

An Unfortunate Series of Decisions

Judges 19-21

Introduction

The story today is in some places quite gruesome, shocking, and disturbing. In fact, one professor calls this a “text of terror.” But it illustrates what can happen when we make repeated poor decisions. The eventual consequences can be huge.

Today’s story is about a man that, though the story consumes three chapters, we never know his name. He is simply “the Levite.” We will look specifically at 15 (often seemingly inconsequential) decisions he made that had more negative impact than nearly every other series of decisions documented in the Bible.

The Story

(17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.)

(18:1 In those days there was no king of Israel; ...)

19:1 ¶ Now it came about in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite **staying in the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim**, who **took a concubine** for himself from Bethlehem in Judah.

A *concubine* was a slave woman in ancient Near Eastern societies who was the legal property of her master, but who could have legitimate sexual relations with her master. A concubine’s status was more elevated than a mere servant, but she was not free and did not have the legal rights of a free wife. The children of a concubine could, in some instances, become equal heirs with the children of the free wife. After the period of the Judges concubines may have become more of a royal prerogative (2 Sam 21:10-14; 1 Kgs 11:3). – NET Bible

2 But his concubine played the harlot against him,

The word translated “played the whore” and “unfaithful” in Hebrew is *zanah*. The word has a primary meaning of committing fornication, being a harlot. However, according to Koehler-Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 261, the word also can mean “to be angry, hateful” or “feel repugnant against.” - <http://www.claudemariottini.com/blog/2006/01/rereading-judges-192.html>

But his concubine became angry with him, ... - (NRSV)
However, she got mad at him ... - (NET Bible)

and she went away from him to her father’s house in Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for a period of four months. 3 **Then her husband arose and went after her** to speak tenderly to her in order to bring her back, taking with him his servant and a pair of donkeys. So she brought him into her father’s house, and when the girl’s father saw him, he was glad to meet him. 4 And his father-in-law, the girl’s father, detained him; and **he remained with him three days**. So they ate and drank and lodged there. 5 Now it came about on the fourth day that they got up early in the morning, and he prepared to go; and the girl’s father said to his son-in-law, “Sustain yourself with a piece of bread, and afterward you may go.” 6 **So both of them sat down and ate and drank together**; and the girl’s father said to the man, “Please be willing to spend the night, and let your heart be merry.” 7 Then the man arose to go, but his father-in-law urged him so that **he spent the night there again**. 8 And on the fifth day he arose to go early in the morning, and the girl’s father said, “Please sustain yourself, and wait until afternoon”; **so both of them ate**. 9 When the man arose to go along with his concubine and servant, his father-in-law, the girl’s father, said to him, “Behold now, the day has drawn to a close; please spend the night. Lo, the day is coming to an end; spend the night here that your heart may be merry. Then tomorrow you may arise early for your journey so that you may go home.” 10 **But the man was not willing to spend the night, so he arose and departed** and came to a place opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). And there were with him a pair of saddled donkeys; his concubine also was with him. 11 When they *were* near Jebus, the day was almost gone; and the servant said to his master, “Please come, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it.” 12 However, his master said to him, “**We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners who are not of the sons of Israel; but we will go on as far as Gibeah.**” 13 And he said to his servant, “Come and let us approach one of these places; and we will spend the night in Gibeah or Ramah.” 14 So they passed along and went their way, and the sun set on them near Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. 15 And **they turned aside there in order to enter and lodge in Gibeah**. When they entered, they sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into *his* house to spend the night.

16 ¶ Then behold, an old man was coming out of the field from his work at evening. Now the man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was staying in Gibeah, but the men of the place were Benjamites. 17 And he lifted up his eyes and saw the traveler in the open square of the city; and the old man said, “Where are you going, and where do you come from?” 18 And he said to him, “We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, *for* I am from there, and I went to Bethlehem in Judah. But I am *now* going to my house, and no man will take me into his house. 19 “Yet there is both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and also bread and wine for me, your maidservant, and the young man who is with your servants; there is no lack of anything.” 20 And the old man said, “Peace to you. Only let me *take care of* all your needs; however, do not spend the night in the open square.” 21 **So he took him into his house** and gave the donkeys fodder, and they washed their feet and ate and drank.

