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Thesis Summary Page

Title: Struggling with Suffering: An Analysis of Judges 19
Author: Sara Yellen Sapadin
Advisor: Rabbi Andrea L. Weiss, Ph. D

Number of Chapters: Nine

Division of Chapters: This thesis is divided into an introduction, an annotated translation, five analytical chapters, and two concluding chapters.

Contribution of this Thesis: In analyzing Judges 19, I gained a deep and appreciative understanding of this controversial text. My exploration of this text helped me find meaning and sanctity in this most disturbing narrative. I hope to use my work here as a template for tackling many of the theologically, morally, and ethically problematic passages in our tradition. I also hope my learning will help others navigate their way through the troubling texts found in our canon.

Goals: In this thesis, I attempt to offer my own interpretation of Judges 19, based upon my own close reading of the biblical text and the research of scholars who have come before me. First, I provide my own annotated translation of the chapter. Then, I continue with several analytical sections, providing close readings of the text and investigations of issues pertaining to each narrative section. Lastly, I discuss Judges 19 as a narrative emblematic of other troubling texts in the Bible. I explore the meaning of violent texts, our approach to them as scholars, readers, and teachers, and the challenge of calling them sacred. Rather than simply rejecting this text on the basis of its brutal nature, I would like to challenge readers to confront the story, understand its words, and seek out their own meaning. Ultimately, I would like to set forth a system by which we can approach difficult texts with the honor, dignity, and sanctity that biblical texts deserve.

Materials Used: Biblical resources and references; traditional, medieval, and modern commentators, a variety of secondary resources such as academic journals, articles, and online databases.

Struggling with Suffering: an Analysis of Judges 19

Sara Yellen Sapadin

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinical Program
New York, New York

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Advisor: Rabbi Andrea L. Weiss, Ph. D

Chapter 1: Introduction

"In those days when there was no king in Israel, there was a Levite man who was sojourning among the remotest parts of the hill country of Ephraim. Now he took for himself a woman, a *pilegesh*[1] from Bethlehem in Judah." This, the first line of Judges 19, begins one of the most difficult, abstruse, and bewildering sections found in the Bible. It is the story of a Levite, a *pilegesh,* and a sequence of tragic events, each one more gruesome and unbelievable than the one before. This thesis will present a critical exploration of Judges 19, closely reading the chapter and surveying the work already written about this episode. As well, this thesis will investigate one of the most important issues raised: the problem of troubling texts altogether. Do scenes of carnage, bloodshed, and misogyny deserve to be called sanctified material? Is it time to begin extracting stories from the canon at large in order to create a less controversial, more palatable biblical tradition? Many questions will be posed throughout the course of this thesis project. While some answers will be provided, most questions will only generate discussion, debate, and ultimately, more questions.

Judges 19 is a fascinating story, but it does not exist within a vacuum. It is part of the larger book of Judges and must be situated within its given context. This introduction will investigate the book of Judges writ-large: its setting, stories, themes, authorship and history. The book of Judges will serve as a wide-angle lens through which to examine chapter 19, providing some background for the brutality found in these verses.

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[1] In this translation I have chosen not to translate the word *pilegesh* into English. The oft-used translation "concubine" carries with it many negative associations, and these connotations do a disservice to the character of the *pilegesh*, even before one has begun reading the narrative. The term "*pilegesh*" which will explored in depth in the first section of the analysis, has a much wider semantic range in Hebrew than the word "concubine" does in English. Therefore, it was important for me to separate the reader from the colloquial notion of the "concubine" by leaving the Hebrew as is.

The remainder of the introduction will introduce readers to the story of Judges 19 and much of the modern scholarship that accompanies it. What are the critical issues at stake here? What are the main ideas coming forth from these scholars? How is their approach different from the commentators who have preceded them?

A. Background

The book of Judges is the second book in the *Nevi'im*, or Prophets, section of the Hebrew Bible. Set in the era after the death of Joshua and before the anointing of Saul, the book of Judges takes place in the Promised Land. The book itself is not necessarily sequential, since many of the events in the final chapters occur chronologically before the events in the beginning portions.[2] Named for the heroic leaders that populate the book, the title "Judges" comes from the verb "*shafat*."[3] Though the noun "*shofet*" is translated into English as "judge," the word has a much wider semantic range in Hebrew. These brave leaders were not necessarily judges in the legalistic sense (though a select number did serve in this capacity), but rather charismatic military and civil leaders in whom "rested the spirit of God."[4] In fact, the word "*shofet*" is often rendered "chieftain" in English to emphasize the warring, militaristic sides of these leaders.[5] The rule of these formidable characters was always temporary; no single judge garnered tribal loyalty for an extended period of time.

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[2] Yairah Amit, "Introduction to the book of Judges," Jewish Study Bible, eds. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 508.
[3] Ironically, the noun "judge" only appears once in the entire book, in Judges 11:27. In this case, the word "judge" does not even apply to a human character, but to God.
[4] Gershon Bacon,"The Book of Judges," Encyclopedia Judaica, CD ROM Edition 1.0. (Israel: Judaica Multimedia Ltd, 1997).
[5] Amit 508. In this translation, I will continue to use the word "judge" because it is familiar and remains applicable.

The book of Judges unfurls cyclically. The sequence of victory then failure, failure then victory occurs side by side with the more theological progression of sin, punishment and salvation.[6] The Israelites would stray from God and from the teachings of the Torah, causing God to "[hand] them over to their foes," and "[surrender] them to their enemies." (Judges 2:14) Only when the Eternal felt pity upon the Israelites would God deliver them through the leadership of a judge. But no judge could keep the Israelites faithful to YHWH, as it says in Judges 2:17: "But they did not heed their judges either; they went astray after other gods and bowed down to them." Thus the Israelites would once more face the existential threats of confrontation and destruction, and the cycle of war, punishment and salvation would begin again.

The leaders in Judges include Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Barak, and Gideon, to name a few.[7] Each of these judges plays the liberator, rescuing Israel from the hand of would-be conquerors, defeating all who pose a danger to this emerging people. For example, Othniel battles King Cushan-Rishathatim of Aram and wins handily, Ehud cleverly kills King Eglon of Moab, Deborah and Barak orchestrate the victory over King Jabin of Canaan, and Gideon razes the Midianites with a scant army of one hundred men. These judges rule Israel temporarily, maintaining a fragile stability that ends with their deaths. Thus the book of Judges develops, with the Israelites seeking strength, salvation and moral fortitude through the election of these provisional leaders.

As the book of Judges progresses, the narratives change. The cyclical stories of sin and salvation shift into a sequence of darker, more ominous tales, foreshadowing the

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[6] Amit 508. See also Judges 3:5-11, the Othniel episode; Judges 3:12-30, the Ehud episode; Judges 4:1-5:31, the Deborah and Barak episode as examples of the sin, punishment and salvation cycles.
[7] Judges 3:5-11, the Othniel episode; Judges 3:12-30, the Ehud episode; Judges 4:1-5:31, the Deborah and Barak; Judges 6:1-8:35, the Gideon episode.

political, social, and ethical deterioration of the Israelite people. The stories of Jepthah, Samson, and the Danite migration all contribute to this sense of decline.[8] These are stories of highly flawed leaders and immoral citizens: Jepthah's vow of sacrifice in exchange for victory ends with him slaying his daughter; Samson's weakness for women is the cause of his eventual demise; the Danites appropriation of a priest and ritual objects from Micah demonstrate the complete disintegration of community values among the Israelites. These stories set the stage for the ultimate tale of moral collapse: the rape of the *pilegesh*, which serves as the catalyst for the ensuing civil war against the Benjaminites. These final events, described in Judges 19-21, conclude the story of a rapidly deteriorating Israel, a society torn apart at the seams.

B.Themes

Judges is a book about leadership, loyalty, faith and social order. As the people of Israel grow and develop, they must find ways to live in a civil society with a stable government. One of the distressing parts of the book is the decided lack of steady leadership displayed by the judges. Since they encounter such obvious failure, many scholars conclude that the book unabashedly advocates for a monarchical system.[9] Marc Brettler explains that Judges is a "highly political work, which echoes the following sentiment, found elsewhere in the Bible (1 Kgs 1:31): 'May my lord King David live forever!'"[10]

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[8] See Judges chapter 11, the Jepthah episode; Judges 13:1-16:31, the Samson episode; Judges chapter 18, the Danite migration.

[9] See Amit 510: "Modern research has...emphasized certain ideological (anti-Northern Kingdom, anti-Saul, pro-Davidic) and literary elements of the book."

[10] Marc Zvi Brettler, The Book of Judges, (London: Routledge, 2002) 116.

Much of the turmoil and strife seen in the book is given a theological valence as well. Walter Drum notes two important theological themes at work in Judges: first, he mentions an "epic" theme, indicating that the consistent downfall of Israel is not only due to the lack of leadership, but the Israelites' idolatrous ways. Second, he observes a "didactic" theme, emphasizing that Israel must always obey God's commandments.[11] Each of these themes highlights yet another important message in the book: history is a continuing interaction between God and God' people.

One last theme, which is particularly important to this paper, is the unique emphasis that Judges places on women. Women take up an uncommonly large piece of the narrative space in this book. One of the most famous women is the aforementioned judge, Deborah. She would "sit under the Palm of Deborah...and the Israelites would come to her for decisions" (Judges 4:5). Considered a prophetess and a warrior, Deborah is one of the great and powerful figures in the book of Judges. Jael is another important character in this part of the book. Described in the song of Deborah as "most blessed of women," Jael is responsible for killing the Canaanite commander Sisera, and delivering the Canaanite forces to the hands of the Israelites.[12] Samson's mother is one of the barren yet faithful women who appear so frequently in the Bible. The dedication which she and her husband Manoah display to God produces a son, Samson.[13] Delilah, too, is unusually calculating and courageous. Using her feminine guile, she deceives Samson and hands him over to the Philistines.[14]

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[11] Walter Drum, "Judges," The Catholic Encyclopedia, 4 August, 2006 <www.newadvent.org/cathen/08547a.htm>.
[12] Judges 5:24.
[13] See Judges 13.
[14] See Judges 16:4-16:20.

The other women who play prominent roles in the book of Judges contrast the strong figures of Deborah, Jael, Samson's mother and Delilah. These are the powerless women, those stripped of autonomy, strength, and even name. Jepthah's daughter is the virgin girl, whose innocence and devotion to God and family seal her terrible fate. The *pilegesh* is a nameless, speechless woman whose literary life is comprised of cruel actions done *to* her and *upon* her.[15] Her only acts of self-determination ultimately invite more violence and more brutality.

C. Authorship

Given the various themes at play in Judges, one wonders about the authorship of the book. Traditionally, Judges has been attributed to the prophet Samuel. Most critical scholars reject this theory due to the lack of concrete evidence and posit other theories about the composition of this book. For example, Robert Boling sees Judges as containing older stock stories of the ancient Near East (stories with fixed structures and narratives), that were later applied to the story of the Israelites.[16] He claims that these stories were eventually written down by professional storytellers (perhaps the Levites) in ancient, pre-monarchical Israel. Once the words were on parchment, so to speak, Boling hypothesizes that the book went through four stages of development: 1) It began, as mentioned above, as an early collection of stories. 2) These stories were then put together into what Boling termed the "pragmatic collection" in the 8th century. 3) The historical aspects were added in the 7th century. 4) Lastly, the 6th century saw a theological and political "updating" in order to modernize the book. Boling finds

[15] See Judges 11 and Judges 19.
[16] Robert G. Boling, Judges (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1969) 29.

evidence of both Deuteronomic (pre-exilic) and Deuteronomistic (post-exilic) contributions to the book.[17] According to Boling, the Deuteronomistic contributions are most evident in the transitions between the stories, which helped to support the political and theological agendas of the time. Boling also believes that the Deuteronomistic redactor added chapters 1 and 19-21.

Many scholars support the majority of Boling's theory, though most choose to refine it in one way or another. For example, Yairah Amit writes that the book was likely compiled by many authors.[18] This rather uncontroversial statement is also de rigeur among many Judges' scholars. Skeptical of Deuteronomistic authorship, Amit affirms that Judges was redacted in the late 8th century or the 7th century BCE, which would fall into the *pre*-Deuteronomistic stage. Because she believes the book of Judges reflects the mood in Judah after the downfall of the Northern kingdom, Amit asserts that the redactor sought to "justify" this catastrophe in the life of the Israelite people. Still, Amit does admit that some parts, such as chapter 19, were added later, not by the Deuteronomistic editor, but by someone who sought to *reflect* this redactor.[19]

In spite of these differences, most scholars who have attempted to decipher the authorship and literary history of the book conclude that Judges has a long and "literarily problematical" history.[20] While the proposed dates may vary, it is generally believed that this book was passed from author to editor to author to editor a number of times. The patchwork nature of the text poses a challenge for scholars attempting to reach any conclusion regarding the exact authorship of the text.

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[17] Boling 35.
[18] Amit 509.
[19] Amit 509-510.
[20] Patrick M. Arnold, S.J. "Hosea and the Sin of Gibeah," Catholic Biblical Quarterly Vol. 51, No. 3, July 1989: 451.

D. Historicity

The search to find who wrote the book of Judges often leads to the question: Is the book based on true historical events? Did the authors try to record history or do these writings have a different purpose altogether? The range of theories concerning the book's historicity is staggering.

On one side of the spectrum are those who maintain the book is historical. Many traditional Jews and older scholars fall into this category. For instance, Boling claims that all of the content in Judges is "definitely" historical.[21] Likewise, Gershon Bacon dubs the work a "precious historical document," and Emil G. Hirsch and Victor Ryssel maintain that the book is "on the whole true to fact."[22] These authors situate the book of Judges in the 12th and 11th centuries BCE, leading up to Saul's inauguration as king in 1020. Certain archaeological evidence suggests that these centuries were filled with much violence, war, and turmoil, which would serve as an appropriate match to the Judges narrative.

Nonetheless, most scholars who have looked at Judges in the last half-century no longer consider it a purely historical book. These academics, rather, see the book as a compilation of legends and stories with a didactic or political message.[23] Yairah Amit expresses this perspective when she writes, "Modern research has abandoned the conservative view, which accepted the bulk of the book of Judges as historically

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[21] Boling 32.

[22] Bacon, Gershon. "The Book of Judges." Encyclopedia Judaica, CD ROM Edition 1.0. Israel: Judaica Multimedia Ltd, 1997 and Hirsch, Emil G and Victor Ryssel. "The Book of Judges." <www.jewishencyclopedia.com>, 2002, December 10, 2006.

[23] See Brettler 8: "Judges should not be studied to reconstruct ancient Israelite history of the pre-monarchic period. Nor should we examine it as a historical work..." Brettler also spends time reviewing this position in pages 6-7. See also Sandra Scham, "The Days of the Judges: When Men and Women Were Animals and Trees Were Kings," *JSOT* 97 (2002), 38: "Perhaps because the Judges stories have never been very convincingly presented as real history..."

authentic."[24] Amit adds, "At the same time, [modern scholarship] acknowledges the fact that ancient traditions sometimes preserve some echo of the historical reality."[25] Reflecting history, however, is not the same as recreating it.

E. Summary of Judges 19 and Beyond

Understanding the broader themes and background of Judges is an important tool in the more specific analysis of Judges 19, the subject of this thesis. Judges 19, which one can fairly claim is one of the most controversial sections of Judges and perhaps the Bible itself, is a story about a Levite from the mountains of Ephraim and a *pilegesh*, a woman whom he takes as a wife at the beginning of the narrative. Afterwards, the *pilegesh* runs away from the Levite to the shelter of her father's home in Bethlehem. When, after a period of approximately four months, the Levite resolves to retrieve his wife, he is welcomed into her home with open arms, especially by the woman's father. Instead of simply handing over his daughter, the father-in-law drinks and eats with the Levite for not one, not two, not even three, but four and a half days. The episode finally ends once the Levite is able to leave the merriment and gluttony behind, to make his way back towards Ephraim.

