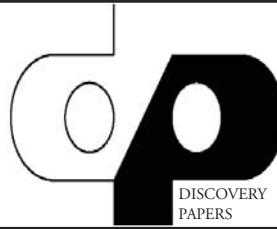


# DARK NIGHT

*SERIES: ONE NECESSARY THING*



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Judges 19:1-30

24th Message

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Legendary football coach Joe Paterno and other top Penn State University officials hushed up child sex abuse allegations against former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky more than a decade ago, allowing Sandusky to prey on other youngsters, according to former FBI director Louis Freeh, who was hired by the university trustees to investigate the scandal. “The most powerful men at Penn State failed to take any steps for fourteen years to protect the children who Sandusky victimized,” Freeh said. A few days after Freeh’s report was published, Rodney Erickson, the university’s president, ordered the removal of the Joe Paterno statue from its pedestal outside the school’s football stadium.

Many have especially wondered how Paterno, reputed to be a man of integrity, who molded men while running a squeaky-clean and highly successful program for decades, could have allowed such atrocities to take place. Yet, such cover-ups are so common, even among men and women of good repute, that we must ask ourselves what we’re willing to cover up and why.

Judges 19 is a story of abuse, among the most disturbing stories in the Scriptures. Many people are shocked to find such a story in the Holy Bible, and some may want to shy away from it. However, because it is all too reflective of our world, we need Judges 19 to help us face into the darkness and pierce it with God’s light.

Judges 19 is actually the first part of a story that spans Judges 19-21. Together, the three chapters constitute the second part of the two-part epilogue to the book of Judges (Judges 17-21).

## Pouring on the hospitality

Judges 19:1-10:

**<sup>1</sup>In those days Israel had no king.**

**Now a Levite who lived in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. <sup>2</sup>But she was unfaithful to him. She left him and went back to her parents’ home in Bethlehem, Judah. After she had been**

**there four months, <sup>3</sup>her husband went to her to persuade her to return. He had with him his servant and two donkeys. She took him into her parents’ home, and when her father saw him, he gladly welcomed him. <sup>4</sup>His father-in-law, the woman’s father, prevailed on him to stay; so he remained with him three days, eating and drinking, and sleeping there.**

**<sup>5</sup>On the fourth day they got up early and he prepared to leave, but the woman’s father said to his son-in-law, “Refresh yourself with something to eat; then you can go.” <sup>6</sup>So the two of them sat down to eat and drink together. Afterward the woman’s father said, “Please stay tonight and enjoy yourself.” <sup>7</sup>And when the man got up to go, his father-in-law persuaded him, so he stayed there that night. <sup>8</sup>On the morning of the fifth day, when he rose to go, the woman’s father said, “Refresh yourself. Wait till afternoon!” So the two of them ate together.**

**<sup>9</sup>Then when the man, with his concubine and his servant, got up to leave, his father-in-law, the woman’s father, said, “Now look, it’s almost evening. Spend the night here; the day is nearly over. Stay and enjoy yourself. Early tomorrow morning you can get up and be on your way home.” <sup>10</sup>But, unwilling to stay another night, the man left and went toward Jebus (that is, Jerusalem), with his two saddled donkeys and his concubine.**

The second part of the two-part epilogue in Judges begins with part of the refrain that has been featured twice before in the epilogue, once in part and once in full. Israel has no king—neither a human king nor, more importantly, a divine king, for she shows no interest in submitting to her God. Therefore, according to the full version of the refrain, everyone literally did “what was right in his own eyes.” Indeed, in part one of the epilogue, Judges 17-18, such was the case. What about part two? Well, the narrator wants us to keep reading.

Part one featured a Levite, a member of Israel’s priestly tribe, who traveled from Bethlehem in Judah in the south

to the hill country of Ephraim in the north. However, even the Levite, as a supposed spiritual leader in Israel, did what was right in his eyes, not God's eyes. Part two also features a Levite who resides in the hill country of Ephraim. What will come of him? Will he redeem the name of his tribe and turn men and women back to the Lord? Again, we'll have to keep reading.

The Levite takes a concubine, a sexual partner without the rights of a wife, but she becomes angry with him and returns to her home—interestingly enough, to the city Bethlehem in the region Judah, where the Levite in part one of the epilogue hailed from. (The verb in what many scholars now consider to be the original manuscript conveys anger, not unfaithfulness.)<sup>1</sup> Why she is angry the narrator doesn't say, but he wants us to pay attention to the story and draw our own conclusion whether, perhaps, she was angry with cause.

