

had to bear the reproach for his city's lack of hospitality. He was the first one to invite them in after they had sat there so long. Many things had been forgotten by many Israelites, but not the standard of kindness Abraham had set. It was just what they hoped would be done for them if they ever happened to be traveling away from home. He brought them home, took care of their animals, and made them a feast. And there that line of the story rests for a while.

(The next line of the story is how it seems the city of Gibeah must have decayed; it is not in the Bible as such.)

#### How Evil Can Israel Become?

Years before in Gibeah there had been a wealthy man who had a good wife. However, she had a much higher standard of raising the children than he did, and it wasn't long before the children saw that. Beginning with the oldest one, they soon found all the freedom they desired between the weak authority of their abba and the unsupported authority of their imma. It frustrated her, but she kept on, because she had born those children in pain, and labored to bring them up. She hadn't really realized what a weak man her husband was when she married him. The situation only got worse as the children got older, and it started becoming unbearable when the oldest son grew taller and stronger than his imma.

He was a powerful influence on youth outside of his family as well, for he was handsome, strong, and most of all, funny. He could make what others considered wrong to be terribly funny. There was something captivating about his humor, and something frightening about being the object of it.

One day even he went too far, however, and there was nothing he could do to make it seem funny. For the last time in his life he knew fear when he saw the look on his abba's face. His abba had come home right after a terrible incident between the boy and his imma. He had actually struck her, knocking her across the room. His abba found her on the floor, with blood trickling out of the side of her mouth, her look at him conveying years of pain and sorrow.

The man's nearly dead conscience, and his long-gone feelings of tenderness towards the wife of his youth, surged into righteous anger, and he grabbed his son and half carried him out the door of his house. It was quite a spectacle to see the youth dragged through the city, with his father crying out for the elders of the city to gather at the gates. When this man spoke, other people listened because of his wealth. (Now, it was inherited wealth — he himself had not earned it by working hard.)

At the gates the man started to tell them what had happened, letting his wife give the background of the incident afterwards. As she spoke, and as the elders were obviously coming to agreement that his son should be stoned, the reality of the judgment facing him began to reach the boy's hard heart. The elders could see he was shaking with fear, but there was no mercy for such a rebellious child.

The youth's inward coolness asserted itself, in spite of his outward appearance, and he began to consider, "How can I get out of this one?"

He thought, "There has to be a way," and when he looked at his abba, he knew what it was. For as his son's fate was being decided, his abba had done what he had done a thousand times before with his imma, and with other people who had come to him with their concerns. He had started to waver. The son could see it on his face. If only his abba would look at him. Then he did.

There, across the circle of the elders, was his oldest son staring intently at him, and the man felt the familiar tug of emotions and thoughts, and that same old feeling of defeat came to him. As they looked at one another, neither was surprised by what they saw. This son knew his father. At his son's look the man's heart shook and then started to melt. Finally he could take it no longer and surprised everyone by speaking up, "Wait, it is not as bad as my wife makes it seem. I am sorry I got carried away and called you all here. This is something we can work out. Look, I'll discipline the boy, and it will be enough."

As he kept on talking, the elders fell into confusion, and though there were those among them who knew what they should do, because of this man's influence the others did not have the strength to agree with them. Finally they left in disagreement, muttering darkly as they walked away. And they were right — very dark times were ahead for Gibeah. How dark, no one could even imagine.

As for the son, he walked away smirking, saying triumphantly under his breath, "Call me Nimrod." He

went to see his friends, shaking again as he recalled how close he had been to death, and told them, "I got away with it. We can do anything we want now — anything. It is only a matter of time."

From that time on there was no fear of God in his whole generation of youth, and life became more and more like the Canaanite cities around them than Israel. The father, like all those under the curse of the law, died sooner rather than later. (He hadn't even bothered to discipline his son.) This meant his wicked, defiant son was now one of the richest men in the city. And as rich men will, his taste ran to pleasure. Soon, there wasn't enough of it in the cities of Benjamin, and he and his friends began to make night trips to the high places of the Canaanites. And there he got the taste of the most wicked, rebellious pleasure his evil heart could imagine — sodomy.