The next section of the story takes place on the road to Ephraim, when the Levite and his servant try to decide where to lodge for the evening. The daylight has waned and they are still en-route to Ephraim. While the servant suggests they stop in Jebus, the Levite rejects the idea because it is a non-Israelite town. Preferring to stay with his countrymen, the Levite settles on Gibeah, a Benjaminite town.

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[24] Amit 510.
[25] Amit 510.

Upon entering the town square, the Levite, his servant, and his *pilegesh* find that no one offers them a place to stay over the night. The lack of hospitality is finally ameliorated when an older man, who also happens to be from the mountains of Ephraim, approaches them. He admonishes them not to stay in the town square overnight, and invites them to stay at his home. When they arrive there, they are greeted warmly; the old man makes sure they are bathed and given drink and food. Echoing the experience in Bethlehem, they eat and are merry.

But the congenial atmosphere is quickly squashed when the men from Gibeah surround the house, demanding that the owner send out the Levite, that they may "know" him (19:22). This disturbing incident, resonant of the Sodom and Gomorrah story in Genesis 19, startles the old man, who begs the intruders not to commit this "outrage" against the Levite (19:23). Instead, the old man offers up his virgin daughter and the Levite's *pilegesh*. Then, the Levite grabs his *pilegesh* and throws her out to the men. All night long, the men rape and abuse her. In the morning, barely alive, the *pilegesh* limps to the old man's front door and collapses upon the threshold.

When the Levite awakes, he walks outside. Upon seeing the *pilegesh*, he says to her, "Get up so we can go!" (19:28). When she does not answer, he lifts her up, drapes her across his donkey and brings her home. He then cuts her up into twelve pieces, each of which he sends to a single tribe, as a rally cry against the Benjaminites.

In the subsequent chapter, the men of Israel gather against the Benjaminites in what becomes a vicious civil war. 400,000 men assemble at Mizpah, armed to destroy the men who perpetrated the heinous crime against the *pilegesh* (20:1-2). The battle is vicious and the tribe of Benjamin is virtually annihilated. Yet the violence continues

even after the war is over. Since all of Israel has vowed not to hand over their daughters to the remaining men of Benjamin, they must find women in another way (21:1). Ultimately, the men "seize" women from Jabesh-Gilead and Shiloh (21:21). The book of Judges ends in with a slew of odious and dreadful acts. Scholar Don Michael Hudson summarizes the conclusion when he writes: "Judges is about loss: a loss of the individual which leads to a loss of the tribe, and if circumstances remain unchecked, a loss of the nation."[26]

F. Scholarship

Many ancient and medieval commentators had little or no interest in the matters of rape, abuse, and female oppression. As with most biblical stories, the traditional Jewish commentators are interested in difficult terms (like וַתִּזְנֶה in verse 2) and textual gaps (such as whether the *pilegesh* is dead or alive when the Levite finds her).[27] They tend to read the story in a way that makes the characters look more traditionally pious and righteous. Contemporary scholars have expanded the spectrum of commentary on Judges 19, taking note of elements dismissed by many ancient and medieval commentators.

One way in which modern scholarship has shifted the pendulum is by taking the *pilegesh* out of the margins and placing her in the center of the narrative. Some authors have played with rewriting and re-imagining this story, deconstructing the characters as a means of seeing them on a deeper level. Other scholars have played with the names in

[26] Don Michael Hudson, "Living in a Land of Epithets: Anonymity in Judges 19-21," JSOT 62 1994: 49.
[27] See Rabbi A.J. Rosenberg, editor. *Mikraot Gedolot* Judges, Rabbi Avrohom Fishelis and Rabbi Shmuel Fishelis, translators. (New York: The Judaica Press, Inc, 1979) 151, 158.

this piece in order to bestow more dignity upon the battered *pilegesh.*[28] They have pondered the conundrum, how does one flesh out a woman who never speaks and is rarely spoken to? How do we as readers give voice to such a character? Moreover, these modern scholars have asked, how do we as readers stand by in the face of such violence? Is there a response for us? Can we stand up for the victim when the Bible does not recognize her as such?[29] Can we give the *pilegesh* comfort or solace despite the fact that she is alone? Perhaps the most obvious question is, can we offer the *pilegesh* anything that is beyond the boundaries of the book?

G. Goals

In this thesis, I will attempt to offer my own interpretation of Judges 19, based upon the readings and scholarship of the great minds that have come before me. First, I will provide my own annotated translation of the chapter. Then, I will continue with several analytical sections, providing close readings of the text and investigations of issues pertaining to each narrative section. Lastly, I will endeavor to discuss Judges 19 as a narrative emblematic of other troubling texts in the Bible. I will explore the meaning of violent texts, our approach to them as scholars, readers, and teachers, and the challenge of calling them sacred. Rather than simply reject this text on the basis of its brutal nature, I would like to challenge readers to confront the story, digest the words, and seek out their own meaning. Ultimately, I would like to set forth a system by which we can approach difficult narratives with the honor, dignity, and sanctity that biblical texts deserve.

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[28] For example, Mieke Bal decides to call the give the *pilegesh* a name: "Beth." Mieke Bal, Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988) 90.

[29] Verse 30 of Chapter 19 is one comment that does offer a moral gloss on the situation.

Chapter 2: Annotated Translation of Judges 19

Verses 1-2: A Relationship Unravels

א וַיְהִי בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וּמֶלֶךְ אֵין בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהִי | אִישׁ לֵוִי גָּר בִּיַרְכְּתֵי הַר־אֶפְרָיִם
וַיִּקַּח־לוֹ אִשָּׁה פִּילֶגֶשׁ מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה׃

19:1 In those days when there was no king in Israel, there was a Levite man who was sojourning[30] among the remotest parts[31] of the hill country of Ephraim. Now he took for himself a woman, a *pilegesh*[32] from Bethlehem in Judah.

ב וַתִּזְנֶה עָלָיו פִּילַגְשׁוֹ וַתֵּלֶךְ מֵאִתּוֹ אֶל־בֵּית אָבִיהָ אֶל־בֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה
וַתְּהִי־שָׁם יָמִים אַרְבָּעָה חֳדָשִׁים

19:2 Then she became angry at him,[33] his *pilegesh*, and she went away from him to her father's house, to Bethlehem in Judah. And she was there for a time of four months.[34]

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[30] The word גָּר should not be translated as simply "living." Here, it carries with it nuances that are notable, especially in relation to the Levite. For example, Koehler-Baumgartner defines גָּר as "dwelling as a client (a newcomer without original rights)," 175-76. The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew defines גָּר as "sojourn, take up residence (as a resident alien)," 336. Brown-Driver-Briggs repeats this sense of dwelling as a "newcomer without original rights," 157. I have chosen to translate the word גָּר as "sojourning" because it captures the sense of temporality which defines the Levite's existence.

[31] The "remotest parts" could possibly refer to those areas outside of Beth-El or Mizpeh, two towns located within Ephraim.

[32] In this translation I have chosen not to translate the word *pilegesh* into English. The oft-used translation "concubine" carries with it many negative associations, and these connotations do a disservice to the character of the *pilegesh*, even before one has begun reading the narrative. The term "*pilegesh*," which will explored in Chapter three (see pages 25-30) has a much wider semantic range in Hebrew than the word "concubine" does in English. Therefore, it was important for me to separate the reader from the colloquial notion of the "concubine" by leaving the Hebrew transliterated.

[33] The word "וַתִּזְנֶה" is problematic and will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter three (see pages 30-36). While the literal translation of this word, according to the DCH means to "prostitute against," the secondary meaning, according to William L. Holladay, implies to "feel a dislike for," 90. The Septuagint, however translates the word as "became angry." The BHS explains this translation noting the word likely comes from "וזנה," meaning to reject, spurn or be angry, which is derived from the Akkadian *zenu*. Many accept this emendation because it would be illogical for the woman to retreat to her father's house after acting adulterously in her marriage. If she had played the whore or prostituted against him, the Levite would have sent her away, rather than her leaving on her own volition. "That was the legal way," writes Abraham Joshua Heschel in his book The Prophets, "to expel the woman who became an adulteress. The husband was not allowed to live with her." (64) Moreover, there would be very little reason for the Levite to go after her if she had been unfaithful to him.

[34] The word יָמִים is not always translated as "days." In this case, it is better translated as "a time of," a definition offered by the DCH, 183.

Verses 3-10: To Stay or To Go?

ג וַיָּקָם אִישָׁהּ וַיֵּלֶךְ אַחֲרֶיהָ לְדַבֵּר עַל־לִבָּהּ לַהֲשִׁיבָהּ [לַהֲשִׁיבָהּ] וְנַעֲרוֹ עִמּוֹ וְצֶמֶד חֲמֹרִים וַתְּבִיאֵהוּ בֵּית אָבִיהָ וַיִּרְאֵהוּ אֲבִי הַנַּעֲרָה[35] וַיִּשְׂמַח לִקְרָאתוֹ׃

19:3 Then her husband arose and went after her, to placate her[36] and bring her back;[37] with him were his servant and a pair of donkeys. She brought him in[38] to her father's house, and the girl's father saw him and he was glad to meet him.

ד וַיֶּחֱזַק־בּוֹ חֹתְנוֹ אֲבִי הַנַּעֲרָה וַיֵּשֶׁב אִתּוֹ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וַיָּלִינוּ שָׁם׃

19:4: His father in-law, the girl's father, prevailed upon him[39], and he stayed with him for three days. And they ate and drank and lodged there.[40]

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[35] The phrase אֲבִי הַנַּעֲרָה is only found in Deuteronomy 22:16. Pamela Tamarkin Reis comments on the use of this phrase, saying: "In Deut 22,15-16.19 the laws concerning a newly-married husband's charges of non-virginity are stated. The bride has married and left her father's house and is now both under her husband's authority and in danger of stoning for harlotry. Here, if the charges are false, her father protects her. The author of Judges may have specifically duplicated Deuteronomy's descriptor, אבי הנערה, father of the (vulnerable) woman, to contrast the father who protects his daughter with the father who does not. By marrying her off to the Levite, the father divests himself of responsibility for his daughter's safety and well-being" (Reis 13-14).

[36] This phrase stands out because it appears in Genesis 34:3, when Shechem approaches Dina after he rapes her. It also occurs in Ruth 2:13, when Ruth asks Boaz to act favorably towards her, for he has "דִּבַּרְתָּ עַל־לֵב" "spoken kindly to her." In 2 Samuel 19:7, Joab speaks harshly to David, telling him to "וְדַבֵּר עַל־לֵב" towards his servants, or else suffer the consequences. While the first examples of this phrase connote "speaking kindly or tenderly," this last example is translated by JPS as "placate." The sense of this phrase is that it is used when a situation needs to be smoothed over, explained, and/or justified. I have chosen this last translation because it appears more in line with the character of the Levite. Nothing in this chapter delineates him as a kind or gentle figure, therefore it seems more likely that he is going to pacify his *pilegesh* rather than court her.

[37] [לַהֲשִׁיבָהּ] לַהֲשִׁיבוֹ: One should note that the *ketiv* is with a singular, masculine, 3rd person pronoun, but the *qere* is with a singular, feminine, 3rd person pronoun. BHS notes that some manuscripts list the Ketiv as וֹ. The *qere* is the most logical option here. The Levite goes to bring the *pilegesh* back, which would necessitate a feminine suffix.

[38] According to BHS, the original Greek says, "When he reached her." The verb ויבא "and he went" has been proposed here, due to what is written in the original Greek version of the Bible. The New Oxford Bible translates this as "When he reached her father's house."

[39] Though some choose to translate this more literally, as Tikva Frymer-Kensky does with "took hold of him," I think the more abstract use of the verb is appropriate here. In 2 Chronicles 27:5, the verb is used to mean "prevail" or "win," as in combat. In 2 Samuel 24:4, the word is used to show how one argument prevails over another. In this context, there is a real sense of a power struggle between the Levite and the father. Translating the word as "prevail" implies that there was more than just hospitality behind the father's urging.

[40] In the Greek version these verbs occur in the masculine, singular, as in "*He* ate and drank." The Greek seems to place more emphasis on the Levite as an individual.

ה וַיְהִי בַּיּוֹם הָרְבִיעִי וַיַּשְׁכִּימוּ בַבֹּקֶר וַיָּקָם לָלֶכֶת וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִי הַנַּעֲרָה אֶל־חֲתָנוֹ
סְעָד לִבְּךָ פַּת־לֶחֶם וְאַחַר תֵּלֵכוּ׃

19:5 On the fourth day, they rose early in the morning, and he got up to go, but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Eat a little something to give you strength, and after you will go."

ו וַיֵּשְׁבוּ וַיֹּאכְלוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִי הַנַּעֲרָה אֶל־הָאִישׁ הוֹאֶל־נָא וְלִין
וְיִטַב לִבֶּךָ׃

19:6 So the two of them sat down and ate and drank together. Then the girl's father said to the man, "Please accept the invitation and stay overnight and enjoy yourself."

ז וַיָּקָם הָאִישׁ לָלֶכֶת וַיִּפְצַר־בּוֹ חֹתְנוֹ וַיָּשָׁב וַיָּלֶן שָׁם׃

19:7 When the man arose to go, his father-in-law strongly urged him and he turned back and spent the night there.[41]

ח וַיַּשְׁכֵּם בַּבֹּקֶר בַּיּוֹם הַחֲמִישִׁי לָלֶכֶת וַיֹּאמֶר | אֲבִי הַנַּעֲרָה סְעָד־נָא לִבֶּבְךָ וְהִתְמַהְמְהוּ
עַד־נְטוֹת הַיּוֹם וַיֹּאכְלוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם׃

19:8 He arose early in the morning on the fifth day to go. But the father of the girl said, "Please eat a little something to give you strength," and the two of them ate[42] and lingered[43] until the day stretched out.

ט וַיָּקָם הָאִישׁ לָלֶכֶת הוּא וּפִילַגְשׁוֹ וְנַעֲרוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ חֹתְנוֹ אֲבִי הַנַּעֲרָה הִנֵּה נָא רָפָה הַיּוֹם
לָעֶרֶב לִינוּ־נָא הִנֵּה חֲנוֹת הַיּוֹם לִין פֹּה וְיִיטַב לִבֶּבְךָ וְהַשְׁכַּמְתֶּם מָחָר לְדַרְכְּכֶם וְהָלַכְתָּ
לְאָהֳלֶךָ

19:9 Then the man got up to go, he and his *pilegesh* and his servant. But the girl's father said to him, "Look—please: The day has faded away to evening. Please spend the night. Look, the day has waned. Spend the night here and enjoy yourself,[44] and tomorrow you can wake early in the morning for your journey, and you will go home.

י וְלֹא־אָבָה הָאִישׁ לָלוּן וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיָּבֹא עַד־נֹכַח יְבוּס הִיא יְרוּשָׁלִָם וְעִמּוֹ צֶמֶד חֲמוֹרִים
חֲבוּשִׁים וּפִילַגְשׁוֹ עִמּוֹ׃

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[41] Notice the number of verbs and the constant action. The rhythm is very peripatetic.

[42] Note that the Greek version has "ate and drank."

[43] This root מהה appears in Genesis 19:16, the story of Lot in Sodom. There are many linguistic parallels between Judges 19 and Genesis 19, suggesting that the author of Judges was familiar with Genesis 19, or vice versa. See Chapter six, pages 61-63, for a more detailed discussion.

[44] Note how many times the word "לב" is used: 19:5, 19:6, and 19:9. Since each phrase is an idiomatic expression, the translations do not reflect the repetition of the word.

19:10 But the man was not willing to spend the night, and he got up and he left, until he arrived in front of Jebus, that is Jerusalem. And with him was a pair of saddled donkeys, and his *pilegesh* was with him.[45]

Verses 11-15: The Foreign vs. The Familiar

יא הֵם עִם־יְבוּס וְהַיּוֹם רַד מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר הַנַּעַר אֶל־אֲדֹנָיו לְכָה־נָּא וְנָסוּרָה
אֶל־עִיר־הַיְבוּסִי הַזֹּאת וְנָלִין בָּהּ׃

19:11 They were close to Jebus and the day was far spent. The servant said to his master, "Come, let us turn into this city of Jebus, so that we may spend the night there."[46]

יב וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלָיו אֲדֹנָיו לֹא נָסוּר אֶל־עִיר נָכְרִי אֲשֶׁר
לֹא־מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵמָּה וְעָבַרְנוּ עַד־גִּבְעָה׃

19:12 But his master said to him, "We will not turn into a foreign city, which is not of the people Israel. But, we will cross over to Gibeah."