Whereas the first Levite journeyed from the city of Bethlehem to the region of Ephraim, this Levite, after waiting for four months, perhaps hoping for his concubine to return, makes the journey in reverse to win her back. Literally, he comes to "speak to her heart." Just as Micah was happy to meet a Levite in part one of the epilogue, the woman's father is happy to see this Levite. The narrator doesn't disclose the reason for the man's excitement; he is more interested to show what the man does with his excitement: he pours on the hospitality and convinces the Levite to prolong his stay.

The byplay between the woman's father and the Levite reminds me of this game I play with my children. While we're seated together on the couch, I say something like, "Goodbye, see you later, have a nice trip," whereupon they inch away from me before breaking away from me as fast as they can because they know I'm going to try to reach out and grab them at the last second. If I catch them, I pronounce, "I knew you wanted to stay!" All in good fun. The Levite, though, is not amused. He doesn't want to stay but can't seem to extricate himself.

By the time the Levite finally leaves Bethlehem, along with his concubine, whom he has convinced to return with him, the fifth day of his stay is drawing to a close, which creates a problem: if he doesn't stay with his father-in-law, where will he stay?

## Coming to the rescue

Judges 19:11-21:

**<sup>11</sup>When they were near Jebus and the day was almost gone, the servant said to his master,**

**"Come, let's stop at this city of the Jebusites and spend the night."**

**<sup>12</sup>His master replied, "No. We won't go into any city whose people are not Israelites. We will go on to Gibeah." <sup>13</sup>He added, "Come, let's try to reach Gibeah or Ramah and spend the night in one of those places." <sup>14</sup>So they went on, and the sun set as they neared Gibeah in Benjamin. <sup>15</sup>There they stopped to spend the night. They went and sat in the city square, but no one took them in for the night.**

**<sup>16</sup>That evening an old man from the hill country of Ephraim, who was living in Gibeah (the inhabitants of the place were Benjamites), came in from his work in the fields. <sup>17</sup>When he looked and saw the traveler in the city square, the old man asked, "Where are you going? Where did you come from?"**

**<sup>18</sup>He answered, "We are on our way from Bethlehem in Judah to a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim where I live. I have been to Bethlehem in Judah and now I am going to the house of the LORD. No one has taken me in for the night. <sup>19</sup>We have both straw and fodder for our donkeys and bread and wine for ourselves your servants—me, the woman and the young man with us. We don't need anything."**

**<sup>20</sup>"You are welcome at my house," the old man said. "Let me supply whatever you need. Only don't spend the night in the square." <sup>21</sup>So he took him into his house and fed his donkeys. After they had washed their feet, they had something to eat and drink.**

Six miles into the Levite's return trip, his servant suggests they spend the night in Jebus, a city of non-Israelites.<sup>2</sup> The Levite rejects the suggestion, however, no doubt fearing for the safety of his party in a city of pagans. Therefore, he presses on for another six miles to Gibeah, which belonged to Benjamin, a tribe of Israel. However, in contrast to the reception the Levite received in Bethlehem, the people of Gibeah ignore their Israelite brothers and, shockingly for a culture that values hospitality, refuse to take them in, even though the Levite and his party made themselves visible in the city square.

Finally, an old man who lives in Gibeah but hails from the hill country of Ephraim greets the visitors and inquires about their travels. The Levite, ingratiating himself to the old man by deferentially identifying himself and the

members of his party, informs him that he hails from the hill country of Ephraim and that his party is well-supplied, implying that none of them would create a burden for anyone willing to take them in for the night.

The old man comes to the rescue of the travelers not only by taking them in but also by providing for other needs, even though the Levite had said they were able to meet such needs. In a town of Benjamites, the only one to help the Levite hails from another tribe in Israel, Ephraim. The connection—both the Levite and the old man had come from Ephraim—no doubt helped the Levite win the old man's favor. Despite hitting a bump in the road in Gibeah, the Levite once again finds a place to stay at the invitation of a gracious host.

We, as the church, can do better than the people of Gibeah. We are, in fact, doing better. From time to time our church gets calls from someone from a church outside our area who notifies us that a family member or friend will be coming to our area for some specialized medical procedure. At that point, we have the opportunity to show hospitality to such folks by visiting the patients or by opening our homes to visiting family members.

In the next section, the Levite enjoys the hospitality of the old man, at least for a while.

