

Introduction

What happens when God's people become indistinguishable from the world? A missionary friend once told me that an important aspect of adjusting to serving in a different culture was to recognize that all people have blind spots in their practical theology. It is easy to criticize Christians in another place for allowing culture to shape their worldview, but *are we any different?*

There is a difficult tension in Scripture. The church should minister in the culture in which God places them. [1 Corinthians 9:19-23](#) “19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become **all things to all people**, that by all means I might save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.”

Scripture also teaches that we should be distinct from the world. [Romans 12:2](#) “2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” [James 4:4](#) “4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

These two positions are not contradictory. We should seek to be like Christ, not like the world, **and** we should seek to reach people in their culture. Christian life and church ministry should **be** the same in every culture; we all live under the same King - Jesus. However, Christian life and church ministry should **look** different in every culture. A church in Greenbrier may speak English, while a church in Peru will speak Spanish, but it will be the same gospel. A church in a remote village will reach people differently than a church in Chicago, but it will be the same gospel. A church in 2026 will minister differently than a church in 1956, but it will be the same gospel.

Main Idea: [Judges 19](#) shows that God's people can become just like the wicked people God condemns. When we do not submit our lives to Christ, we fall in love with the world. Christians should minister in the culture where and when God places them, but we should not become like the world.

The Levite's concubine

[Judges 19:1-2](#) “1 In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. 2 And his concubine was unfaithful to him, and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there some four months.”

Why does this story (of blatant sin) begin with “there was no king in Israel?” The book of Judges, especially chapters 17-21, prepare for the appointment of David as king. There was no king in Israel, so everyone did what they considered to be right. Israel sought a king, rather than submitting to God. Eventually, God appointed David as king. Ultimately, God's covenant with David foretold of Jesus, who would be the eternal king over God's people.

Where was the Levite living? He was living in the hill country of Ephraim. This is the **region** where Joshua ([Josh 24:29-30](#); [Judg 2:8-9](#)) and Eleazar, the high priest ([Josh 24:33](#)) were buried. Deborah judged Israel between Ramah and Bethel in that region ([Judg 4:5](#)). Micah lived in that region ([Judg 17:1](#)). Samuel was Ramah in that region ([1 Sam 1:1, 19](#)).

From where was the Levite's concubine? The concubine was from Bethlehem, Judah. There is not a massive distinction in the ancient world between a wife and a concubine. However, concubines were often considered inferior to a wife (see “Concubine” in *Lexham Bible Dictionary*).

Where did the concubine go when she left her husband? She returned to her father's house. The MT (Hebrew) says that she left because she was unfaithful to her husband. The LXX (Greek) says that she left because she was angry with her husband. [**Note:** the Hebrew for “to be unfaithful” (זָנָה) is similar to a word for “to be angry” (חָנַן). (1) The LXX may have mistranslated the Heb. because of the similarity. (2) The MT may include a textual error that was avoided by the LXX because of the similarity.]

[Judges 19:3-4](#) “3 Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys. And she brought him into her father's house. And when the girl's father saw him, he came with joy to meet him. 4 And his father-in-law, the girl's father, made him stay, and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and spent the night there.”

How long did the Levite initially stay with his father-in-law? The Levite stayed with his father-in-law three days. Within the context, this detail (as well as the following verses) highlight the father-in-law's hospitality. In our culture, this may seem like a pushy father-in-law. In that eastern culture, his actions would be very virtuous.

[Judges 19:5-7](#) “5 And on the fourth day they arose early in the morning, and he prepared to go, but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, “Strengthen your heart with a morsel of bread,

and after that you may go.” 6 So the two of them sat and ate and drank together. And the girl’s father said to the man, “Be pleased to spend the night, and let your heart be merry.” 7 And when the man rose up to go, his father-in-law pressed him, till he spent the night there again.”

[Judges 19:8–9](#) “8 And on the fifth day he arose early in the morning to depart. And the girl’s father said, “Strengthen your heart and wait until the day declines.” So they ate, both of them. 9 And when the man and his concubine and his servant rose up to depart, his father-in-law, the girl’s father, said to him, “Behold, now the day has waned toward evening. Please, spend the night. Behold, the day draws to its close. Lodge here and let your heart be merry, and tomorrow you shall arise early in the morning for your journey, and go home.””

Why did the father-in-law press the Levite to stay in verse 9? It was close to evening. Travel would be dangerous. The Levite would not make it home before dark.

Stay at Gibeah

[Judges 19:10–13](#) “10 But the man would not spend the night. He rose up and departed and arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). He had with him a couple of saddled donkeys, and his concubine was with him. 11 When they were near Jebus, the day was nearly over, and the servant said to his master, “Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it.” 12 And his master said to him, “We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel, but we will pass on to Gibeah.” 13 And he said to his young man, “Come and let us draw near to one of these places and spend the night at Gibeah or at Ramah.””

Why did the Levite refuse to spend the night in Jebus? Jebus (later called Jerusalem) was a non-Israelite city. Jebus was about 6 miles north of Bethlehem. Gibeah is about 4 miles north of Jerusalem (10 miles from Bethlehem). Ramah is about 2 miles north of Gibeah (12 miles from Bethlehem).

[Judges 19:14–15](#) “14 So they passed on and went their way. And the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, 15 and they turned aside there, to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. And he went in and sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night.”