יג וַיֹּאמֶר לְנַעֲרוֹ לֵךְ וְנִקְרְבָה בְּאַחַד הַמְּקֹמוֹת
וְלַנּוּ בַּגִּבְעָה אוֹ בָרָמָה׃

19:13 Then he said to his servant, "Come let's approach one of the places, that we may sleep in Gibeah or Ramah.

יד וַיַּעַבְרוּ וַיֵּלֵכוּ וַתָּבֹא לָהֶם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ אֵצֶל הַגִּבְעָה אֲשֶׁר לְבִנְיָמִן׃

19:14 And so they continued on and went, and the sun came [down] upon them near Gibeah, which was of Benjamin.

טו וַיָּסֵרוּ שָׁם לָבוֹא לָלוּן בַּגִּבְעָה וַיָּבֹא וַיֵּשֶׁב בִּרְחוֹב הָעִיר וְאֵין אִישׁ מְאַסֵּף־אוֹתָם הַבַּיְתָה
לָלוּן׃

19:15 So they turned in there to go in to spend the night in Gibeah. He came and sat on the street of the city, but there was no one to take them home to spend the night.

Verses 16-26: When Hospitality Invites Hostility

טז וְהִנֵּה | אִישׁ זָקֵן בָּא מִן־מַעֲשֵׂהוּ מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה בָּעֶרֶב וְהָאִישׁ מֵהַר אֶפְרַיִם וְהוּא־גָר בַּגִּבְעָה
וְאַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם בְּנֵי יְמִינִ

19:16 But, look, in the evening, an old man came from his work in the field. Now the man was from the hill country of Ephraim, but he lived in Gibeah, and the people of the place were Benjaminites.

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[45] BHS notes that the last "with him" is probably "and his servant," as referenced in two Greek versions. By substituting the term "and his servant" for "his *pilegesh*" the text demonstrates bias against the *pilegesh*. In the Greek text, the *pilegesh* has a more dimished role.

[46] Again, notice another synonym in this verse for "declining" or "waning," רַד. The author is highlighting this concept of the fading day, creating a very ominous tone.

יז וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא אֶת־הָאִישׁ הָאוֹרֵחַ בִּרְחֹב הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ הַזָּקֵן אָנָה תֵלֵךְ וּמֵאַיִן תָּבוֹא׃

19:17 He lifted up his eyes[47] and he saw the man, the guest, in the street of the city. The old man said to him, "Where are you going and from whence do you come?"

יח וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו עֹבְרִים אֲנַחְנוּ מִבֵּית־לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה עַד־יַרְכְּתֵי הַר־אֶפְרַיִם מִשָּׁם אָנֹכִי וָאֵלֵךְ עַד־בֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה וְאֶת־בֵּית יְהוָה אֲנִי הֹלֵךְ וְאֵין אִישׁ מְאַסֵּף אוֹתִי הַבָּיְתָה׃

19:18 He said to him, "We are crossing from Beit Lechem of Judah up to the remotest parts of the hill country of Ephraim. I am from there, but I went to Beit Lechem of Judah. And I am going to the House of the Eternal[48], but there is no person who will take me into [his] home.

יט וְגַם־תֶּבֶן גַּם־מִסְפּוֹא יֵשׁ לַחֲמוֹרֵינוּ וְגַם לֶחֶם וְיַיִן יֶשׁ־לִי וְלַאֲמָתֶךָ וְלַנַּעַר עִם־עֲבָדֶיךָ אֵין מַחְסוֹר כָּל־דָּבָר׃

19:19 Our donkeys also have straw and fodder, and I too have bread and wine for me and for your handmaiden and for the servant with your servants. We don't lack anything."

כ וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ הַזָּקֵן שָׁלוֹם לָךְ רַק כָּל־מַחְסוֹרְךָ עָלָי רַק בָּרְחוֹב אַל־תָּלֶן׃

19:20 The old man said, "Peace be upon you; I will take care of your needs, just do not spend the night on the street."[49]

כא וַיְבִיאֵהוּ לְבֵיתוֹ וַיָּבָל [וַיָּבָל] לַחֲמוֹרִים וַיִּרְחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיהֶם וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ׃

19:21 And he brought him into his house and mixed fodder for the donkeys. He bathed their feet and they ate and drank.

כב הֵמָּה מֵיטִיבִים אֶת־לִבָּם וְהִנֵּה אַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר אַנְשֵׁי בְנֵי־בְלִיַּעַל נָסַבּוּ אֶת־הַבַּיִת מִתְדַּפְּקִים עַל־הַדָּלֶת וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־הָאִישׁ בַּעַל הַבַּיִת הַזָּקֵן לֵאמֹר הוֹצֵא אֶת־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־בָּא אֶל־בֵּיתְךָ וְנֵדָעֵנּוּ׃[50]

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[47] "וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו": This phrase has many echoes throughout the Bible. In Genesis 18:2, Abraham "lifts his eyes" to see the three angels standing before him. In Genesis 22:4, Abraham again "lifts up his eyes" to see Mount Moriah before him. In Genesis 22:13, Abraham "lifts up his eyes" to see the ram. In Genesis 24:63, Isaac "lifts up his eyes" to see the camel caravan carrying Rebecca. In all of these examples, the character "lifts up his eyes" to see some thing of great, even divine significance. Here, the phrase may be used ironically. Perhaps the old man was looking for something great in the Levite, but ultimately, he only brings him trouble.

[48] Greek version says, "I am going home." This substitution creates an image of a less pious Levite.

[49] The phrase, "רַק כָּל־מַחְסוֹרְךָ עָלָי" is translated literally as "all your needs be upon me." This phrase, however, does not translate so well into English. After seeking out other translations, it was clear that almost all included the pronoun "I" as a way of emphasizing the voice and the offer of the old man. I therefore chose to insert the "I" in order to make the sentence more idiomatic.

[50] Much of the language here parallels the language used in Genesis 19, in the story of Lot in Sodom. For example, in Genesis 19:5, it says, "הוֹצִיאֵם אֵלֵינוּ וְנֵדָעָה אֹתָם׃" which is very similar to the language used in Judges 19:22. As well, the Hebrew in Genesis 19:8 is very similar to that in Judges 19:24:
הִנֵּה־נָא לִי שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ אִישׁ

19:22 They were enjoying themselves, and suddenly the men of the city, a depraved crowd,[51] surrounded the house, beating on the door. They said to the man, the old owner of the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house, so that we can know him!"[52]

כג וַיֵּצֵא אֲלֵיהֶם הָאִישׁ בַּעַל הַבַּיִת וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אַל־אַחַי אַל־תְּרֵעוּ נָא אַחֲרֵי אֲשֶׁר־בָּא הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה אֶל־בֵּיתִי אַל־תַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־הַנְּבָלָה הַזֹּאת׃

19:23 The man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers! Please do not do such evil. Seeing that this man has come to my house, do not do this outrage!

כד הִנֵּה בִתִּי הַבְּתוּלָה וּפִילַגְשֵׁהוּ אוֹצִיאָה־נָּא אוֹתָם וְעַנּוּ אוֹתָם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם וְלָאִישׁ הַזֶּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ דָּבָר הַנְּבָלָה הַזֹּאת׃

19:24 Here is my virgin daughter, and his *pilegesh*. Let me please bring them out to you, so you may humiliate them[53] and do to them what is good in your eyes. But to this man, you shall not commit any such outrage!"

כה וְלֹא־אָבוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לִשְׁמֹעַ לוֹ וַיַּחֲזֵק הָאִישׁ בְּפִילַגְשׁוֹ וַיּוֹצֵא אֲלֵיהֶם הַחוּץ וַיֵּדְעוּ אוֹתָהּ וַיִּתְעַלְלוּ־בָהּ כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה עַד־הַבֹּקֶר וַיְשַׁלְּחוּהָ בַּעֲלוֹת [כַּעֲלוֹת] הַשָּׁחַר׃

19:25 The men were not willing to listen to him, so the man took hold of his *pilegesh* and brought [her] to them outside.[54] They knew her and they abused[55] her all night long, until the morning. And they let her loose as the dawn was breaking.

כו וַתָּבֹא הָאִשָּׁה לִפְנוֹת הַבֹּקֶר וַתִּפֹּל פֶּתַח בֵּית־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־אֲדוֹנֶיהָ שָׁם עַד־הָאוֹר׃

19:26 Then the woman came at the dawning of the day, and she collapsed upon the entrance of the man's house, where her master was, until it was light.

אוֹצִיאָה־נָּא אֹתָהֶן אֲלֵיכֶם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶן כַּטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם רַק לָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵל אַל־תַּעֲשׂוּ דָבָר כִּי־עַל־כֵּן בָּאוּ בְּצֵל קֹרָתִי׃
See pages 61-63 for a more detailed discussion.

[51] In Genesis 19:4, the men who approach the door are just called "אַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר," but here they are called "אַנְשֵׁי בְנֵי־בְלִיַּעַל" or scoundrels. When you look through the Bible, you see that the בְנֵי־בְלִיַּעַל are not only wicked, but usually blasphemers as well. In Deuteronomy 13:14, the men are referred to as "scoundrels" who encourage others to worship the gods of ba'al. In 1 Samuel 2:12, Eli the Priest's sons are called "אַנְשֵׁי בְנֵי־בְלִיַּעַל" who have no regard for God. Therefore, calling the men by this name already classifies them as evildoers.

[52] Rashi interprets וְנֵדְעֶנּוּ in a homosexual vein, saying it is: "משכב זכר."

[53] When used in the *piel* form, this verb means to "humiliate" or "oppress." See Numbers 24:24: "They subject Asshur, subject Eber..." and Judges 20:5: "They ravished my concubine..." when the Levite describes, in his own words, the scene at Gibeah.

[54] When the Radak commented on this verse, he said, "ויחזק האיש בפלגשו- הוציאה על כרחה להציל עצמו" that "he took her out against her will, to save himself."

[55] This word, when used in the *hitpael*, with the preposition "ב"is often translated as "to make sport of" or "to make a mockery of." See Numbers 22:29, 1 Samuel 6:6, 1 Chronicles 10:4. But the meaning can be extended to "abuse" as in Jeremiah 38:19.

Verses 27-30: Violence Begets Violence

כז וַיָּקָם אֲדֹנֶיהָ בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּפְתַּח דַּלְתוֹת הַבַּיִת וַיֵּצֵא לָלֶכֶת לְדַרְכּוֹ וְהִנֵּה הָאִשָּׁה פִּילַגְשׁוֹ נֹפֶלֶת פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת וְיָדֶיהָ עַל־הַסַּף׃

19:27 When her master arose in the morning, he opened the doors of the house and went outside to go on his way. And here, the woman, his *pilegesh*, was collapsed at the entrance of the house, and her hands were across the threshold.

כח וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ קוּמִי וְנֵלֵכָה וְאֵין עֹנֶה וַיִּקָּחֶהָ עַל־הַחֲמוֹר וַיָּקָם הָאִישׁ וַיֵּלֶךְ לִמְקֹמוֹ׃

19:28 He said to her, "Get up so we can go!"[56] But there was no answer.[57] So he took her up on his donkey, and the man arose and went towards his destination.[58]

כט וַיָּבֹא אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וַיַּקַּח אֶת־הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת[59] וַיַּחֲזֵק בְּפִילַגְשׁוֹ וַיְנַתְּחֶהָ לַעֲצָמֶיהָ לִשְׁנֵים עָשָׂר נְתָחִים וַיְשַׁלְּחֶהָ בְּכֹל גְּבוּל יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

19:29 When he arrived at his house, he took a cleaver[60], seized his *pilegesh* and cut her up in parts,[61] ligament by ligament, into twelve pieces. And he sent her to all the territory of Israel.

ל וְהָיָה כָּל־הָרֹאֶה וְאָמַר לֹא־נִהְיְתָה וְלֹא־נִרְאֲתָה כָּזֹאת לְמִיּוֹם עֲלוֹת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה שִׂימוּ־לָכֶם עָלֶיהָ עֲצוּ וְדַבֵּרוּ׃

19:30 And every witness said, "Never has there been or have we seen anything like this, since the day the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until now. Consider it, take counsel, and speak."

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[56] These are the only words he ever speaks to her.

[57] She does not answer because she has been raped all night long. In the Septuagint, the text reads, "She did not answer, for she was dead."

[58] BDB, entry 2A notes the idiomatic definition "destination." I chose destination because it implies more wandering and reminds the reader that the Levite is still in transit.

[59] Whereas at the beginning, the text says, "וַיִּקַּח־לוֹ אִשָּׁה" (19:1) now the text reads "וַיַּקַּח אֶת־הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת."

[60] Notice the same word, "הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת" is used in Genesis 22:6 and 22:10. This is the scene of the *Akeidah*, when Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his son, Isaac. "Cleaver" is the definition used by Robert Alter. He quotes E.A. Speiser when he explains that the term "הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת" is not the common biblical term for "knife." Alter notes that this scene uses other words that imply "butchering" here. Because this is such a violent act, I chose this translation for the word "הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת" in order to distinguish it from the rather commonplace word "knife." Robert Alter, The Five Books of Moses, 109. The use of this word suggests that the author of this text knew the Bible well.

[61] This phrase is often used in conjunction with sacrifice and the cutting up of the animal. See Exodus 29:17: "Cut up the ram into sections..." and Leviticus 1:12: "When it has been cut up into sections, the priest shall lay them out..."

Chapter 3: A Relationship Unravels

Judges 19: 1-2:

[1] In those days when there was no king in Israel, there was a Levite man who was sojourning among the remotest parts of the hill country of Ephraim. Now he took for himself a woman, a *pilegesh* from Bethlehem in Judah.

[2] Then she became angry at him, his *pilegesh*, and she went away from him to her father's house, to Bethlehem in Judah. And she was there for a time of four months.

A. Background

Readers are first introduced to Judges 19 with the opening statement, "In those days when there was no king in Israel." This foreboding clause, which is repeated in Judges 17:6; 18:1; and 21:25, the very last line of the book, clearly points to the circumstances here in this chapter. There is no king to watch over the land or the people, no king to serve as a behavioral model, no king to keep the peace in a land filled with violence and war. The phrase in 17:6 and 21:25 continues, "and every man did what was correct in his eyes'" so the educated reader of Judges 19 cannot help but think of these words and the resultant lack of justice, righteousness, and morality. Hence, this first verse creates an emotional overlay for this chapter.

The essence of these two verses, however, is to introduce readers to the Levite and the *pilegesh*, the main characters of this narrative, and to contextualize the story to come. What becomes very important here are the definitions of "Levite" and "*pilegesh.*" These titles are the only labels given to the characters; they have no other names or designations. Scholars note the significance of this namelessness. Some say it encourages readers to see the Levite and the *pilegesh* as social symbols rather than individuals.[62] Writer Pamela Tamarkin Reis states that the namelessness "reflects the

[62] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, Reading the Women of the Bible, (Schocken Books, New York, 2002) 118.

increasing dehumanization and disintegration of society."[63] Understanding what it means to be a Levite and a *pilegesh* is crucial to understanding the narrative. The verb "וַתִּזְנֶה" which appears in verse 2, also represents a critical piece of this account. This verb is the defining act which sets this entire story in motion. Its ambiguous definition complicates the story and demands a thorough analysis.