Even the leveled men of Gibeah were alarmed by how he would walk with his arm around other young men; it seemed disgusting to them somehow. Yet they found themselves powerless to stop this, and soon it spread like wildfire among all the "in" crowd of Gibeah. If these men would have known they were becoming just like Sodom and Gomorrah, it would only have pleased them, not made them afraid.

In the tribal gatherings, the funny and clever men of Gibeah wormed their way into the hearts of the whole tribe, spreading discord, striving with those who stood up for what was right (calling them *spiritual*). They were scoundrels who covered over their immense evil with smiles and humor. They waited like murderers for the righteous to do something they could make fun of, or complain about, and their voice grew louder and louder in Benjamin. Finally, no one even spoke up when they were on the prowl for new flesh to ruin with their loathsome sin. How long would it take until all of Benjamin was like Gibeah? It didn't really matter, they had prevailed there, and now they wanted more.

The more far-seeing men in the tribe, led by the wicked men of Gibeah, began to realize that surely there would be conflict with the other tribes over this. They even began to prepare for it, reasoning within themselves that the only way to triumph over the combined greater numbers of the other eleven tribes would be to make it too costly for them. If the cost was great enough, they would give up trying to stop them from doing what they were doing. Then it would only be a matter of time before all Israel was like Benjamin, and even like Gibeah. "How could they do this?" They wondered and they thought and they planned ... They were such intelligent men.

### **A Terrible Night in Gibeah**

**At this point two lines of the story meet, although there is one line still to cross this fateful intersection.**

**The pleasant conversation of the old man and his guests was rudely interrupted by the dreadful demand, unheard of since the days of Sodom, "Bring out the man who came to your house, so we can have relations with him." How wicked and worthless could men be to do such things? What a terrible place this put the old man and his guest in, and the torment of their souls was heard in heaven.**

**"No, don't commit this vile act, this detestable, loathsome, depraved, extremely disgusting act." What could he say or do to protect his guest? What good was someone who broke the ancient code of honor of hospitality? What mercy could he ever expect from his God? How could he let someone under his roof suffer through the vile, outrageous act of sodomy? It was worse than offering his own daughter to these men. "Here," the old man said in a desperate, heart-broken voice, "Take my virgin daughter and this man's concubine, and do to them whatever you wish. But to this man, don't do such a disgusting thing." But the wicked men would not listen to him. Seeing the man's heart, the Levite knew it was better that his unfaithful concubine would suffer rather than this man's virgin daughter. Outside in the darkness they raped and abused her all night, like animals in the dirt of the city square. They were men who had lost their humanity — so selfish and senseless. At dawn they finally let her go, for they were creatures of the darkness, and didn't like the light. She came back to the doorway of the house and fell down with her hands on the threshold until the full light of day.**

### **All Israel Shall Hear and Fear**

**When her master found her in the morning, he spoke to her, but she did not respond. So he placed her on his donkey and went on his way, the men of the city of Gibeah not even caring what kind of report he would bring to the rest of Israel. As he made his way home, his heart shuddered at the evil in Gibeah, and he knew something desperate was needed to wake his brother Israelites up to this evil in their midst.**

A few days later, when he arrived home, he took her rotting flesh and chopped it into twelve pieces with a great knife. He wondered why he thought to do so, but then he realized this was a perfect symbol of what Israel would become if this evil weren't dealt with — a dismembered corpse. When he called his friends and told him of the terrible wickedness in Gibeah, they willingly accepted the uncleanness of handling dead flesh and brought the pieces and the story to the twelve tribal centers.

Everyone who saw this wretched flesh cried out, "Think about it, take counsel, and tell us what to do?" How could such evil have arisen in their midst? Suddenly they realized the fate of Israel was on the line — their destiny lay before them in this stinking flesh if they didn't root out and destroy the vile and wicked men of Gibeah. Surely this flesh was a covenant of death with their God, entered into by this Levite for all Israel. Either the guilty men of Gibeah were to become like this concubine, or they were.

The gathering of the men of Israel at Mizpah, only a few miles away from Gibeah, is the third group of people in this story. Even though they were 400,000 strong, the men of Benjamin paid no heed.