22 ¶ While they were making merry, behold, the men of the city, certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the door; and they spoke to the owner of the

house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations with him." 23 Then the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my fellows, please do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not commit this act of folly. 24 "Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Please let me bring them out that you may ravish them and do to them whatever you wish. But do not commit such an act of folly against this man." 25 But the men would not listen to him, so **the man seized his concubine and brought her out to them.** And they raped her and abused her all night until morning, then let her go at the approach of dawn. 26 As the day began to dawn, the woman came and fell down at the doorway of the man's house where her master was, until *full* daylight. 27 **When her master arose in the morning** and opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, then behold, his concubine was lying at the doorway of the house, with her hands on the threshold. 28 And **he said to her, "Get up and let us go,"** but there was no answer. Then he placed her on the donkey; and the man arose and went to his home. 29 When he entered his house, **he took a knife and laid hold of his concubine and cut her in twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout the territory of Israel.** 30 And it came about that all who saw *it* said, "Nothing like this has *ever* happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up!"

20:1 ¶ Then all the sons of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, came out, and the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah. 2 And the chiefs of all the people, *even* of all the tribes of Israel, took their stand in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 foot soldiers who drew the sword. 3 (Now the sons of Benjamin heard that the sons of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the sons of Israel said, "Tell *us*, how did this wickedness take place?" 4 So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "I came with my concubine to spend the night at Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. 5 "But the men of Gibeah rose up against me and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me; instead, they ravished my concubine so that she died. 6 "And 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. 7 "Behold, all you sons of Israel, give your advice and counsel here." 8 Then all the people arose as one man, saying, "Not one of us will go to his tent, nor will any of us return to his house. 9 "But now this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah; *we will go up* against it by lot. 10 "And we will take 10 men out of 100 throughout the tribes of Israel, and 100 out of 1,000, and 1,000 out of 10,000 to supply food for the people, that when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, they may punish *them* for all the disgraceful acts that they have committed in Israel." 11 Thus all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united as one man.

12 ¶ Then the tribes of Israel sent men through the entire tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What is this wickedness that has taken place among you? 13 "Now then, deliver up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove *this* wickedness from Israel." But the sons of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the sons of Israel. 14 And the sons of Benjamin gathered from the cities to

Gibeah, to go out to battle against the sons of Israel. 15 And from the cities on that day the sons of Benjamin were numbered, 26,000 men who draw the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah who were numbered, 700 choice men. 16 Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. 17 Then the men of Israel besides Benjamin were numbered, 400,000 men who draw the sword; all these were men of war.

18 ¶ Now the sons of Israel arose, went up to Bethel, and inquired of God, and said, "Who shall go up first for us to battle against the sons of Benjamin?" Then the LORD said, "Judah *shall go up* first." 19 So the sons of Israel arose in the morning and camped against Gibeah. 20 And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel arrayed for battle against them at Gibeah. 21 Then the sons of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and felled to the ground on that day 22,000 men of Israel. 22 But the people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and arrayed for battle again in the place where they had arrayed themselves the first day. 23 And the sons of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall we again draw near for battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Go up against him." 24 Then the sons of Israel came against the sons of Benjamin the second day. 25 And Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah the second day and felled to the ground again 18,000 men of the sons of Israel; all these drew the sword.

26 ¶ Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. 27 And the sons of Israel inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God *was* there in those days, 28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, Aaron's son, stood before it to *minister* in those days), saying, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand." 29 So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah. 30 And the sons of Israel went up against the sons of Benjamin on the third day and arrayed themselves against Gibeah, as at other times. 31 And the sons of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city, and they began to strike and kill some of the people, as at other times, on the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, *and* in the field, about thirty men of Israel. 32 And the sons of Benjamin said, "They are struck down before us, as at the first." But the sons of Israel said, "Let us flee that we may draw them away from the city to the highways." 33 Then all the men of Israel arose from their place and arrayed themselves at Baal-tamar; and the men of Israel in ambush broke out of their place, *even* out of Maareh-geba. 34 When ten thousand choice men from all Israel came against Gibeah, the battle became fierce; but Benjamin did not know that disaster was close to them. 35 And the LORD struck Benjamin before Israel, so that the sons of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day, all who draw the sword. 36 So the sons of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. When the men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah, 37 the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush also deployed and struck all the city with the edge of the sword. 38 Now the appointed sign between the