B. The Levite

Who is a Levite? The name "Levi" first appears in the Genesis narrative. Levi is the third son of Jacob and Leah, born to into the family who will represent the future tribes of Israel. The Levite tribe was distinguished among the others as the group designated for service of the Mishkan. The Levites were given the responsibilities of carrying the ark, caring for the Tabernacle, and managing the duties of the sanctuary. The Levites also served the priests, attending to them in their various duties. In this hierarchical system, the Levites were inferior to their fellow priests. Writes Ben-Zion Schereschewsky, author of the article "Levi" in the Encyclopedia Judaica: "This appointment of the Levites as ministers of God resulted in their becoming wanderers during the period of the Judges, without any permanent possession in the country."[64] Though there are certain towns designated for the Levites, this tribal group nonetheless lives in and among the other tribes of Israel.[65] Once the Israelite religion becomes

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[63] Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "The Levite's Concubine: New Light on a Dark Story," Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament (Spring 2006, vol. 20, no. 1), 4.
[64] Ben-Zion Schereschewsky, "Levi," Encyclopedia Judaica, CD ROM Edition 1.0. (Israel: Judaica Multimedia Ltd, 1997).
[65] Reis 4.

centralized in Jerusalem, the Levites are "reckoned in the Bible among those needing support, such as the stranger, the orphan, and the widow."[66]

The Levite, therefore, is a very dichotomous figure. On one hand, he has been selected for holy service, an honorific position despite the less than glamorous details of the job.[67] On the other hand, the Levite is an incessant wanderer, destined to be a nomad for all time, and always dependent upon others for compensation, sustenance, and support. The Levite of Judges 19, for example, lives in Ephraim. Yet he is not an Ephraimite, and so he is marked as different or other from the very start of the narrative. Even the verb "גּוּר" which can mean to "reside" or "dwell," also means "sojourn." Though the Levite lives in Ephraim, his place there is temporary. He is always a sojourner.

Moreover, the text also implies there is something awry with the Levite. The first verse of the narrative begins, "In those days when there was no king in Israel..." The second phrase of that famous sentence, "and every man did what was correct in his eyes," is left off, and is instead replaced with, "there was a Levite man..." This substitution implies that the Levite is one of those "men," a vigilante who lives by his own standards rather than those set forth by God. Therefore the story begins with him as a marked man, of dubious standing from the start.

Contemporary feminist scholars disagree in their interpretations of the Levite. Phyllis Trible, author of Texts of Terror, sees the Levite as a man with an esteemed position in society. He is clearly superior to the *pilegesh*, who Trible views as more than

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[66] Ben-Zion Schereschewsky, "Levi," Encyclopedia Judaica, CD ROM Edition 1.0. (Israel: Judaica Multimedia Ltd, 1997).

[67] The Levite could be considered a kind of ancient janitor. Among other duties, he was in charge of clearing out the carcasses and cleaning up the mess after the sacrifices.

a slave than anything else. Throughout her analysis, Trible refers to the Levite as "master," always reminding the reader of the inequality she sees between the two figures.[68]

But not every scholar concurs with Tribles' reading of the Levite. Tikva Frymer-Kensky sees a more nuanced version of the Levite. She asserts that though the Levite is one of God's "shock troops," a privileged protector of the faith, he is nonetheless an itinerant wanderer. Levites were landless people dependent upon the support and assistance of others. They had no predetermined place in society and were completely shut out of the tribal land system. Frymer-Kensky therefore sees the Levite as other, "an 'outsider' everywhere." She adds, "He did not dwell among his own extended kin, and his loyalties to the people among whom he lived may have been suspect." He is an unstable force in society, a person whose status automatically marks him as other. Therefore, Frymer-Kensky concludes, "The Levite was a figure of both power and danger, centrality and marginality."[69]

Reis raises a number of questions regarding the Levite. She is suspicious of this man who sojourns in Ephraim. Reis states, "We immediately distrust...a Levite sojourning in Ephraim. Why is he not living in one of the cities allotted to Levites? How does he support himself away from his appropriate milieu?"[70] Reis associates this Levite with the unnamed Levite who appears in the preceding chapter: "Is he perhaps another such scoundrel as the anonymous itinerant Levite sojourning in Ephraim in the preceding chapter (Judges 18:18,20) whose "heart is glad" to play the priest, for a price, before

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[68] Phyllis Trible. Texts of Terror, (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1984) 66.
[69] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, Reading the Women of the Bible, (Schocken Books, New York, 2002) 118-119.
[70] Reis 4. In reference to the Levite cities, Reis notes: See Num 35, Jos 21, 1 Chr 6.

graven and molten images?"[71] The Levite's peripatetic nature is disconcerting, for it presupposes there is a reason why he has not settled in one place. Perhaps he has been kicked out, perhaps he has been banished. Such information is not provided in the text and remains speculation.

C. The *Pilegesh*

Perhaps the most pressing issue arising in these first verses concerns the definition of a *pilegesh*. More so than the Levite, the *pilegesh* is difficult to understand. The Koehler and Baumgartner biblical dictionary defines the *pilegesh* first as a "wife, in the older kind of marriage in which the wife stays in her father's house."[72] Schereschewsky however, states that the concubine was a "marital companion of inferior status to a wife," giving a more nuanced understanding of the *pilegesh* and her familial.[73] Meanwhile, both the Brown Driver Briggs and William J. Holladay dictionaries provide a highly reductionist definition: simply "concubine."[74] Each of these resources gives a slightly different definition of the term *pilegesh*, demonstrating to readers the fluidity and interpretive range of the word. The term "*pilegesh*" is not a simple one, and dismissing it as such is a disservice to both the character and the text.

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[71] Reis 4.
[72] Walter Baumgartner and Ludwig Koehler, The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, (Leiden, New York, E.J. Brill, 1994) 929.
[73] Ben-Zion Schereschewsky, "Concubine," Encyclopedia Judaica, CD ROM Edition 1.0. (Israel: Judaica Multimedia Ltd, 1997).
[74] Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds, The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, (Peabody, MA, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001) 811. For the record, BDB also offers "paramour" as a secondary understanding for the word.
William L.Holladay, ed, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, (Leiden, the Netherlands, E.J. Brill, 1988) 292.

The word "פִּילֶגֶשׁ" (*pilegesh*) is used several times throughout the biblical text. At face value, the word implies a woman, not the primary wife, who shares a sexual relationship with a man. Genesis 36:12 states: "Timna was a *pilegesh* of Esau's son Eliphaz; she bore Amalek to Eliphaz." It seems clear that Timna is not considered a "wife" for the simple reason that she is not labeled as such, like Adah, Esau's wife named above. Saul is also said to have laid with a *pilegesh* in 2 Samuel 3:7, again a woman of separate stature than a wife.

But the complications begin to arise when comparisons are made to a pair of texts in Genesis. In Genesis 35:22, Bilhah is called a *pilegesh*. She has born Jacob children and also sleeps with his son Reuben. But in Genesis 29:29, Bilhah is described as a "שִׁפְחָה" or maidservant. This designation clearly diminishes Bilhah's status. Whether or not she is considered a "wife" she is nonetheless secondary to Rachel. Still, what is interesting is that Keturah, called Abraham's "אִשָּׁה," or "wife" in Genesis 25:1, is later called "Abraham's *pilegesh*" in 1 Chronicles 1:32. In this case, she was undoubtedly termed a wife in the first narrative. The author may have used the term "*pilegesh*" to distinguish Keturah from Sarah, and denigrate her in the process.

All of these biblical occurrences build a layered understanding of what it means to be a *pilegesh*. Primarily speaking, the relationship between a man and a *pilegesh* is not considered an illicit one in the biblical text. It is sanctioned by the authors. How do we know? The children of these relationships are counted among the legacies of their fathers. Consider the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah; they constitute a portion of the twelve tribes of Israel. The relationships with these *pilegshim* are legitimate, therefore, though they are nonetheless different and separate from the bond shared with a (primary) wife.

Our understanding of the *pilegesh* can also be informed by information about the practice of concubinage in the surrounding ancient Near East, where the father of the house often had relations with multiple women of various statures in addition to his primary wife.[75] According to Walter Jacob, in ancient Israel, "the *Pilegesh* was second to the main wife and had definite rights as did her children." Later on, the understanding of the *pilegesh* changed: "Among the Romans and Greco-Roman Jews, the *Pilegesh* became a mistress of doubtful legal status, and in Roman law, she had no legal status."[76] Still, the concubine system became an accepted part of life during these years, and many were members of society's upper echelons.

Thus, when the rabbis of the Talmud and the medieval commentators write about the *pilegesh*, they often refer to this later, Roman understanding of the term "*pilegesh*." For example, in Sanhedrin 21a the question is asked: "What is the difference between a wife and a *pilegesh*?" Rabbi Yehuda says that a wife is designated as such with a *ketubah* and through *kiddushin*, while the *pilegesh* has neither *ketubah* nor *kiddushin*.[77] Meanwhile, the Palestinian Talmud claimed that the *pilegesh* had *kiddushin*, but no *ketubah*.[78]

One factor that has made the understanding of the term "*pilegesh*" more complicated is its association with the English word "concubine." J. Cheryl Exum asserts that the "English translation, 'concubine,' gives the impression that she is less valued,

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[75] Louis Epstein, "The Institution of Concubinage Among Jews," Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research, vol. 6, pp. 153.

[76] Walter Jacob ed. "Concubinage as an Alternative to Marriage," American Reform Responsa, (New York, NY, CCAR Press, 1983) 1-2.

[77] Sanhedrin 21a:

מאי נשים ומאי פלגשים? אמר רב יהודה אמר רב
נשים בכתובה ובקידושין, פלגשים בלא כתובה ובלא קידושין

[78] Jacob 1-2.

and probably more expendable than a legitimate wife," which might not be the case.[79] In English, a concubine is typically defined as a mistress or sexual servant, while the Hebrew definition suggests that a *pilegesh* may be a kind of legitimate wife, albeit of secondary status.[80] All of the negative associations that come with the word in English should not be applied to the Judges 19 narrative. This *pilegesh* is not a concubine as we understand the English term today. Therefore, it seems prudent and proactive to employ the transliterated term "*pilegesh*" in this thesis, instead of the somewhat misleading translation "concubine."

Mieke Bal and Exum, two feminist scholars, give more dignity to the *pilegesh* by bestowing her with a name. Bal writes, "The woman who is so utterly victimized in chapter 19...can no longer be referred to as 'the concubine.'"[81] She claims the character must be renamed and reframed. Bal chooses the name "*Beth*," a word meaning "house." According to Bal, the name not only references the place of her birth, Bethlehem, but the "house" motif that figures so prominently throughout the story. *Beth* is also resonant of the Hebrew term "*bat,*" meaning "daughter." According to Bal, the father-daughter relationship is of utmost importance in this narrative.

Exum looks to Bal as an inspiration for naming the *pilegesh*. Exum, who analogizes the story to the Bathsheba and David narrative, chooses the name "*Bath-sheber* (daughter of breaking)." She writes:

> I choose Bath-sheber as a name for this woman because it can serve to remind us both of what happens to her at the hands of the men of Gibeah

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[79] J. Cheryl Exum, Fragmented Women, (Valley Forge, PA, Trinity Press International, 1993) 177.
[80] Dictionary.com states, "a woman who cohabits with a man to whom she is not legally married, esp. one regarded as socially or sexually subservient; mistress." 17 December, 2006 <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/concubine>.
[81] Mieke Bal, Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988), 89.

> and also of her subsequent dismemberment by her husband...I intend Bath-sheber's name to signify the role feminist criticism plays in breaking open the text's phallocentric ideology and exposing the buried and encoded messages it gives to women.[82]

Naming the *pilegesh*, therefore, is a way to establish her individuality, give her a narrative voice, and flesh out her identity.

But naming the *pilegesh* also takes a very important piece away from the narrative. Doing so gives the *pilegesh* a false sense of dignity and respect, when the text refuses to do as such. Naming the *pilegesh* is reading against the text and its principles. Rather than helping the *pilegesh*, this exercise actually harms her. By remaking the *pilegesh* into a stronger, more independent figure, both Bal and Exum risk obscuring her true suffering self. The reader cannot nor should not be shielded from the bleakness of her character or her situation.

Contemporary scholars have chosen to interpret the *pilegesh* in a variety of ways. Trible sees the *pilegesh* as occupying a very low position in society, much lower than that of the Levite.[83] She maintains that the concubine does not even have the rank of secondary wife, but is more like a slave than anything else. Even the grammatical structure of the first line lends weight to her interpretation; the Levite is the subject and the concubine the object, he dominates her. Trible even goes as far to assert that "he owns her."[84]

Frymer-Kensky disagrees with Trible in her reading of the concubine. She does not refer to the concubine as a slave but as a lower ranking wife. She does, however echo Trible in her description of the power structure present between the two characters. She writes, "When the Levite takes a wife-*pilegesh*, a second-class wife, the power

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[82] Exum 176-177.
[83] Trible 66.
[84] Trible 66.

dissymmetry between husband and wife is even more pronounced than in the average patriarchal household."[85]

Reis is unwilling to make a conclusion with regards to the status of the *pilegesh*. She states: "The requirements and expectations of biblical concubinage are unclear. Abraham leaves his estate to the son of his wife, Sarah (25:5), while he gives gifts to the sons of his concubines (v 6)." Reis remarks that it is somewhat clear that she has a lower status than an ordinary wife, but "we do not know if her social position is below that of a never-married woman, a divorced woman, a widow, a servant, or a slave."[86]

In spite of these interpretive debates, what is clear is that the *pilegesh* is a woman of low stature. She is dependent upon the means of the men who surround her and therefore is subservient to them as well. Though she is not, as Trible states, a "slave," she is neither an autonomous woman as Bal and Exum claim. Her act of independence leads to her utter paralysis. After she acts out once, she is never able to act out again.

D. What does it mean to "וַתִּזְנֶה"?

The interpretation of this story is largely contingent not only upon understanding the term "*pilegesh*," but also upon understanding what she does. Verse two reads: "וַתִּזְנֶה עָלָיו פִּילַגְשׁוֹ." The crux of the issue centers about the phrase "וַתִּזְנֶה עָלָיו." It is this act which causes her to go away from the Levite and back to her father's house. This act sets the entire narrative in motion, for the Levite would never have journeyed through Gibeah if he did not first go to Bethlehem to retrieve his *pilegesh*. But what exactly did the *pilegesh* do? What does the phrase, "וַתִּזְנֶה עָלָיו" actually mean? Like

[85] Frymer-Kensky 119.
[86] Reis 2, 4 .

the term *pilegesh*, or perhaps even more so, the word *vatizneh* is a veritable semantic quagmire. Each possible definition produces a vastly different interpretation.

The first level translation for the word "וַתִּזְנֶה," which comes from the root *zayin-nun-heh* is, according to the Brown-Driver-Briggs dictionary, to "be or act as a harlot, or commit fornication."[87] The Koehler and Baumgartner dictionary states more precisely that the verb primarily means "to have dealings with another man, be unfaithful."[88] In the Bible, there are many instances which support this first-level, literal definition of the word.[89]

The second level translation for the word deals with its figurative meaning: the root *zayin-nun-heh* is used to describe apostasy. The relationship between a man and an adulterous woman becomes the representation of God and a disloyal Israel. The second definition in Holladay is simply, "in relation to God, be faithless."[90] When people worship other gods besides YHVH, they are considered adulterers, as being faithless to God. Evidence for this level utilization is also strewn throughout the Bible, especially in the Prophets.[91]

Holladay also identifies a second classification for the word. In his dictionary, there is a specific entry for "וַתִּזְנֶה" which he terms "to feel a dislike for."[92] The singular

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[87] Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds. The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001) 275.
[88] Koehler-Baumgartner 274.
[89] See Deuteronomy 22:21 which speaks of bringing a bride, who is suspected of "committing fornication" while still in her father's home, before the public for judgment. In Joshua 2:1, the spies are said to go to the house of a prostitute (זוֹנָה). In Leviticus 21:7, the Bible states that a man shall not marry a "harlot."
[90] William Holladay, ed. A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988) 90.
[91] See Ezekiel 23:30 and Isaiah 23:17 in which the word "fornicate" is used to describe seeking out the gods of foreign nations. See also Exodus 34:15: "You shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for they will lust after their gods..."
[92] Holladay 90.

example for this entry is Judges 19:2. Along these same lines, the Dictionary of Classical Hebrew translates the word, only in this chapter, as "to be angry."[93] Both the Dictionary of Classical Hebrew and the BHS edition of the Bible note that this translation may stem from a verb emendation.[94] Both also mention that the word וַתִּזְנֶה might have evolved from ותזנח, a root meaning to reject, or be angry. This root (*zion-nun-chet*), states the BHS, is derived from the Akkadian *zenu*, which also means to spurn or become angry. The most disconcerting issue here is the fact that there are no other examples in the Bible in which the word is utilized in this way, other than perhaps this chapter. But there are many interpreters and translations that choose to veer away from the idea of prostitution, some of whom will be explored below.