## A turn for the worse

Judges 19:22-26:

**<sup>22</sup>While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him."**

**<sup>23</sup>The owner of the house went outside and said to them, "No, my friends, don't be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don't do this outrageous thing. <sup>24</sup>Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But as for this man, don't do such an outrageous thing."**

**<sup>25</sup>But the men would not listen to him. So the man took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and they raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go. <sup>26</sup>At daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, fell down**

## at the door and lay there until daylight.

At one moment, the Levite and his party were worried for their welfare, fending for themselves at nightfall in the public square. The next moment, a generous host takes him in, not only to give him lodging but also to celebrate with him. But the Levite's fortunes take another turn for the worse when the men of the city finally take note of him, not to offer him a bed but to gang-rape him! The old man, aghast, pleads with the men to relent, but before waiting for a possible response, he offers them his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine.

What kind of father is this? And what kind of hospitality is this? The old man of Gibeah values hospitality, to be sure, but supremely for "this man," words he uses twice, referencing the Levite. His values are out of balance, so much so that his role as a host for a man trumps his role as a host for a woman, not to mention his role as a father. Here's a man who values men, not women, not even his own daughter. And what's he doing offering to throw another man's woman to the wolves, anyway? The narrator would have us believe that the old man knew his world—and his guest. As the two men enjoyed each other earlier in the night, the old man must have discerned that the Levite considered his concubine expendable.

The old man discerned correctly, for the Levite, without even speaking to his concubine, grabs her and throws her outside. The men of the city, who earlier refused to take two women instead of one man, are so ravenous that the sight of the Levite's concubine makes them forget their earlier protestations. They take the woman. And they take her. And they take her. All night long. When they're finished, they discard her like a piece of trash. At dawn, she manages to make her way to the doorway of the old man's house, where she lay until full daylight. Between dawn and full daylight, no one bothers to check on her, not the old man or even the Levite.

By the way, men, if there's a bullet to be taken, don't let it be taken by women and children. You take the bullet. You stand between evil and the vulnerable.

In the next sequence, morning breaks.

## Chilling callousness

Judges 19:27-28:

**<sup>27</sup>When her master got up in the morning and opened the door of the house and stepped out to continue on his way, there lay his concubine, fallen in the doorway of the house, with her**

**hands on the threshold. <sup>28</sup>He said to her, “Get up; let’s go.” But there was no answer. Then the man put her on his donkey and set out for home.**

The narrator now calls the Levite “master” of the woman. Some master. Anyway, the woman’s master gets up to “continue on his way,” not to check on his woman, whom he had handed over to ravenous men the night before. Gets up? You mean he was lying down while his woman was being gang-raped all night long? That’s exactly what the narrator means. When he gets up to leave, he all but trips over his woman on his way out the door.

Pathetically, the hands of the fallen woman are positioned on the threshold of the house, as if she were reaching out to the men inside to help her. Alas, no help was forthcoming. Nor *is* any help forthcoming, for her man, stumbling upon her, commands her to get up so that they can be on their way. What? Not even a word of concern for her state? No, not one word, only words of concern for the timing of his departure. The beaten woman is unable to even answer her man, let alone get up, so the Levite throws her onto a donkey like a bundle and heads for home. Is she dead? Unconscious? The narrator doesn’t say.

What kind of man is this? What happened to the man who was supposedly so besotted that he went to extraordinary lengths to win back his lost lover? What happened to the man who went to extraordinary lengths to literally “speak to her heart”? Since he traveled from Ephraim to Bethlehem, we’ve seen more of the Levite’s heart. When his father-in-law took him in, literally the Levite’s “heart” was merry (Judges 19:6, 9). When the old man of Gibeah took him in, the Levite and his host were literally “making good their hearts” (Judges 19:22). When the Levite spoke to his woman in Gibeah, commanding her to get up, he spoke not to her heart but with chilling callousness. What about his woman’s heart? We are left to conclude that when he spoke to her heart, way back when, he was smooth-talking her. The Levite cares for his heart and not at all for his woman’s heart.

The men of Gibeah epitomize the period of the Judges. The old man literally begged them not to act “evilly,” and at multiple points in Judges, the narrator observes that the Israelites literally “did evil in the sight of the Lord” (Judges 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). In fact, the old man, when offering his daughter and the Levite’s woman to the men, literally told them to do “good in your own eyes.” There you have it: everyone did what was right in his own eyes, not God’s eyes—including, of course, the Levite and the old man.

The Levite, upon his return home, wants everyone else to do what’s right in his eyes.