men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they should make a great cloud of smoke rise from the city. 39 Then the men of Israel turned in the battle, and Benjamin began to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel, for they said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle." 40 But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, Benjamin looked behind them; and behold, the whole city was going up *in smoke* to heaven. 41 Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were terrified; for they saw that disaster was close to them. 42 Therefore, they turned their backs before the men of Israel toward the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them while those who came out of the cities destroyed them in the midst of them. 43 They surrounded Benjamin, pursued them without rest *and* trod them down opposite Gibeah toward the east. 44 Thus 18,000 men of Benjamin fell; all these were valiant warriors. 45 The rest turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, but they caught 5,000 of them on the highways and overtook them at Gidom and killed 2,000 of them. 46 So all of Benjamin who fell that day were 25,000 men who draw the sword; all these were valiant warriors. 47 But 600 men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they remained at the rock of Rimmon four months. 48 The men of Israel then turned back against the sons of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, both the entire city with the cattle and all that they found; they also set on fire all the cities which they found.

21:1 ¶ Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, "None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage." 2 So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. 3 And they said, "Why, O LORD, God of Israel, has this come about in Israel, so that one tribe should be *missing* today in Israel?" 4 And it came about the next day that the people arose early and built an altar there, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. 5 Then the sons of Israel said, "Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up in the assembly to the LORD?" For they had taken a great oath concerning him who did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah, saying, "He shall surely be put to death." 6 And the sons of Israel were sorry for their brother Benjamin and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel today. 7 "What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the LORD not to give them any of our daughters in marriage?" 8 And they said, "What one is there of the tribes of Israel who did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah?" And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly. 9 For when the people were numbered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there. 10 And the congregation sent 12,000 of the valiant warriors there, and commanded them, saying, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the little ones. 11 "And this is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every man and every woman who has lain with a man." 12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan. 13 Then the whole congregation sent *word* and spoke to the sons of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them. 14 And Benjamin returned at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had kept alive from the women of

Jabesh-gilead; yet they were not enough for them. 15 And the people were sorry for Benjamin because the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.

16 ¶ Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?" 17 And they said, "*There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe may not be blotted out from Israel.* 18 "But we cannot give them wives of our daughters." For the sons of Israel had sworn, saying, "Cursed is he who gives a wife to Benjamin." 19 So they said, "Behold, there is a feast of the LORD from year to year in Shiloh, which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south side of Lebonah." 20 And they commanded the sons of Benjamin, saying, "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards, 21 and watch; and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to take part in the dances, then you shall come out of the vineyards and each of you shall catch his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. 22 "And it shall come about, when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, that we shall say to them, 'Give them to us voluntarily, because we did not take for each man *of Benjamin* a wife in battle, nor did you give *them* to them, *else* you would now be guilty.'" 23 And the sons of Benjamin did so, and took wives according to their number from those who danced, whom they carried away. And they went and returned to their inheritance, and rebuilt the cities and lived in them. 24 And the sons of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and each one of them went out from there to his inheritance. 25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Conclusion

So, what was the final result of this series of decisions?

26,100 Benjaminite soldiers total
22,000 Israelite soldiers day 1
18,000 Israelite soldiers day 2
80,000 Benjaminite citizens killed after battle
6,000 Jabesh-Gileadites killed to harvest 400 virgins
1 Concubine

152,101 killed before it was all over!!!!!!!

What does this horrible story teach us?

The ease of making bad decisions when God is not in control.

And the importance of our decisions as men, husbands, fathers. Even inconsequential decisions made without God's leadership can lead you and/or your family to very unexpected outcomes.

Everything you do matters.