Perhaps the earliest interpreters to dismiss the idea of adultery or whoring were the ancient rabbis. In Gittin 6b, as previously mentioned in the introduction, the rabbis affirm that the *pilegesh* did not play the whore. Rather, they read the term "וַתִּזְנֶה" to mean she did not practice proper cleanliness. That is, she might have served a meal with a fly in it, causing her to be diminished in the eyes of the Levite. This interpretation served the rabbinic agenda very well, for it made the characters appear less exotic and more pious, less coarse and more concerned with halachic law (which did not exist during biblical times). But the goals of the ancient rabbis were very different than those of the modern scholars.

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[93] David J.A. Clines, ed, Dictionary of Classical Hebrew. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 123.

[94] K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia. (Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977) 435.

For example, Robert Boling rejects the "prostitution" translation for the word וַתִּזְנֶה on semiotic grounds. He feels this particular translation does not make sense in the context of the narrative. Writes Boling, "It is strange that the woman would become a prostitute and then run home. Moreover, the verb *znh* is not elsewhere construed with *'l* in this sense."[95] Boling identifies two issues: 1) A father, especially in this context, would not necessarily welcome a daughter who has been faithless into his home. Moreover, a daughter would not necessarily think to run to her father's house if she were prostituting herself. 2) Boling examines the preposition used with the verb, and notes that there are no other combinations of this type in the Bible. The unique construction demands a unique translation.

Bal also explores the illogical nature of the "prostitution" translation, echoing Boling's reasoning and adding that simply "walking out" on her husband "would count as a breach of marriage." Because the *pilegesh* has no right to request divorce, any action against her husband and any act to end her marriage might cause her to be construed as an adulteress, which Bal says "has come to be considered equal to a prostitute."[96] Bal adds that "ideology often corrupts philology," and that many readers, especially religious ones, eisegetically read sexuality into the text, when it does not necessarily merit such a reading. [97]

Bal places her interpretation within the context of patrilocal and virilocal marriage. In the patrilocal system, which is rooted in a tribal, more nomadic system of living, a wife lives with her father. She goes to her husband for occasional conjugal visits, but makes

[95] Boling 273-274.
[96] Bal 81-82.
[97] Bal 82.

her life with her father. In the virilocal system, of which most readers are familiar, a wife leaves her family's tribe to go live with her husband. Therefore, Bal reads this word וַתִּזְנֶה to mean unfaithfulness against her *father* not her husband. That is, having stayed with the Levite for so long, the *pilegesh* has acted unfaithfully to the institution of patrilocal marriage. Bal admits, however, that the ambiguity of the verse leaves room for a deeper interpretation. That is, not only does the father feel jilted, but the Levite does as well (she leaves him and goes back to her father's house). She has been unfaithful to each in a very particular way. Ultimately, Bal reads this narrative as a "struggle [between] the father against his 'successor'- the virilocal husband- the man who takes over the daughter." Bal ominously adds that "the woman will die from the competition."[98]

The most obvious problem with Bal's creative interpretation is the fact that the patrilocal system is very uncommon in the biblical context. Though Bal points to Samson's marriage with the Philistine, she does not have much more evidence supporting her argument. Most readers are more familiar with virilocal marriage, which is also more common in the Bible. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Moses and Tzipporah—all of these are representations of virilocal marriage.

Another twist on the word וַתִּזְנֶה comes from Reis, who refuses to run circles around a word whose definition seems so clear. *Zanah* refers to "prostitution," she writes.[99] She asserts that what is most important about this phrase is not the verb, but rather the preposition, *'l*. Looking at a number of other biblical examples of this preposition, Reis determines that the word should be translated as "on account of him" or

[98] Bal 88.
[99] Reis 7.

"for him." She therefore reads this phrase: "And his concubine whored for him." In other words, the *pilegesh* was not acting as an adulteress; rather, the Levite was prostituting his wife. Reis adds that "his use of her was morally unconscionable" and caused the *pilegesh* to run home to her father. According to this reading, it makes sense that her father would welcome her back to his home with open arms. Reis states that the *pilegesh* was "within her rights" to leave her husband. She concludes that the Levite most logically returns for her because he needs money and needs her to continue working on his behalf.[100]

Frymer-Kensky and Exum both admit that they cannot determine the exact meaning of the word וַתִּזְנֶה. That being said, Frymer-Kensky notes that the reader must realize that the word does not always have sexual undertones, nor does it always concern infidelity. Exum claims that the most important part of understanding this word does not stem from its translation, but from its context in the narrative. Writes Exum, "Whether the woman acts contrary to patrilocal or virilocal marriage customs...or whether she divorces her husband, her behavior is a gesture of sexual autonomy."[101] Exum describes how these characters inhabit a world where men own women's bodies and men control the sexuality of women. Therefore, she maintains that the main issue hinges on this concept of female autonomy. Because the *pilegesh* has asserted herself and left her husband, no matter what the reason, she is "guilty of sexual misconduct," and she has given up the protection that comes with submission to male autonomy.[102] She will pay the unjust price for her independent action later on in the narrative.

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[100] Reis 12.
[101] Exum 179.
[102] Exum 179.

I have chosen to read and translate against the literal, first-level meaning of "וַתִּזְנֶה." Instead, I employ the translation "and she became angry." A number of factors influenced this decision. First, I considered the argument of logic: As Boling questioned, would it be logical for the *pilegesh* to return to her father's home after she had prostituted herself or acted adulterously? Would he have given her shelter if she had been faithless to her husband? Secondly, one must consider the passivity of the *pilegesh* throughout the rest of the narrative. While any voluntary action is inconsistent with her character, prostitution and/or adultery seem the most inconsistent. Thirdly, it was important to consider the linguistic evidence. Though the Jewish Publication Society employs the attractive translation "deserted," this translation is more idiomatic and has little textual grounding.[103] Therefore, I chose to use the translation "she became angry," because of its possible linkage to the root זנה, a word meaning to reject, or be angry to the word *zenu* in Akkadian, as previously mentioned. As well, both Holladay and the Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, as mentioned above, even dedicate an entry to this translation, as opposed to "deserted."

The translation of the word "וַתִּזְנֶה" may always remain elusive. Ultimately, I agree with Exum. What is most important here is the self-directed action of a woman who is supposed to remain submissive. Her volition is the heart of the matter here, for it defies all the patriarchal rules which surround her. The *pilegesh* is a victim of her own autonomy, which the narrative must counteract. Though there are many other themes at work in this narrative, the self-determination of the *pilegesh* is viewed as a symptom of social anarchy and moral dissolution.

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[103] JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999) 560.

E. Conclusion

The fluid definitions of the words "Levite," "*pilegesh*" and "וַתִּזְנֶה" set the stage for the rest of the narrative. The complexity of these terms and the multitude of meanings associated with them reflect the complexity of this story, its characters, and the events which come to pass. This narrative is built upon a foundation of ambiguity; the text is filled with gaps and uncertainties. As the passage continues, one must always return to this linguistic underpinning to find the core message of the text: this story is about a society that is unraveling at the seams.

Chapter 4: To Stay or To Go?

Judges 19: 3-10:

[3] Then her husband arose and went after her, to placate her and bring her back; with him were his servant and a pair of donkeys. She brought him in to her father's house, and the girl's father saw him and he was glad to meet him.

[4] His father in-law, the girl's father, prevailed upon him, and he stayed with him for three days. And they ate and drank and lodged there.

[5] On the fourth day, they rose early in the morning, and he got up to go, [but] the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Eat a little something to give you strength, and after you will go."

[6] So the two of them sat down and ate and drank together. Then the girl's father said to the man, "Please accept the invitation and stay overnight and enjoy yourself."

[7] When the man arose to go, his father-in-law strongly urged him and he turned back and spent the night there.

[8] He arose early in the morning on the fifth day to go. But the father of the girl said, "Please eat a little something to give you strength," and the two of them ate and lingered until the day stretched out.

[9] Then the man got up to go, he and his *pilegesh* and his servant. But the girl's father said to him, "Look—please: The day has faded away to evening. Please spend the night. Look, the day has waned. Spend the night here and enjoy yourself, and tomorrow you can wake early in the morning for your journey, and you will go home.

[10] But the man was not willing to spend the night, and he got up and he left, until he arrived in front of Jebus, that is Jerusalem. And with him was a pair of saddled donkeys, and his *pilegesh* was with him.

A. Background

The second section of the narrative begins with the Levite setting out for Bethlehem to retrieve his wife, the *pilegesh*. Though the Levite travels to Bethlehem explicitly to bring back his *pilegesh*, his attention is ultimately consumed by her father. The *pilegesh* is virtually absent in these verses, as her story is upstaged by the developing relationship between the Levite and his father-in-law. The two men sit together, eating,

drinking, and laughing for much of five days. What unfolds here is a scene of excess: excess hospitality, food, drink, and gaiety.

There are several important literary issues in this passage. The first deals with the phrase from 19:3 describing why the Levite goes after his *pilegesh*: "לְדַבֵּר עַל־לִבָּהּ" What exactly does this phrase mean and what does it imply in this narrative? The second problem concerns the *pilegesh*, who practically vanishes from the narrative here. What is her role and why isn't she present in this scene? Lastly, what is the role of her father? Why does he insist upon entertaining the Levite with such obsequiousness? How does his relationship with the Levite impact the rest of the chapter?

B. Exploring "לְדַבֵּר עַל־לִבָּהּ"

The first problem appears in verse three: Why does the Levite go to retrieve his *pilegesh*? What leads him back to Bethlehem to seek her out, four months after she has so abruptly left him? The first, most complicated answer is provided in the text: he travels there to "לְדַבֵּר עַל־לִבָּהּ." The phrase, which translated literally means "speak to her heart," seems to imply that the *pilegesh* has left an emotional void which can only be filled by her presence.

This phrase stands out because it appears in Genesis 34:3, when Shechem approaches Dina after his illicit sexual affair with her. "וַיְדַבֵּר עַל־לֵב" is written in conjunction with the statement that Shechem loves her. It also occurs in Ruth 2:13, when Ruth asks Boaz to act favorably towards her, for he has "דִּבַּרְתָּ עַל־לֵב" and "spoken kindly to her." These first examples describe a person who is "speaking kindly" or

"tenderly." These occurrences imply a sense of caring and concern on the part of the speaker.

Many critics use the literal reading of the phrase to reiterate what they perceive as the narrative's kind portrayal of the Levite. According to Boling, the fact that the Levite seeks reconciliation "elicits the reader's respect for the Levite at the outset of the story."[104] Trible echoes Boling's interpretation when she writes that "speak to the heart" implies a sense of "reassurance, comfort [and] loyalty." Her criticism lies in the fact that the narrative hints at the Levite's love but neglects to identify him as the guilty party (i.e. the one who initially caused the *pilegesh* to run away).[105] His character now comes across sympathetically, even favorably. Frymer-Kensky agrees that the scene is an amiable one, but she adds that the phrase "speak to the heart" carries with it certain associations. She claims that this phrase "describes the act of a superior who reassures his alienated or anxious subordinate partner."[106] These words, then, highlight the social disparity extant between these two characters.

Still, others find the translation of the phrase "speak to the heart" unconvincing. Bal, for example, argues that the "romantic" notion of speaking affectionately to one another is not a logical interpretation of this phrase. Because the heart was once considered to be the seat of rationality, this phrase implies that the Levite set off to reason with his *pilegesh* and convince her to return to the system of virilocal marriage.[107] Yet Bal has little biblical evidence to support her statement.

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[104] Boling 274.
[105] Trible 67.
[106] Frymer-Kensky 120
[107] Bal 90.

The most convincing biblical parallel for this phrase occurs in 2 Samuel 19:8, when Joab speaks harshly to David, telling him to "וַיְדַבֵּר עַל־לֵב" towards his servants, or else suffer the consequences. After insulting them, David must appease his servants and regain their trust. While the first examples of this phrase connote "speaking kindly," this last example is translated by the Jewish Publication Society translation as "placate."[108] This phrase is used here to smooth over, explain, and justify this situation. I have chosen this last translation because it fits most appropriately with the Levite's character. Nothing in this chapter delineates him as a kind or gentle figure; therefore it seems more likely that he travels to pacify his *pilegesh* rather than court her.

C. A Man's World

How ironic that the Levite goes to Bethlehem with the explicit reason of speaking to his *pilegesh*, when he ultimately never says a single word to her. After she leads him into her father's house, she is not seen or heard from again until they set off to leave for Ephraim. Instead, her father takes the role of gracious host upon himself, welcoming the Levite with open arms. As Frymer-Kensky observes, the story is no longer about the *pilegesh* and the Levite; rather, it is about men and the relationships, struggles, and matters concerning them.[109] Not only is there no mention of the *pilegesh*, but there are no other women who appear in this four day eating and drinking extravaganza. Boling implies that women must be in the picture somewhere; they are simply absent in this section of the narrative.[110] All of the verbs occur in the masculine form; all the action is

[108] JPS 687.
[109] Frymer-Kensky 121.
[110] Boling 274.

for the men and by the men. Boling remarks, "The question of original grounds for the young woman's anger and her flight home, indeed all interest in the young woman herself, gets lost in the shuffle."[111]

Even though the *pilegesh* is neither seen nor heard from in this scene, she is consistently referenced, through the identification of her father. Oftentimes, he is identified as "חֹתְנוֹ אֲבִי הַנַּעֲרָה" "his father-in-law, the father of the girl" (19:4). At other times he is simply referred to as "אֲבִי הַנַּעֲרָה" or "the father of the girl" (19:6, 9). Why is the *pilegesh* connected to her father rather than her husband? Why must she be linked to a man at all? Perhaps the association with her father emphasizes her powerlessness and lack of autonomy.

Reis extends this idea further when she looks closely at the phrase: "אֲבִי הַנַּעֲרָה" (19:4). She links these words to Deuteronomy 22:15-19, the only other time they are mentioned in the Bible. In that case, the father of the girl goes to the city gate to prove his daughter's virginity, when it has been challenged by her (future) groom. The role of the father is to defend his daughter from the accusation of promiscuity. Reis suggests that this phrase connotes a father who gives protection and care. In the case of Judges 19, claims Reis, the repetition of this phrase serves to invert its initial meaning. Here, the father has given up any and all responsibility for his daughter by marrying her off to the Levite. Despite the fact that she has taken refuge in his home, there is no explicit connection between the two in this narrative. The consistent return to the phrase, "אֲבִי הַנַּעֲרָה" only highlights the lack of both association and protection.[112]

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[111] Boling 274.
[112] Reis 12.

Bal offers a different answer to the question of why the text identifies the *pilegesh* in relation to her father instead of her husband. She concludes that when the Levite enters the house, he is "submitting" to the system of patrilocal marriage, and submitting to the power of the girl's father.[113] Trible concurs that the father-in-law dominates the scene, up until the moment when the Levite is able to remove himself from the table.