## Sending a message

Judges 19:29-30:

**<sup>29</sup>When he reached home, he took a knife and cut up his concubine, limb by limb, into twelve parts and sent them into all the areas of Israel. <sup>30</sup>Everyone who saw it was saying to one another, “Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came up out of Egypt. Just imagine! We must do something! So speak up!”**

Finally, the Levite returns home, to the hill country of Ephraim from which he came. He had left home to bring back his woman, and bring her back he does, but not at all as he had hoped. What’s left for him to do but—what?—cut up his concubine into twelve parts, like the carcass of an animal, and send those parts throughout the land? In order to do so, the Levite first “took” her, just as he “took” her to throw her to the men of Gibeah. And the narrator leaves open the possibility that he put his knife to her when she was still alive! Separated from his woman at the beginning of Judges 19, reunited with her in the middle of the chapter, the Levite separates himself from her at the end of the chapter.

The gruesome exercise serves as a call to arms, alerting the tribes of Israel of the atrocity of Gibeah of Benjamin (1 Samuel 11:7). Of course, the Levite allowed the atrocity to take place by throwing his wife to the men of Gibeah. The exercise has its intended effect, provoking moral indignation in Israel that refreshes readers at the end of this troubling chapter. In the next chapter, the Israelites will take counsel about what to do in response. What started out as a private matter between a man and his woman has escalated into a national crisis.

The scouts of Dan, encouraging their tribesmen to attack the unsuspecting people of Laish, in wanton disobedience to the Lord, said, “Aren’t you going to do something?” (Judges 18:9) Now those who have received the Levite’s message say, “We must do something.” Remember, in the book of Judges, everyone “did” what was right in his or her own eyes, including, of course, the Levite and the old man of Gibeah.

The Levite is supposed to be a shepherd in Israel, but instead of laying down his life for the sheep, he throws his lamb to the wolves. Indeed, we are left to conclude, now that the Levite’s character has emerged, that his concubine

was rightly angry with him when she left him. Did the Levite redeem the name of his tribe? Hardly. What of the Levites, the shepherds of Israel, in the book of Judges?

Oh the shepherd is asleep  
Where the willows weep  
And the mountains are filled  
With lost sheep.<sup>3</sup>

## The new Sodom

Judges 19 bears a striking resemblance to Genesis 19, where the men of Sodom demanded that Lot hand over two visiting men to them so that they could rape them. Lot, like the old man of Gibeah, pleaded with men of Sodom to turn aside, but they refused. (In Sodom, the two visitors turned out to be angels, who struck the would-be perpetrators with blindness; thus, the atrocity was averted.) As in Sodom, so in Gibeah. So in Israel? Yes, as in Sodom, so in Israel! The Levite bypassed Jebus, a pagan city, fearing unfriendly treatment, in favor of Gibeah, an Israelite city. When he gets there, he finds that Gibeah has become the new Sodom!

Moreover, the old man and the Levite act with complete self-interest—the old man to protect his reputation as a host of men and the Levite to protect his own hide. Neither of them stands up to evil. Neither of them prays. Neither of them thinks to ask the Lord to intervene.

Who are these people? They have names, no doubt, but the narrator doesn't tell us what they are. In fact, not one name appears in the entire chapter. Furthermore, only one name, that of a minor character, appears in all of Judges 19-21. Anonymity in the epilogue serves at least two purposes. First, each character represents a wider group. For example, in Judges 19, the Levite stands for every heartless Levite, the abused woman for every abused woman, the old man for every unbalanced host, inasmuch as everyone, not just a few people, did what was right in his own eyes. Second, the absence of names signifies, in a sense, the absence of humanity, for to be human is to have a name, to have an identity. If a man has no name, as in this story, he can do as he pleases. If a woman has no name, as in this story, it's easier for men to make her an object and do to her as they please.

In the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, a prisoner, Heywood, is complicit in the death of another prisoner. When asked what the name of the now-dead prisoner was, Heywood takes offense and says, "Doesn't matter what his ... name was."<sup>4</sup> If his name doesn't matter, then it doesn't matter what happens to him, and your complicity in his

death doesn't matter, either. So goes the reasoning, anyway.

## Abandon self-interest, stand up to evil

A world that ignores what is right in God's eyes and instead encourages everyone to do right in his or her own eyes will produce at least some sexual predators and sex traffickers. Some will deem, in however warped a manner, such perversions allowable. In such a world, women, like the Levite's concubine, and children are especially vulnerable. Some fathers, in the manner of the old man of Gibeah, even go so far as to offer their own children up to sex traffickers for the sake of making money. Some, like the Levite, will condemn sexual predators, for example, while doing nothing to stand up to them. Some will decry such atrocities while denying complicity in perpetuating the sexually explicit and violent environment in which such atrocities take place. Many films, video games, and songs, for example, objectify women and glorify violence.

