



Judges 19

The plight of the nameless concubine and her “sisters”
around the world today

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Overview

Throughout history, slavery has seen millions of men, women and children exploited by others. The Bible is full of stories of slaves: Hagar who was Sarah's slave in Genesis, Joseph sold into slavery by his brothers in Genesis, the Hebrew slaves exploited by the Egyptians in Exodus, and many other nameless slaves are referenced particularly in the Old Testament. The passage of Judges 19 is the story of a young, nameless female slave ("concubine") whose life ends tragically.

Concubine. This is a word found multiple times in the Bible. For example, David had concubines, and in addition to his 700 wives King Solomon also had 300 concubines! But what does this term mean? The Bible does not really give a description or definition of the term "concubine." They are often referenced in addition to wives. But how were wives different than concubines? It is understood that concubines lived with and/or had sexual relations with a man, but they were also seen as having lesser status than a wife.

When a concubine is mentioned in the Bible, there is usually no background story given to the woman. How was she acquired? What rights did she have? Was she kidnapped by force? Or was she sold out of an arrangement between her family and new "husband"?

According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, a concubine's role and acquisition was much different than a wife. Essentially, she was considered a female slave and "might be taken in debt or purchased from a poor Israelite family or taken captive in war (2 S. 5:13)."¹² A concubine's main function was to "provide offspring and sexual activity (Eccl. 2:8)" and "care of the house (2 S. 15:16; 16:21; 20:3)."³

¹ Bromiley, Geoffrey W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Volume 1 A-D*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (Grand Rapids, MI), p. 758.

² However, even wives could be obtained by force. For example, in Judges 20-21, retribution is taken against Gibeon as a result of Judges 19. As a result of this strife, the people of Israel would not give their daughter to a Benjaminite as a wife but they were also fearful that the tribe of Benjamin would be wiped out as a result. So the rest of the tribes instructed the Benjaminites to obtain wives from Shiloh, north of Bethel: "Go and hide in the vineyards and watch. When the young women of Shiloh come out to join in the dancing, rush from the vineyards and each of you seize one of them to be your wife" (Judges 21:20-21). Judges 21:23 says "So that is what the Benjaminites did. While the young women were dancing, each man caught one and carried her off to be his wife."

³ p. 758

Opening Prayer

Lord God, we pray that you open our hearts to learn more about the nameless concubine. Like her, countless women around the world are exploited sexually today. You know each one by name and you love them and cry for their pain. Give us hearts of compassion as we discover how this passage applies to those enslaved today. Amen.

Passage

Take time to read **Judges 19**. In this chapter, a nameless concubine leaves her husband – a Levite – and travels to her family’s household. The Levite goes to retrieve his concubine and on their way home stops in Gibeah. A local man offers them a place to stay for the evening after which a group of local men appear at the man’s house demanding that the guest is released to them to be raped. The local man insists that this is “vile” and instead offers his virgin daughter and the Levite’s concubine. The concubine is released to the group of men; she is raped throughout the night and dies upon returning to the house.

“No, my friends, don’t be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don’t do this outrageous thing.’²⁴ 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.”

Judges 19:23-24 (NIV)

Digging Deeper into the Bible

1. From whose perspective is this story told?
2. The story does not divulge much information about the female concubine (in particular, what made her leave the Levite, how old she was, how she was first acquired by the Levite, how long she had been with him, etc.).
What do you think she was feeling and thinking as she left for her father's house?
3. Why do you think the father kept asking the Levite to stay another night?
4. The local man living in Gibeah who offered the Levite, his concubine and servant a place to stay for the night showed hospitality and kindness. How did you feel when he then offered his virgin daughter and the concubine to the local men knowing that they wanted to rape someone?
5. The host says (The Message" translation) "Abuse them if you must, but don't do anything so senselessly vile to this man [the Levite guest]." Sexual assault is *wrong* and *violent* regardless of whether it is acted out on a male or female victim. But what do the host's words say about the status of women in this time?
6. The Levite dismembered the concubine into 12 pieces and sent out the body part amongst Israel to send the message of the "outrageous crime" that was committed. The Levite felt the responsibility for this woman's rape and murder was held by the men of Gibeah. How do you feel about this placement of blame?
7. While the Bible does not always seem to overtly disapprove issues of slavery and violence against women, the Bible *does* have some incredibly hopeful messages of justice and compassion! What are some of your favourite passages about justice and compassion that reassures us that God is a God who deeply cares for the concubine and today's exploited people?
Having a hard time getting started? See Psalm 33:5 ; Psalm 82:3,4 ; Psalm 140:12 ; Proverbs 28:5 ; Proverbs 29:7 ; Isaiah 1:17 ; Isaiah 10:1-2.

Digging Deeper into Slavery

In recent news, the issue of “forced marriage” has been at the forefront of the news when the story of a young girl from Yemen died of internal injuries suffered on her wedding night after being forced to marry a man five times her age (age estimated to be around 40 years old).⁴

“Child marriage is a huge problem worldwide, although it predominates in the poorer regions of the poorest nations. One-third of the world's girls are married before the age of 18 and one in nine is married before the age of 15. In 2010, nearly 70 million girls worldwide were child brides. The majority of these girls are in Southeast Asia (31.1 million), Sub-Saharan Africa (14.1 million) and South America (11 million). In Niger, 75 percent of girls are married before 18. In Chad, Central African Republic, Bangladesh, Guinea, Mozambique and Mali, between 60 and 70 percent of girls are married before 18. But throughout Central America nearly 50 percent of girls are also child brides under 18.”

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/victoria-a-brownworth/april-jones-child-brides-b-4004220.html>

The issue of forced marriage is a global concern. In a recent study in Ontario, Canada it was reported that hundreds of women in this country are also subjected to forced marriage (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/women-in-forced-marriages-number-in-the-hundreds-in-ontario-1.1862831>).

How can you stand up for those who are being exploited in this way today?

Praying for the Exploited

“I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.”

Ezekiel 34:15-16 (NIV)

⁴ For a similar story, see the book *I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced*, a true story about a girl forced into marriage at the age of 10.

Spend some time in prayer petitioning on behalf of those who are exploited today.