Where did the Levite’s group have to spend the night? They decided to stay in Gibeah because the sun went down. They settled in the city square because no one gave them a place to stay.

What is different between their stay in Bethlehem and their stay in Gibeah? The father-in-law provided food for them and a place to stay; he was hospitable. The people of Gibeah were not hospitable. Hospitality was common in this region and time-period and was not limited to family members.

[Judges 19:16-21](#) “16 And behold, an old man was coming from his work in the field at evening. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was sojourning in Gibeah. The men of the place were Benjaminites. 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 parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to the house of the Lord, but no one has taken me into his house. 19 We have straw and feed for our donkeys, with bread and wine for me and your female servant and the young man with your servants. There is no lack of anything.” 20 And the old man said, “Peace be to you; I will care for all your wants. Only, do not spend the night in the square.” 21 So he brought him into his house and gave the donkeys feed. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.”

Where was the old man from? He was from the hill country of Ephraim. Gibeah was a city of the tribe of Benjamin. So, the old man was not originally from this area; he was a sojourner.

Why wouldn't the old man allow the Levite to stay in the city square? For one, in a hospitality-centered society, it was shameful to allow someone to sleep in the city square. As we will read, the city is also not a safe place.

[Note: The Levite said he was going to the “house of the Lord” (בֵּית יְהוָה), which would suggest he was going to Shiloh. The LXX says that he was going to “my house” (τὸν οἶκόν μου), which fits better with the context.

Sin in Gibeah

[Judges 19:22-24](#) “22 As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house, beating on the door. And they said to the old man, the master of the house, “Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him.” 23 And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, “No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing. 24 Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out now. Violate them and do with them what seems good to you, but against this man do not do this outrageous thing.””

Who did the old man offer to the men of the city instead of the Levite? He offered his daughter and the Levite's concubine. The old man said (in the ESV) “do with them what seems good to you.” In the Hebrew (MT) and Greek (LXX), it says “do to them what seems good in your eyes.” *How does that relate to the book of Judges (especially ch 17-21)?* [Judges 21:25](#) “25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

How does this story parallel the destruction of Sodom ([Gen 19](#))? The two angels intended to spend the night in the city square ([Gen 19:2](#)). Lot insisted that they stay with him ([Gen 19:2](#)).

The men of Sodom insisted that Lot send the two men (angels) out to have sex with them ([Gen 19:5](#)). Lot offered his two daughters to the men of the city instead ([Gen 19:8](#)). Lot was a sojourner (not from Sodom) ([Gen 19:9](#)).

There was a major distinction between Sodom and Gibeah. The people of Gibeah were Israelites (from Benjamin). The people of Israel had become the people of Sodom.

[Judges 19:25-26](#) “25 But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go. 26 And as morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man’s house where her master was, until it was light.”

What does verse 26 call the Levite? He is the “master” of the concubine. This suggests that concubines were distinct from wives to some degree.

[Judges 19:27-28](#) “27 And her master rose up in the morning, and when he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, behold, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. 28 He said to her, “Get up, let us be going.” But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey, and the man rose up and went away to his home.”

Why didn’t the woman answer the Levite? The context suggests she was already dead.

[Judges 19:29-30](#) “29 And when he entered his house, he took a knife, and taking hold of his concubine he divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. 30 And all who saw it said, “Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day; consider it, take counsel, and speak.””

Why did the Levite cut his concubine into 12 pieces? There were twelve tribal divisions of land. The Levites were a thirteenth tribe, but were scattered throughout the other tribes.

Conclusion

When God condemned Jerusalem through Isaiah, He compared them to Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. [Jer 23:14](#); [Ezek 16](#); [Rev 11:8](#)). Passages such as these highlight the fact that those who are **called** God’s people may **actually** be God’s enemies. It was not enough to be born in Israel; those of faith were God’s people. It is not enough to be a church member; those of faith are God’s people.

Read [Isa 1:10-15](#) with reflection. God spoke these words to Israel as a warning that He viewed them as Sodom because they were unrepentant sinners. Repentance and faith are inseparable in Scripture, suggesting that they lacked faith. This same warning applies to church members. This passage does not suggest that someone can come to know God, fall

away into unrepentant sin, and lose his/her relationship with God. Instead, it teaches that there are those who profess a relationship with God but do not actually have faith. Often their unrepentant sin **reveals** their lack of faith. Scripture frequently encourages us to examine our lives to see if our profession of faith is genuine and proven.

[Isaiah 1:10-15](#) “10 Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! 11 “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. 12 “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? 13 Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. 14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.”

[Isaiah 1:10](#) “10 Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!” Those who reject God, whether in Israel or in the church, are Sodom in God’s eyes.

[Isaiah 1:11-12](#) “11 “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. 12 “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?” God equates sacrifices with unrepentant sin with “trampling [His] courts.” The Lord rejects whatever service we offer to Him apart from faith and repentance.

[Isaiah 1:13-14](#) “13 Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. 14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.” God states that He cannot endure (He is weary) of their obedience to the calendar, without obedience in their daily lives.

[Isaiah 1:15](#) “15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.” Notice the irony of this verse. Their hands are full of blood, but not because of their sacrifices. Their hands are full of blood because they oppress those who are helpless ([Isa 1:16-17](#)). Because of their unrepentant sin, God will not listen to their prayers.

*How does a church become Sodom? We become Sodom by not living under the authority of our King, Jesus and by not doing what is right in **His** eyes.*