Most of us don't become sexual predators like the men of Gibeah, thank God. Many of us, however, are vulnerable to the temptation to turn a blind eye to sexual abuse, God help us. Why are so many of us oblivious to signs of sexual abuse? Because we're preoccupied with our own affairs, because we don't want to get involved, because we see what we want to see. Why are so many people reticent to report sexual abuse? The old man of Gibeah wanted to protect his reputation. The men of Penn State, according to Freeh, failed to report a pedophile or take the necessary steps to stop him because they were concerned for the reputation of the university and its football program, both of which they benefited from. Likewise, many people fail to report sexual abuse because they are concerned for the reputation of something or another.

The Levite acted in self-preservation by offering his concubine to the men of Gibeah in his place. Likewise, many of those who fail to report sexual abuse act in self-preservation, but in reality, they're allowing predators to torment victims, just like the Levite allowed the men of Gibeah to torment his concubine. They go to sleep, like the Levite, literally and figuratively, and they continue on their way, like the Levite, literally and figuratively, without bothering to check on the victims or taking steps to make sure that the predators are stopped, even if they virtually trip over victims on the way out the door. They might even tell the victims, in so many words, in the manner of the Levite, "Get up; let's go," or, "Put this behind you; you have to move on." Their focus, like the focus of the Levite, is their perceived needs, which are in reality trivial, not to be compared with the needs of the victim. They wouldn't put it this way, but in reality, like the Levite, they're treating victims as less than human: bundles, baggage, whatever.

The human disposition to cover up wrongdoing in order to protect oneself is by no means limited to cases of sexual abuse. Is there something—sexual abuse or something else—you’re covering up? If so, why are you covering it up? Also, what do you think you might be inclined to cover up, and why might you do so? Is there anything in you that wants to protect a reputation, keep up appearances, or stay uninvolved?

The apostle Paul writes: “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light” (Ephesians 5:11-14). In exposing shameful wrongdoing, you not only help victims of wrongdoing, you also make it possible for the perpetrators to come to the light instead of hiding in the darkness.

Many of those who have been abused, like the Levite’s concubine, have no voice in our world. They have no way to understand what’s happened to them, so they remain silent. They feel dirty, responsible in some way for what’s happened to them, so they remain silent. In many cases, the abuser and those complicit with the abuser threaten the victims if they speak up, so they remain silent. The victims need help, and maybe, if we can’t hear their silent cries, we can somehow become aware of them, as if we could see them draped across our doorways, with their hands on our thresholds, as if they were reaching out to us. It is up to us, as followers of the Lord Jesus, in contrast to the Levite and the old man, in contrast to the officials of Penn State, to abandon self-interest, whatever form it takes; stand up to evil; and speak up for victims, no matter the cost. It’s up to us to, through the prompting and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, to pierce the darkness with the light of God’s restorative justice.

After all, we don’t remember Bethlehem for the book of Judges; we remember it for the gospel of Luke. In Judges, a man traveled to Bethlehem to retrieve his sexual partner. In Luke, a man and a woman who had had no sexual relations traveled to Bethlehem, where, astoundingly, the virgin gave birth to a son, the Son of God, the human and divine king for whom the book of Judges longs. On that night, God pierced the darkness with his love. He’s piercing it still, and one day, the light will completely overcome the darkness. Of the Son, the apostle John says, “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome

it” (John 1:4-5).

## What to do

If you’ve been a victim of abuse and have remained silent, please consider telling someone about it and getting the help you need. All of our pastors and elders are available to hear your story and help you get whatever you need.

If you’re interested in doing something about sex trafficking, several people connected with our church are involved with ministries that address the issue in one way or another: the Bay Area Anti-Trafficking Coalition (Brian and Angela Wo), [www.baatc.org](http://www.baatc.org); the Home of New Beginnings, a ministry to women in Thailand (Bonita Thompson), [www.homeofnewbeginnings.com](http://www.homeofnewbeginnings.com); and the International Justice Mission (Sophia Sedillo), [www.ijm.org](http://www.ijm.org).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The narrator doesn’t say whether the Levite has a wife *and* a concubine or whether the concubine is his sole partner. Earlier in the book of Judges, Gideon’s involvement with a concubine produced Abimelek, a disastrous leader (Judges 8:31). Does the Levite’s involvement with a concubine portend similar results?

<sup>2</sup>The Israelites had conquered Jebus but failed to dispossess its inhabitants (Judges 1:8, 21). They would later dispossess the inhabitants under David and rename the city Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup>Bob Dylan, “Ring Them Bells” (Special Rider Music, 1989).

<sup>4</sup>*The Shawshank Redemption* (Castle Rock, 1994).