The dialogue and action support this concept of a power struggle between the two men. Despite the seeming levity of the scene, there is a real undercurrent of tension and conflict here too. From the start, the father-in-law is exceedingly gracious to this man who has caused his daughter to flee from him. His overtures of hospitality and warmth are beyond inflated, and they are tinged with a bizarre sense of urgency. In verse 4, the father-in-law "[prevails] upon" the Levite to stay for three days. In verses 5, 7, 8 and 9, the Levite's attempts to leave are met with insistent pleas to the contrary such as, "his father-in-law strongly urged him [until] he turned back." The *pilegesh*'s father clearly has a vested interest in keeping the Levite close.

The dialogue in verses 3-9 is also heavily weighted towards the father-in-law. He speaks long and complex sentences while the Levite sits in silence, eating and drinking. There is no space for the Levite to assert his power in the beginning parts of this scene, so filled are the verses with food, drink, and the father-in-law's words. By overwhelming the Levite with words, victuals and flattery, the father-in-law subtly establishes his position as the dominating force in the house.

But as the scene nears its end, the father-in-law loses his grip over the Levite. Evidenced in both the dialogue and the narrative description, the reader plays witness to the father-in-law's increasing desperation. By verse 19:9, the father-in-law's speech

[113] Bal 91.

becomes overly verbose. He rambles, "Look—please: The day has faded away to evening. Please spend the night. Look, the day has waned. Spend the night here and enjoy yourself, and tomorrow you can wake early in the morning for your journey, and you will go home." In this singular phrase, the father-in-law repeats himself multiple times. He asks the Levite to "spend the night" two times. He says "Please" two times. He remarks upon the fading light of day two times. This time, however, the appeals do not work.

The more the father-in-law speaks, the weaker he becomes. The balance of power shifts once the father-in-law is incapable of convincing him to stay. Now, the Levite is able to peel himself away from the feast of food, words, and wills to stand up and leave: "Then the man got up to go, he and his *pilegesh* and his servant... the man was not willing to spend the night, and he got up and he left" (19:9-10). Though he is speechless, his actions speak louder than any words. By standing up from the table and rejecting any further gestures of hospitality, the Levite asserts his power. His movement away from the meal signals that he is now the rightful possessor of the *pilegesh*. One can find support for this idea in the text as well: Once the Levite's decision to leave has been made, the *pilegesh* comes back into the narrative: "And with him was a pair of saddled donkeys, and his *pilegesh* was with him" (19:10). He has released himself from the hold of his father-in-law and reclaimed his ownership of the *pilegesh*.

The graciousness of the father-in-law is tainted by a struggle for power. His offers of food and drink and lodging are cast in doubt because they are so exaggerated and sycophantic. It is clear that the father-in-law wants to do more than simply entertain the Levite. He wants, rather, to intimidate him. His subtle attempts to undercut the

Levite foreshadow the more overt efforts of terrorization by the men of Gibeah. Here, the Levite is a victim in the most hospitable of environments. Later he will be the victim in the most inhospitable of environments. In this disintegrating world of moral, ethical and human relationships, the Levite is doomed to fail whether he is welcomed or threatened.

D. Conclusion

In this section, the presence of the *pilegesh* is subjugated by the prominence of the Levite and her father. Her absence foreshadows her lowly position in the following scenes. As well, the themes of hospitality and lodging loom large in this section. What does it mean to enter into the home of another? What does it mean to stay the night in an unfamiliar, albeit welcoming place? How are the boundaries between the foreign and the familiar constructed, and why? These questions will continue to complicate the text and propel the narrative forward, as the Levite travels from Bethlehem to Gibeah.

Chapter 5: The Foreign vs. The Familiar

Judges 19:11-15

[11] They were close to Jebus and the day was far spent. The servant said to his master, "Come, let us turn into this city of Jebus, so that we may spend the night there."

[12] But his master said to him, "We will not turn into a foreign city, which is not of the people Israel. But, we will cross over to Gibeah."

[13] Then he said to his servant, "Come let's approach one of the places, that we may sleep in Gibeah or Ramah.

[14] And so they continued on and went, and the sun came [down] upon them near Gibeah, which was of Benjamin.

[15] So they turned in there to go in to spend the night in Gibeah. He came and sat on the street of the city, but there was no one to take them home to spend the night.

A. Background

The Levite, his servant, and the *pilegesh* leave Bethlehem at last on the fifth day, despite the father-in-law's excessive overtures to stay. But as this group travels, the question of where to lodge becomes the most central of the text. Thus commences a debate between the Levite and his servant over the proper place to spend the night. The *pilegesh* is not included in this discussion; no one asks her where she prefers to lodge, a choice that impacts her more than anyone else. While the servant mentions the nearby city of Jebus, later known as Jerusalem, the Levite rejects the idea because the city "is not of the people Israel" (19:12). He assumes that the inhabitants there are too foreign and too other, and that they represent too much of a risk. Night would soon fall and there was no telling how an alien people might behave.[114] The Levite, instead, points them in the direction of Ramah and Gibeah, two Israelite cities in close proximity. He decides that

[114] The Malbim, a 19th century rabbinic scholar, adds that the Levite dismisses Jebus "out of fear of robbery of his possessions or molestation of his concubine." Rabbi A.J. Rosenberg, editor. *Mikraot Gedolot* Judges, Rabbi Avrohom Fishelis and Rabbi Shmuel Fishelis, translators. (New York: The Judaica Press, Inc, 1979) 154

when the sun sets, they shall rest wherever they may land. Dusk falls as they approach the Benjaminite city of Gibeah, where they decide to stay.

What are these five verses about? What issues demand further analyses? Primarily, this section focuses on the question of lodging. The group must choose a place to stay and they must live with the consequences of that decision. In this section, the syntax and verb choices highlight the dichotomy between lodging and sojourning, between stasis and movement. The dialogue as well is important here, for it reveals much in the way of character development and color. Lastly, the reader must pay close attention to the use of light and dark imagery. The light and dark signal messages of safety and danger, trust and suspicion, good and evil.

B. The Decision

The choice of Gibeah and Ramah over Jebus is ironic for a number of reasons. It is interesting that the Levite fears difference, because he himself represents such difference. As previously mentioned, Levites did not live amongst themselves, but rather among other Israelite tribes. This Levite, in particular, is from Ephraim, and Gibeah is in the Benjaminite territory. He is neither an Ephraimite nor a Benjaminite, yet he feels safer among them than he does around the Jebusites. On another note, the Levite has just torn himself away from his father-in-law's home in Bethlehem, a place where intimacy and hospitality served as tools of manipulation. Nothing in the Levite's immediate past has taught him that familiarity equals security.

Even more ironic is what each place, Jebus and Gibeah, come to represent in the life of the Israelites. The foreign city of Jebus will later be captured by the illustrious

King David and will become the center of the Israelite religion and society, the holy city of Jerusalem. This now "foreign" city will eventually represent the very essence of Israelite centralization and power. Gibeah and Ramah, on the other hand, are most famous because of their relationship to the often maligned King Saul. As Brettler observes: "Judges 19 is a learned, allusive, polemical text, arguing against the kingship of Saul."[115] Born in Ramah, Saul ruled for thirty-eight years from the city of Gibeah. Though Saul is Israel's first official king, he is often remembered for his lunacy rather than his leadership, his instability rather than his constancy. It is hard to say whether the Saul's flawed leadership informs Judges 19 or whether Judges 19 informs his less-than-perfect leadership. Saul is a Benjaminite, and the fact that he ruled from Gibeah, the ultimate representation of Israelite upheaval, forever taints his legacy and irrefutably tarnishes his already shaky reputation.

C. Syntax

The syntax of this section helps to create the tension between movement and stasis. As pointed out by Scholar David Richter, this section is filled with several sequences of verbs, each following one another in rapid succession.[116] The verbal sequences mimic the actions of the Levite. He too lives in periods of stasis followed by rapid movements. And when he goes, he does so with a surfeit of energy and frenzy. For instance, when the Levite is finally able to pull himself away from his father-in-law, he "וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיָּבֹא," "he gets up, goes, and leaves" (19:10). Later on, in verse 14, the

[115] Brettler 90

[116] David Richter, "Farewell, My Concubine: The Difficult, the Stubborn, and the Outrage of Gibeah," in Agendas for the Study of Midrash, ed. Marc Lee Raphael and Richter, David, (Williamsburg, VA: William and Mary, 1999)105-106.

Levite and his servant (and the *pilegesh*) do not simply travel, but they "וַיַּעַבְרוּ וַיֵּלֵכוּ," "cross over and go." Once they reach Gibeah, they do not merely walk in to the city, but "וַיָּסֻרוּ שָׁם לָבוֹא לָלוּן," they "turn in to go in and spend the night." These patterns serve a rhetorical function. There is safety in motion and danger in stasis.

D. Dialogue

Though the Levite has been a central part of this narrative, he has not spoken a word until now. His first direct quotation appears in verse 12, "We will not turn into a foreign city, which is not of the people Israel. But we will cross over to Gibeah." He speaks in response to his servant, who suggests that the group lodge in Jebus for the night. It is interesting that the Levite's first words are a negation. The servant has spoken first; consequently, the Levite must dismiss him in order to maintain his sense of power. Not only does he oppose the servant's suggestion, but he speaks not once, but twice. Verse 13 also belongs to the Levite: "Come let's approach one of the places, that we may sleep in Gibeah or Ramah." His attempt to dominate the dialogue here reflects his desire to assert himself and his role as leader in the group.

Though the servant is silenced from here on, his voice has at least been heard and recorded. The *pilegesh* has been silenced since the beginning of the narrative. She is not consulted about the decision of lodging. In fact, the only assurance that she is even there appears in verse 10: "And with him was a pair of saddled donkeys, and his *pilegesh* was with him." Her presence does not even merit a mention before the donkeys. She is remembered last. There is no further mention of the *pilegesh* until verse 24, when the old man offers her up to the men of Gibeah in substitution for the Levite.

E. Thematic Structure

Two themes course vigorously through this text. First, is the juxtaposition of light and dark. Second, is the contrast between sojourning and lodging. The theme of light and dark appears at the end of section two, when, on day five, the narrative reveals that the two men have enjoyed themselves "עַד־נְטוֹת הַיּוֹם," "until the day waned" (19:8). Fearful of what the night may bring, the father-in-law asserts this admonition—twice—in the next verse. He says, "הִנֵּה נָא רָפָה הַיּוֹם לַעֲרֹב לִינוּ־נָא." "Look—please: the day has faded away to evening. Please stay the night." Immediately he repeats, using slightly different Hebrew "הִנֵּה חָנֹת הַיּוֹם," "The day has waned!" (19:9).

Once the Levite and his crew have left Bethlehem, the thematic signals of light and dark continue. In 19:11, as they reach the city of Jebus, the text reveals, "וְהַיּוֹם גָּד מְאֹד," "The day [was now] far spent." Refusing to stay in Jebus, they head in the direction of Gibeah and Ramah. They are left with little choice regarding where to stay because "וַתָּבֹא לָהֶם הַשָּׁמֶשׁ" the sun ultimately sets when they reach Gibeah.

Light, we learn, represents safety and familiarity. Darkness symbolizes danger and terror. The emphasis on the waning of the day serves a very clear rhetorical strategy: the foreshadowing of evil to come. The fact that the Levite does not heed the natural cycles of the day and that he believes he can outwit the diminishing daylight, speaks to his lack of judgment and his poor decision-making skills. Even before the reader discovers what happens in Gibeah, the reader senses that the choice to lodge there is not a good one.

F. Conclusion

Verses 11-15 serve a very clear purpose in this story. All of the narrative, syntactic, verbal, and thematic signs point to a lack of judiciousness on the part of the Levite. His failure to consider Jebus as a lodging place, his dismissal of the servant and the *pilegesh*, and his insistence upon traveling in the late afternoon all point to his lack of common sense and his blind desire for control. His domineering presence here, as compared to the virtual (and continued) absence of the *pilegesh*, also emphasizes the disparity of power so present between them. The Levite's behavior, too, appears to be a reaction to the compliant role he played in Bethlehem. There, he had a difficult time claiming authority. Now, he will use and abuse any power he has to underscore his place as leader.

Chapter 6: When Hospitality Invites Hostility

Judges 19:16-26

16 But, look, in the evening, an old man came from his work in the field. Now the man was from the hill country of Ephraim, but he lived in Gibeah, and the people of the place were Benjaminites.

17 He lifted up his eyes and he saw the man, the guest, in the street of the city. The old man said to him, "Where are you going and from whence do you come?"

18 He said to him, "We are crossing from Beit Lechem of Judah up to the remotest parts of the hill country of Ephraim. I am from there, but I went to Beit Lechem of Judah. And I am going to the House of the Eternal, but there is no person who will take me into [his] home.

19 Our donkeys also have straw and fodder, and I too have bread and wine for me and for your handmaiden and for the servant with your servants. We don't lack anything."

20 The old man said, "Peace be upon you; I will take care of your needs, just do not spend the night on the street."

21 And he brought him into his house and mixed fodder for the donkeys. He bathed their feet and they ate and drank.

22 They were enjoying themselves, and suddenly the men of the city, a depraved crowd, surrounded the house, beating on the door. They said to the man, the old owner of the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house, so that we can know him!"

23 The man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers! Please do not do such evil. Seeing that this man has come to my house, do not do this outrage!

24 Here is my virgin daughter, and his *pilegesh*. Let me please bring them out to you, that you may violate them and do to them what is good in your eyes. But to this man, you shall not commit any such outrage."

25 The men were not willing to listen to him, so the man took hold of his *pilegesh* and brought [her] to them outside. They knew her and they abused her all night long, until the morning. And they let her loose as the dawn was breaking.

26 Then the woman came at the dawning of the day, and she collapsed upon the entrance of the man's house, where her master was, until it was light.

A. Background

Chapter 19 reaches its climax in verses 16-26, when the group settles in Gibeah for the evening. The consequences of having chosen to stay in the Israelite city of Gibeah, rather than Jebus, a city of foreigners, will come to fruition in this section. It soon becomes clear that a shared nationality does not guarantee safety, security, or shelter. Nor does a common ethnicity translate into common ethics, morals, or behaviors. Here, the reader witnesses an act of unparalleled violence and brutality, an act that sets a civil war in motion and stuns Israel so deeply they remark: "Never have has there been or have we seen anything like this, since the day the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until now" (19:30).

Evening falls as the group arrives in Gibeah. In the town square they sit, waiting for someone to come and offer them shelter for the night, but no one does. When an old man finally approaches them, the Levite eagerly pleads their case:

> 'We are crossing from Beit Lechem of Judah up to the remotest parts of the hill country of Ephraim. I am from there, but I went to Beit Lechem of Judah. And I am going to the House of the Eternal, but there is no person who will take me into [his] home. Our donkeys also have straw and fodder, and I too have bread and wine for me and for your handmaiden and for the servant with your servants. We don't lack anything' (19:18-19).

The old man, like the Levite, comes from the mountains of Ephraim and does not belong to the Benjaminites. He invites the Levite to stay the night. The Levite accompanies him home, where the two of them eat, drink, and have a good time.

Suddenly, they are interrupted when "the men of the city, a depraved crowd" surrounds the house, beating on the door (19:22). They demand that the old man send out the Levite, that they may "know him" (19:22). Appalled by this act of brutality, the old

man begs them to stop, saying "Please do not do such evil...do not do this outrage!" (19:23) In an attempt to appease this "depraved crowd," the old man proposes they take his daughter and the *pilegesh* instead. They refuse, but the Levite nonetheless shoves his *pilegesh* out the door. The men rape and abuse her all night. When they release her at dawn, she collapses at the entrance of the old man's home. She has been left for dead.

This section is filled with compelling literary, linguistic, and thematic issues. First, the reader must parse out the most basic of questions: what transpired in Gibeah and why? Who is the intended victim of this carnage? What is at stake for the characters involved? How does the reader measure the involvement (or lack thereof) of the Levite? What is the role of the *pilegesh*? The reader must then focus on the language of the passage, and ask: how does the choice of language complicate and color this incident? Lastly, the reader must attune him/herself to the themes present in the passage. Here, the contrasts between day/night, light/dark, and inside/outside are very significant. The question of hospitality, and all of its inherent limitations, is also prevalent here.