The chiefs of the sons of Israel gathered in their midst and asked the Levite to explain before them all how this wickedness took place. He told them how he had gone to Gibeah expecting to find hospitality, even avoiding a city of foreigners to stay in Israel. Then his voice rose to a shout, shaking with the terror of that wicked night, "But the men of Gibeah rose against me and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to abuse and kill me; instead they raped and abused my concubine so that she died." Everyone was silent, their ears tingling, determination forming in their hearts. The Levite continued, "So I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout the land of Israel's inheritance, for they have committed a lewd and disgraceful act in Israel. Behold, all you sons of Israel, give your advice and counsel here."

With one heart the chiefs spoke for the people, "Not one of us will go to his tent, nor will any of return to his house. But now this is the thing we will do to Gibeah: we will go up against it by lot." Setting aside one man out of ten to gather supplies for the rest, they sent messengers to Benjamin to see if the battle could be avoided. Throughout the territory of Benjamin the men went, asking, "What is this wickedness that has taken place among you? Now then, deliver up the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and remove this wickedness from Israel."

The Benjamites would not listen. Instead of being ashamed of this great evil, they gathered as one man from all over Benjamin to defend the very center of the wickedness — Gibeah! They thought they could prevail over all of Israel. They thought Israel was just like they were. They had carefully prepared for this day, and trusted in their swords and the awesome devastation their slingers could do. Afraid of 400,000 men? Hah! Nimrod and his friends had practically dreamed of this day, and now it had come.

There was death in the eyes of the men of Benjamin as they looked at the approaching men of Israel. Some of them recognized that they were led by the men of Judah. The men of Gibeah did not know that the sons of Israel had gone to Bethel to inquire of God through the priests about who should go up to battle first. Our God spoke clearly that it should be Judah. All the men of Benjamin came out to join in the battle, and instead of the mighty numbers of Israel prevailing, the lethal swordsmen and slingers of Benjamin mercilessly cut down their brother

Israelites, rejoicing in their deaths. What a terrible shock to the men of Israel. How had God allowed this to happen to them? Their dead were numbered in thousands, their crushed skulls and bloody bodies strewn all over the battlefield. It did not seem that the men of Benjamin had suffered at all. How could this be?

But some evils were not to be tolerated, no matter what the cost. The men of Israel actually gathered together to encourage one another to persevere and not give up. Then they went with tears before their God at Bethel, weeping until the sun went down for their brothers, their friends, their fathers, and their sons.

Bravely, they asked of their God, "Shall we again go to battle with the sons of our brother Benjamin?" Again the answer came back that they should do battle. What a test of their determination, but there was no way to back out now. They saw that the guilt would be transferred to them if they allowed the guilty to

remain in Israel. If they accepted this evil in Israel, they might as well all be dead. But the battle went just as terribly for them as before, and now, in two days of battle, 40,000 men of Israel had perished!

All the remaining sons of Israel went again to Bethel, with weeping and fasting, humbling themselves before their God until evening, finally sensing the desperate evil they were dealing with, and through their suffering seeing how horrible this was to their God. So that evening they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and once again sought their God. "Shall I yet go again go out to battle, or shall I cease?" How hard the struggle had become!

But this time our God answered them, "Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands." When the news of this strong encouragement spread through the men, they set themselves to do battle, knowing full well what the cost might be. Their leaders gathered to lay out a plan for the battle, and in the morning, the men of Israel were on the move. Some went around the surrounding hills and waited until their brave brothers engaged the fearsome warriors of Gibeah again in a frontal attack. Some thirty of them gave their lives as a burnt offering that day, the final sacrifice to lure the men of Benjamin out of their city and down the roads, exulting in the slaughter they anticipated in inflicting on their brothers again that day.

When that happened, the ten thousand warriors of Israel who lay in wait burst out of hiding and assaulted the now defenseless city, putting everyone in it to the sword, and burning the city. As the flames rose to the heavens, the men of Israel turned and stood, and now the men of Benjamin saw their judgment in the eyes of their brothers, and the sword turned against them. Slaughter followed them as they tried to escape, and over 25,000 of the 26,000 men of Benjamin fell that day, to await the much more serious judgment to come.

Israel was saved that day, but at what a cost — rivers of blood, tens of thousands of wives who would never see their husbands again, abbas who would never see their boys again, children their abbas, grandchildren who would never be born. How evil was the sin of Gibeah!

How evil can Israel become? When the fear of God departs, in can become as evil as Sodom and Gomorrah. May such evil never be tolerated in Israel today.