Lesson 9 – Judges 19-21

Text: Judges 19-21

Main Characters: God, a Levite, men of Gibeah, Benjamites, the Israelites

Key Passages:
- Judges 19:12 – The Levite thought that the Israelite city would be safer than the Canaanite city.
- Judges 21:25 – During the time of the Judges, everyone did whatever they wanted to do.

Main Storyline:
Like the last two chapters (Judges 17-18), Judges 19-21 does not describe a particular judge, but rather follows a chain of events that seems to have taken place in the early part of the Judges time period. These chapters give insight into the lifestyle and morality of the Israelites of that day.

There was a certain Levite who lived in Ephraim who had taken a concubine from the city of Bethlehem, in Judah. The concubine betrayed her husband, however, and left him to return to her father’s house. After 4 months had passed, the Levite decided to go and bring her back home. When the Levite arrived at her father’s house, the father was glad. They ate together for several days before the Levite insisted one afternoon that it was time for him and the concubine to start for home. Because it was so late in the day, they were not able to make the trip in one day, so they needed to stop somewhere for the night. The Levite’s servant pointed out a potential lodging location, the city of Jebus (Jerusalem), which was, at the time, inhabited by Canaanites. The Levite told him that he did not want to stay with foreigners, but that they should move on to another city which had Israelites.

Eventually they came to a Benjamite city, Gibeah, where they decided to stay for the night. They went into the open square of the city to spend the night, because none of the Benjamites extended an invitation for them to stay with them. Eventually, an old man from Ephraim, who was also staying in Gibeah, invited them in to stay with him, warning them not to stay in the open square.

That night, while they were eating and drinking, perverse men of the city surrounded the house and began to beat on the door, demanding the old man bring out the Levite so that they could have relations with him. The old man begged that they not act so wickedly, even offering his daughter and the concubine instead at one point, but the men would not listen. Finally, the Levite brought his concubine out to them, and they beat her and raped her all night until she was nearly dead. Before she died, she managed to crawl back to the door of the man’s house where the Levite was staying.

The next morning, the Levite was ready to go back to Bethlehem and opened the door to leave, but saw the concubine lying on the ground. He told her to get up, but obviously the woman did not respond. The man picked her body up, put it on his donkey, and went home. When he got home, he cut her body into 12 pieces and sent each tribe a piece, inciting them to punish the men of Gibeah.

The Israelites gathered an army together to punish the city of Gibeah for its wickedness. However, instead of helping the rest of the Israelites, the Benjamites defended their city and started a civil war. During the fighting, the Benjamites and their cities were decimated; tens of thousands died.

The other tribes thought they got a little carried away, however, because they became worried that the tribe of Benjamin would not survive. They had taken an oath not to give their wives to the Benjamites, so they had to scheme to supply Benjamin with more women to have children. Eventually they did so. In those days, there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Lessons/Applications:
1.) It is easy to see egregious sin in the lives of others, but it can be hard to recognize in our own.
2.) Living without God as king in one’s life (using no standard) leads to moral and spiritual chaos.