B. Deconstructing the Episode in Gibeah

The Levite, his servant, and his *pilegesh* have settled in Gibeah for the evening. The Levite, from Ephraim, though not an Ephraimite himself, is an outsider in this place. His livelihood has conditioned him to live a life dependent upon others, but here none have volunteered to aid him. The reader concludes that there is either some quality within the Levite that drives others away or something intrinsically hostile about the inhabitants of Gibeah.

The old man approaches the Levite with curiosity: "Where are you going and from whence do you come?" (19:17). Like the father-in-law who urged the Levite to stay over, the old man strongly suggests that the Levite stay with him: "I will take care of your needs, just do not spend the night on the street" (19:20). The reader is left to wonder: What kinds of threats lurk in the street? What kinds of dangers does one confront in Gibeah at night? The text is unambiguous here: one should not loiter in Gibeah at night.

The Levite is welcomed in to the old man's home with great benevolence: "And he brought him into his house and mixed fodder for the donkeys. He bathed their feet and they ate and drank. They were enjoying themselves..." (19:21-22). The old man engages in the rituals of hospitality, as a way of demonstrating his kindness toward the Levite. He feeds him, bathes his feet, and provides nourishment for his animals. After the Levite has been properly attended to, he and the old man relax and "enjoy themselves" (19:22). The words "מֵיטִיבִים אֶת־לִבָּם" echo the suggestion of the father-in-law in verse 6. There, the sense of enjoyment was subtly tinged with threat. Now, the reader is alert to this phrase and attuned to the danger it may foretell.

Indeed, the merriment is soon interrupted by a "depraved crowd" banging on the old man's door (19:22). They come seeking the Levite: "Bring out the man who came to your house, so that we can know him!" (19:22). They are clear about their intentions: they have come to sexually violate the Levite. Yet the old man refuses to allow such an "outrage" (19:24). If they must release their aggression, the men may do it against his "virgin daughter and [the Levite's] *pilegesh*" (19:24).

Women are characterized as dispensable objects, easily exchanged for the safety of men. Writes Frymer-Kensky, "Girls are the coin of the realm, the bounty that men

exchange as they jockey for power and survival."[117] In the case of Judges 19, the *pilegesh* is the most expendable character in the story. She is merely an object of trade and conciliation. Both she and the man's virgin daughter ("bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh," writes Trible) represent the negotiating tools between these men in conflict.[118] Once the marauders storm the old man's house in Gibeah, she and the virgin daughter are the first to be relinquished: these "two female objects" are sent out to "protect a male," explains Trible.[119]

One might think that the old man, the father figure so to speak, would stand in as the "protector" of the women.[120] But he does not behave in this capacity. The old man believes he is preventing a greater injustice by protecting his male visitor and dispensing with the women of the house. The practice of hospitality, one must remember, is a vital part of this culture. In fact, maintaining a hospitable environment to strangers appears even more important than maintaining an environment safe for one's family, as demonstrated here when the old man offers up his virgin daughter. The Levite is the old man's guest and the old man must do all he can to protect and care for him. The *pilegesh*, however, is not considered the primary guest; she belongs to the Levite, and therefore is of no concern to the old man. As Trible describes, the "rules of hospitality in Israel protect only males."[121]

The *pilegesh* is ultimately cast out to the men. Though the "men were not willing to listen" to the old man's suggestion, the Levite still "took hold of his *pilegesh* and brought [her] to them outside" (19:25). (The virgin daughter, mercifully, is spared the

[117] Frymer-Kensky 125.
[118] Trible 74.
[119] Trible 74.
[120] Reis 13-14 and Trible 74.
[121] Trible 75

pilegesh's fate.) She was the Levite's substitution, the ultimate sacrifice. That which they desired to do to the Levite, the men did to her. Multiple men "knew her." She became the vessel of their sexual aggression, the outlet for their unrelenting hostility. For her association with the Levite, she would be carnally, almost fatally punished.

C. The Question of "Why?"

But why did the men come to the door? Why did they want to abuse the Levite? What drove them to behave as they did? Many contemporary scholars read this section as one dealing with power, domination, and subjugation. Says Trible, this is a moment when "male power confronts male power."[122] Frymer-Kensky notes that the men are not interested in having sex with the Levite. She asserts: "Rape is not a sexual act." It is rather an assertion of power and a means of debasing and humiliating another human being.[123] Rape is an attempt to force a man "into a passive role, into the woman's position" adds Exum.[124] These men are not merely seeking the pleasure of sex, but the satisfaction of personal conquest.

Therefore, when the old man refuses to send the Levite outside, offering his daughter and the *pilegesh* instead, the men rebuff him. Subjugating the women is far less powerful than doing the same thing to a man. But they take what they can get because their violence nevertheless sends a message of dominance. Since the women are considered to be the property of men, the rape of the *pilegesh* is still seen as a stain upon the Levite. Frymer-Kensky states: "Controlling women is a mark of manhood in

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[122] Trible 73.
[123] Frymer-Kensky 125.
[124] Exum 182. Ironically they did not need to force the Levite into a woman's position, for they had a woman to abuse in his stead.

patriarchal societies," and the failure to protect the *pilegesh* from the marauders' abuse ultimately "emasculates" the Levite more than anyone else.[125]

Bal also interprets this scene as a power struggle, though she takes a different angle from the scholars above. Bal sees the entire chapter as a conflict between old and new, between the patrilocal and virilocal systems of marriage. In this case, she interprets the men of Gibeah as proponents of patrilocal marriage. They neither like nor respect the Levite, whose marriage to the *pilegesh* had been under the virilocal system of marriage. His adherence to the virilocal system demonstrates a blatant disregard for the morals and sexual ethics they held dear. Bal continues, "he wanted autonomy; they wanted to crush it."[126]

But the Levite's attempts to challenge the old social order have failed, explains Bal. His will to fight the system is gone, and he can no longer maintain his struggle against the patrilocal structure. The moment he pushes the *pilegesh* into the throng represents "his final renunciation of what he had tried in vain to accomplish."[127] She contends that this rape is a symbol of the social turmoil so palpable between the various factions in Israelite society. The *pilegesh* is neither the cause nor the ultimate consequence of this upheaval. She is rather a "sacrifice" to the social chaos of the time.[128] While Bal's interpretative rendering of this section is incredibly innovative, her reading does not seem to adequately address all of the issues raised here. Placing the issue of marriage at the center of this struggle seems inappropriate and unbalanced, giving undue weight to these societal institutions, rather than the individuals themselves.

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[125] Frymer-Kensky 124.
[126] Bal 92.
[127] Bal 93.
[128] Bal 93.

Bal's interpretation adds a cultural dimension to the story that may or may not exist in the passage. Because her analysis moves so far beyond the text, Bal does not present the most convincing case.

Whether or not the power struggle is about social norms, as Bal discusses, or social domination, as Trible and Frymer-Kensky point out, the tension between the Levite and the Benjaminites exists nonetheless. Perhaps they are threatened because he was foreign or by his status as a Levite.[129] Perhaps they are simply looking to demonstrate their own tribal strength to all who enter their territory. Whatever the case may be, Frymer-Kensky is correct when she notes that rape, in this context, is not a sexual act, but rather one of dominance and control. While the men did not succeed in subjugating the Levite, they were able to bring the *pilegesh* to her knees. She is not the intended victim, but she will suffice. As Exum wrote, she is merely an extension of the Levite, his virtual proxy. By overpowering the *pilegesh*, the men also defeat the Levite. He has failed to protect her. Her punishment demonstrates his weakness. She is, as Bal observes, the sacrificial lamb. Unwittingly she becomes the tragic casualty of the story.

D. Language

One of the main questions a reader should ask of this text is: How does the language help to tell the story? In this section, the answer lies in the use of repetition, word choice, and echo. The repeated use of the word "house" (בַּיִת) highlights the importance of hospitality in this text, and underscores the tension between inside and outside in this text.[130] Reading this word time and again, the reader asks: What does it

[129] In Chapter 18, a Levite was vilified for serving other gods.
[130] The word appears 12 times between verses 19-28; 3 times in verses 18 and 22 alone.

mean to have a home in this text and what does a "home" represent? What happens when an owner invites someone into his home, blending the outside with the inside?

The word "home" often connotes hospitality and generosity. It brings to mind a sense of civility, even graciousness. But in this section, the word seems to point to a society void of these qualities, a society which has lost touch with the plain meaning of these words. Gibeah is a place where safety is guaranteed neither inside nor outside the home. For even though the old man warns the group not to "spend the night in the street," the real consequences come once they step indoors (19:20). "Home" is now a threatening place, an unstable place. Gibeah challenges the very notion of "home" and all of the comforts, protection, and safety that are assumed to come with it.

The study of the word "home" is intricately connected to another oft-repeated root: (יצא), meaning "to go out." What is the difference between inside and outside? What does it mean to cross the threshold from inside to out? This root is used in verses 22, 23, 24, 25 and 27—five times in the span of six verses. Even though the text has destabilized the meaning of "home," the text also emphasizes the danger of being outside. The men approach the house from the outside. They ask that the old man "הוֹצֵא אֶת־הָאִישׁ" or "bring out the man" (19:22). The rape happens outside, only after the old man has offered to bring out his daughter and the *pilegesh* (אוֹתָם אוֹצִיאָה־נָּא) and the Levite "וַיַּחֲזֵק הָאִישׁ בְּפִילַגְשׁוֹ וַיֹּצֵא אֲלֵיהֶם הַחוּצָה," "took hold of his *pilegesh* and brought [her] to them" (19:24-25). Despite the threat posed by both the indoors and outdoors, it is clearly preferable to remain inside.

The language of this passage also reveals that it is preferable to be male, for the text is heavily weighted to favor the men and disregard the women. Once he has arrived

in the town of Gibeah, the Levite exclaims: "וְאֵין אִישׁ מְאַסֵּף אוֹתִי הַבָּיְתָה," "but there is no person who will let *me* into [his] home" (19:18). He is accompanied by both the servant and his *pilegesh*, but his concern does not extend beyond himself. When the old man agrees to shelter him, he says, "כָּל־מַחְסוֹרֶךָ עָלָי," "I will take care of your needs," using the masculine singular form of "your" (19:20). The narrative continues, "וַיְבִיאֵהוּ" and "he brought *him*" into his house, excluding both the servant and the *pilegesh* (19:21). But the most important example of male bias occurs when the men demand to see the Levite. Instead of asking the men to go away, the old man offers his daughter and the *pilegesh* in their stead. The language reveals that hospitality and its ensuing benefits do not include or apply to women.[131]

The use of literary echo is also very important in this chapter. Judges 19 appears to borrow from another famous text, Genesis 19. In the Genesis story, Lot encounters two angels sitting in the town square of Sodom. He invites them to his home to spend the night. When they respond no, he convinces them otherwise. Once they reach his home, Lot prepares a feast. Suddenly, a group of men, called "אַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר" or "the men of the city" surround the house, demanding that Lot "הוֹצִיאֵם אֵלֵינוּ וְנֵדָעָה אֹתָם," "Bring them out to us, that we may know them" (Genesis 19:5). Lot responds, "אַל־נָא אַחַי תָּרֵעוּ," "I beg you my brothers, do not do such evil" (Genesis 19:7). In the angels' stead, Lot offers his two virgin daughters:
"הִנֵּה־נָא לִי שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ אִישׁ" (Genesis 19:8).

The language is strikingly similar in the Judges 19. In this case, the men, here too called, "אַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר" demand, "הוֹצִא אֶת־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־בָּא אֶל־בֵּיתְךָ וְנֵדָעֶנּוּ;" "bring out

[131] Trible 75.

the man who came to your house, so that we can know him!"(19:22). The old man's response recalls that of Lot: "אַל־אַחַי אַל־תָּרֵעוּ נָא," "No, my brothers! Please do not do such evil" (19:23). Though the language differs, the old man then offers his virgin daughter and the *pilegesh* as well.

The use of the Sodom and Gomorrah template is revealing. First of all, it demonstrates that the author of this passage was familiar with other biblical texts. The Sodom and Gomorrah tale is one of the Bible's consummate representations of depravity and corruption. Therefore, its echo in Judges 19 signals foul play. It is a literary foreshadowing of the downfall that is soon to come in the form of violence, destruction, and civil war. Since the shadow of Sodom weighs so heavily upon the Bible and upon the future Israelite generations, the very evocation of the story tells the reader how grave a situation this truly has become.

But the author of Judges 19 plays with this reference to Genesis 19, distinguishing the tale of the Levite and the *pilegesh* from that of Lot and the angels. One of the most profound differences is the marked presence of God in the Lot story. The visitors are not suspicious travelers, but divine messengers. Upon first encountering them, Lot immediately clamors to house them and care for them. Unlike the Levite, who desperately desires a place to stay for the night, the angels do not respond right away to Lot's overtures of hospitality. They are more self-sufficient, saying: "But they said, 'No, we will spend the night in the square'" (Genesis 19:2).[132] Since the angels are endowed with the spirit of God, there is no worry for their well-being, or even the well-being of Lot. The angels are forces of protection and shelter. The overlay of apprehension, so

[132] Their statement is an interesting contrast to the old man's warning: "Just do not spend the night on the street" (Judges 19:20).

apparent in Judges 19, is absent in Genesis 19 because it is so infused with the notion of God and God's abiding presence.

The author of Judges 19 turns this sense of security on its head. In Judges 19, there is no abiding presence of God. The Levite is certainly no angel and his presence, therefore, is more of a threat than it is a comfort. Once the Levite brings the *pilegesh* outside, there is no hope for her. God does not and will not intervene. The memory of the divine *dues ex machina* in Genesis 19 haunts the story of Judges 19, heightening the sense of danger even more. Judges 19, sadly, carries out the violence that the angels prevented in Genesis 19.

E. Themes

This section is colored by a variety of contrasting images: day/night, light/dark, and inside/outside. It is already evening when the group of three arrives in the town center of Gibeah. Evening represents the liminal threshold between night and day and marks the transition between safety and danger. As the group awaits the approach of a kind stranger, the encroaching darkness increases their vulnerability to threats that may lurk in the night. Bad things happen, we learn, when the sun goes down. Later in this story, the *pilegesh* is raped and abused all night long. Only the breaking of the dawn stops the men from continuing the heinous act. But even the light of dawn does not guarantee the safety of one who remains outside.

In Judges 19, the inside world, though not entirely safe, is far safer than the world outside. When the old man brings the Levite to the shelter of his home, the perilous world of the town square feels far, far away. The men drink, eat, and make merry. They

relax and rest their bones. But this haven is infiltrated when the men of the city begin banging at the door. Here, the outside world threatens to overthrow the asylum indoors.

The men stand at the doorway, the space which demarcates the division between inside and out. Like the symbol of evening, the doorway, too, is the liminal place between safety and danger.[133] They shout, "הוֹצֵא אֶת־הָאִישׁ," "bring out the man," lead him outside, where there are no rules and there is no protection (19:22). The Levite, however, remains safe indoors throughout the entire scene. Only the *pilegesh* is pushed outside (by the Levite), forever crossing the boundary between safety and danger. She enters the world of danger, and tragically falls victim to its perils. When she is released, she heads back towards the front door, towards the entryway of wellbeing and security. But only her hands reach across the threshold; for she collapses then and there. She will never again (consciously) enter the refuge of the indoors. Sadly, she will remain outside for the short remainder of her life.

The *pilegesh* never benefits from the safety of the hospitable indoors. She is conspicuously absent from the indoor scenes in this story. Instead, men are the beneficiaries of the protection, kindness and hospitality offered here. In Bethlehem, the father-in-law and the Levite bond over food and drink; the *pilegesh* is nowhere to be seen. In Gibeah, the Levite stays within the old man's house, avoiding the danger outside. The rituals of hospitality are lavished upon him, not the *pilegesh*.

Hospitality has played a significant role throughout the entire chapter. First, the Levite is welcomed into his father-in-law's home in Bethlehem. There, however, the hospitable environment is tainted, marked by suspicion. The Levite's father-in-law wants

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[133] Trible 73

to do more than entertain; he wants to intimidate. Once the Levite comes to Gibeah, he finds that no one will take him in. Hospitality is nowhere to be found. Perhaps the Levite should have learned his lesson from his experience in Bethlehem, perhaps he should have remained alone. But, he is once again taken in, this time by the old man. He is greeted with kindness, as the old man "brought him into his house and mixed fodder for the donkeys. He bathed their feet and they ate and drank" (19:21). But he has not yet realized that hospitality always invites hostility. No sooner have they sat down when the "men of the city" bang upon the door (19:22).

The question here is: "What does hospitality represent in Judges 19?" In this text, it seems like hospitality can never be taken at face value. Both the presence and the lack of kindness bring about danger. Both genuine and false hospitality result in negative outcomes. Perhaps the crux of the issue is once again to emphasize the chaos and upheaval so prevalent in Israelite society. That is to say, no matter how hospitable a person may be, there is no way to bypass the corruption that exists in the land. Whether a person is good or bad, decent or depraved, he cannot avoid falling victim to the baseness of this people.

F. Conclusion

The climax of this chapter reveals a harsh and brutal side of the Israelite people. In this world without a king, society has plummeted to a sad and sorry state. But, tragically, this rape does not mark the end of the violence. Rather, it is just the beginning. The episode in Gibeah initiates a sequence of vicious and unspeakable acts

that do not end until brothers take up sword against brother, until a civil war breaks out among the people ironically chosen to be a "light among the nations" (Isaiah 49:6).

Chapter 7: Violence Begets Violence

Judges 19: 27-30

27 When her master arose in the morning, he opened the doors of the house and went outside to go on his way. And here, the woman, his *pilegesh*, was lying at the entrance of the house, and her hands were across the threshold.

28 He said to her, "Get up so we can go!" But there was no answer. So he took her up on his donkey, and the man arose and went towards his destination.

29 When he arrived at his house, he took a cleaver, seized his *pilegesh* and cut her up in parts, ligament by ligament, into twelve pieces. And he sent her to all the territory of Israel.

30 And every witness said, "Never have has there been or have we seen anything like this, since the day the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until now. Consider it, take counsel, and speak."

A. Background

This section builds upon the violence that has preceded it, culminating with the animalistic slaughter of the *pilegesh*. The main issues of discussion focus on the death of the *pilegesh* and the question of the Levite's role in her demise. When the *pilegesh* collapses at the doorway, is she dead or alive? Is she treated in death as she was in life? How does the Levite conduct himself in this section and how should one evaluate his handling of the *pilegesh*? Does his personal conduct indict him or vindicate him? In the end, the consequences of the *pilegesh's* death have profound reverberations for the Levite, the Benjaminites, and the entire land of Israel.

B. The Death of the *Pilegesh*

One of the fundamental questions in this section concerns the fate of the *pilegesh*. What transpires once the men of Gibeah "let her loose" (19:25)? How does the depiction of her collapsed at the doorway, hands spread across the threshold, help us to understand

her character? Does the *pilegesh* ever call out for help? Does she beg to be let in? When does she die? And who is ultimately responsible for her death? The last moments of her life are shrouded in silence and mystery.

The text is unambiguous about the events of the night: "וַיֵּדְעוּ אֹתָהּ וַיִּתְעַלְּלוּ־בָהּ כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה עַד־הַבֹּקֶר," "They knew her and they abused her all night long, until the morning" (19:25). There is no question about the violence done to the *pilegesh* during the night. There is no debate that she was raped and battered. The questions arise when the *pilegesh* is released from the hands of the Benjaminites. She is able to make it to the entrance of the old man's house, but what happens next?

There are no clear answers to the questions: Who killed the *pilegesh*, and when does she die? The Hebrew text, filled with gaping interpretive holes, leaves the matter unresolved, creating space for a multitude of analytical possibilities. This uncertainty is profoundly disturbing, and casts a shadow over this final section of the story.

Many commentators believe that the *pilegesh* dies there on the doorstep from the wounds inflicted upon her during the night. In the Septuagint, Judges 19:28 reads: "She did not answer, for she was dead." The phrase "for she was dead" does not appear in the original Hebrew text. Rashi agrees with this codicil, perhaps because he could not imagine a biblical character doing what the Levite does to someone who is alive.[134] Reis is of the same mind, reckoning that her death is the most logical conclusion. She asserts that otherwise, the detail about her hands lying across the threshold would be superfluous: "The woman is dead on the doorstep…the concubine, alive and able to knock when she approaches the house, dies of injuries, shame, and neglect."[135]

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[134] See Rosenberg 158.
[135] Reis 37.

According to Reis, the blood of the *pilegesh* is not only on the hands of the Benjaminites, but on the Levite's as well. Reis, unlike the Septauagint and Rashi, astutely concludes that the Levite is an accomplice in this crime as well.

The Hebrew text neither implicates nor exonerates the Levite. This sense of uncertainty is important to maintain. It is possible that the *pilegesh* lies upon the doorstep alive. It is possible, frightening though it may be, that the *pilegesh* does not die until the Levite "took a cleaver, seized his *pilegesh* and cut her up in parts, ligament by ligament, into twelve pieces" (19:29). It is possible that the Levite, who might have been her savior, could be her murderer. By concluding that the *pilegesh* dies from the injuries inflicted upon her during the evening, the reader closes up too many of the textual gaps, and essentially absolves the Levite of her murder.

It is unclear whether or not the Levite actually kills the *pilegesh*. It is certain, however, that he slaughters her in the end. The haunting text supports this notion of violence. As noted in the annotated translation, "הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת" or "cleaver," is unusual in the Bible.[136] It does not connote a simple knife or dagger. This word, combined with the cutting and the separating of body parts, creates an impression of butchery.[137] Cutting her body piece by piece, the Levite treats the *pilegesh* the way he would an animal for sacrifice. The *pilegesh* has become like the oxen that Saul cuts up in his own violent attempt at political change.[138]

Though the slaughter of the *pilegesh* can be likened to (the potential slaughter in) the binding of Isaac, the disparities between the two scenes heighten the sad and cruel

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[136] The word "הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת" or "cleaver," in Judges 19:29, echoes the story of the binding of Isaac, the only other time this noun is used in the Bible. See Genesis 22:6, 11.
[137] Alter 109.
[138] Trible 81 and 1 Samuel 11:7.

fate of the *pilegesh*. In the Genesis story, Abraham raises his cleaver to sacrifice his son, Isaac. But no sooner does he lift his hand then an angel of God cries out: "Abraham! Abraham!" (Genesis 22:11). As with the Lot story in Genesis 22, mentioned in chapter six, God's presence is very much felt in the Genesis episode; God is an abiding protector of Isaac. The contrast between the Genesis narrative and Judges 19 makes God's absence even more striking than it was before. God does not intervene. God does not swoop in and save the *pilegesh* from harm; she simply dies. And the death she endures is violent and cruel. In her final moments, the *pilegesh* is stripped of any dignity she might have ever possessed. The mutilation of her body becomes the humiliation of her soul.

C. The Role of the Levite: Dialogue, Action, Evaluation

After the Levite grabs his *pilegesh* and casts her out to the men outside (19:25), he remains inside the house, and does not open the door until the morning. He does not seem to fret about her. What has he been doing? Reis comments:

> We learn from this detail that her lord and the old host were not waiting up anxiously, keeping watch for any sound of her. They were most likely fast asleep in a drunken stupor after making their hearts merry (v 22).[139]

His behavior points to a complete lack of concern for the *pilegesh*. It is clear that he prioritizes his well-being over hers. He uses her to save himself.

When morning comes and the Levite finally opens the door to find the *pilegesh*, he speaks to her for the first and only time in the entire story. He says just two words: "קוּמִי וְנֵלֵכָה," "Get up so we can go" (Judges 19:27). His speech is short, clipped, and

[139] Reis 34.

direct. The words are not requests, but commands. It is almost as if the Levite has completely forgotten what transpired over the night.

But when the Levite hears no answer, he is suddenly set in motion, propelled into a rapid sequence of action.[140] Verses 28 and 29 read:

> He said to her, "Get up so we can go!" But there was no answer. So he took her up on his donkey, and the man arose and went to his home. When he arrived at his house, he took a cleaver, seized his concubine and cut her up, ligament by ligament, into twelve pieces. And he sent her to all the territory of Israel.

He does not stop to mourn the *pilegesh* or bury her. He does not stop t take stock of what has just occurred. The action just moves forward. The Levite is determined to complete this gruesome task as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The "systematic dismemberment," as Boling observes, is "all very businesslike."[141] The Levite approaches the slaughter of the *pilegesh* as he might any other animal. He simply goes through the motions. There is no indication of emotion, no suggestion of feeling. In this final scene, the *pilegesh* becomes a beast that the Levite must ritually slaughter.

Why does the Levite commit this heinous act? Why does he commit more violence against a woman who had suffered so much already? The Levite attempts to justify his actions in chapter 20. After the Israelites have gathered at Mizpah, they ask the Levite, " 'Tell us, how did this evil thing happen?'" (20:3). He answers:

> "I came to Gibeah of Benjamin, I and my *pilegesh* to lodge. And the masters of Gibeah rose against me, and surrounded the house at night against me. They meant to kill me and my *pilegesh* they abused, and she died. And I took hold of my *pilegesh* and I cut her in pieces and I sent her to all the

[140] On page 80, Trible discusses the "rapid succession" of verbs employed in this section.
[141] Boling 276.

> lands of the inheritance of Israel, for they did wickedness and lewdness in Israel."(Judges 20:4-6).[142]

The Levite's explanation is clear: the men of Gibeah are to blame. They "rose against" him. They "surrounded the house," and they "meant to kill" him. They "abused" the *pilegesh* and as a result, "she died." Their "wickedness and lewdness" spurred the Levite to action. Thus he cut the *pilegesh* into pieces in order that all of Israel would see how despicable these men truly were. The people of Israel are, no doubt, horrified by the message they receive in the form of human remains, for they cry out: "Never have has there been or have we seen anything like this, since the day the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until now" (19:30). In cutting her up and sending her throughout the land, the Levite both reacts to and reflects the vulgarity of the Benjaminites. "Feeling himself abused, the man now abuses his concubine's corpse and uses it to inscribe and dramatize his message," states Frymer-Kensky.[143] By treating the *pilegesh* in this way, he attempts to combat depravity. Sadly, he only succeeds in creating more.

Once the Levite has managed to gather the Israelites at Mizpah, they prod him for his version of the story, as mentioned above. In the Levite's account, he plays the central and most important part of the story. "He emphasizes the impact of the attack on him," writes Frymer-Kensky.[144] The *pilegesh* almost seems like an incidental character. He says, "I came into Gibeah...and the masters of Gibeah rose against *me*, and surrounded the house at night against *me*. They meant to kill *me*" (20:4-5, emphasis added). He is the victim of this narrative, and the *pilegesh* is merely his proxy. In his mind, the Benjaminite's assault on the *pilegesh* is really an assault on him.

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[142] Judges 20:4-6, much of translation from JPS 563.
[143] Frymer-Kensky 128.
[144] Frymer-Kensky 129.

Yet the Levite's recapitulation of the tragedy is filled with sweeping omissions and falsehoods. He neglects to say that he "brought" the *pilegesh* out to the men, as stated in Judges 19:25. He does not acknowledge the fact that he condoned the substitution of her life for his. Nor does he, as Reis writes, "let on that his concubine returned to him still living...while he, unconcernedly, slept off the merry-making of the night before."[145] He never once opens the door to rescue her and instead keeps her outside until morning. These exclusions, when combined with the Levite's utter disregard for the *pilegesh*, portray him as scheming, self-absorbed, and callous.

Contemporary scholars debate whether or not this final act of violence serves as a condemnation of the Levite. Trible would suggest that this part is no more egregious than the rest of the story. The Levite is treating the concubine just as he always had, like a piece of "property," a mere possession.[146] Even in the face of tragedy, the Levite does not surrender his power over her: "Raped, tortured, and dead or alive, this woman is still in the power of her master," writes Trible.[147]

While Frymer-Kensky agrees with parts of Trible's argument, she veers away from Trible's final conclusion about power. Though the Levite "shows no solicitude for what might have happened to her, [nor] gratitude for having saved his life...there is another side to this command to '[Get up so we can go!]'" (19:28)[148] He does not "disown her" or abandon her on that doorstep.[149] He is not reviled by her sight or too disgusted to carry on with her. She continues, "He does not react like the husbands of

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[145] Reis 38.
[146] Trible 80.
[147] Trible 80.
[148] Frymer-Kensky 127.
[149] Frymer-Kensky 127.

women raped by the enemy in today's ethnic wars...does not act as if her victimization were a source of shame."[150] Frymer-Kensky adds one more thought. Perhaps the Levite is in denial about the severity of the rape, simply incapable of understanding what has occurred the night before. She posits, "He might not have let himself imagine what befell the concubine."[151] For this reason, she echoes Trible in asserting that the Levite displays no more sensitivity now towards the *pilegesh* than he has throughout the entire story.[152]

But a close reading of the story raises questions about the soundness of Frymer-Kensky's suggestions. Though the Levite does not leave her limp body on the doorstep, it does not mean that he desires her company. Picking up her body and slinging it over the donkey could be a violent act in and of itself, though the details of how he does this are not spelled out explicitly. He does not turn his back on her; he does, however, turn his knife on her. Her body may have received more respect had he left her in the possession of the old man. Lastly, Frymer-Kensky's suggestion that the Levite could not cope with the fact that the *pilegesh* was raped, or did not realize that she was violated, is purely speculative. Her supposition is not supported by the text, and actually undermines the coherence of the narrative. In Chapter 20, he cries out to his fellow men: "They meant to kill me" (20:5). If the Levite sensed that the men would harm him, would he logically think they would spare the *pilegesh*? The Levite brought out the *pilegesh* so that the men would do to her what they wanted to do to him. If he could not "let himself imagine" what the men did to the *pilegesh*, it was not out of ignorance, but out of indifference or apathy.

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[150] Frymer-Kensky 127.
[151] Frymer-Kensky 127.
[152] Frymer-Kensky reminds readers on page 127 of her book that the Levite is, in fact, no different than so many of our Biblical characters, including Abraham and Isaac, who "share their wife in order to spare their life Recall that both Abraham and Isaac lied about the status of their wives in order to save themselves.

D. Conclusion

At the end of this chapter, Exum proposes the question: Why is this "additional violence necessary?"[153] First, the Levite allows his *pilegesh* to be ravished by the men of Benjamin. Then, he violently uses her as a means of claiming his own revenge on the people of Gibeah. Committing more violence upon her already injured body, the Levite slaughters the *pilegesh* as he would an animal he was preparing for sacrifice. She becomes his agent of depravity, the reflection of all the evil he has witnessed. In her death, she loses everything, including her very humanity. This tragic tale, therefore, emphasizes how far removed this society is from its original mission, how lost these people truly have become. There is no civility, no decency, no integrity. There is no accountability in this place where "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25).

[153] Exum 180.

Chapter 8: Responding to Judges 19 through Interpretation

Judges 19 has perennially been a source of struggle and debate for scholars and laypeople alike. Finding suitable ways to read and interpret this disturbing story is no easy task. The excessive violence and lurid subject matter present obstacles for even the most charitable of readers. The misogyny and patriarchal biases do not help either. The question is: How should a reader interpret this story? Is there one best way to analyze the story, or to arrange its various parts into a meaningful structure? What are the ranges of interpretive possibilities here?

A. The Biblical Response

It is important to begin with the oldest commentator on this story, the Bible itself. The biblical voice represents a critical and lasting viewpoint. What is the aftermath of this story? How is this story referenced in later books? The answers to these questions demonstrate ways in which various people in various ages understood this episode.

After the Levite "cut her up in parts, ligament by ligament, into twelve pieces...[and] sent her to all the territory of Israel," the men of Israel take up arms against the tribe of Benjamin (19:29). All of Israel, we learn, is horrified by the incident in Gibeah and the tragic demise of the *pilegesh*, as 19:30 clearly states: "Never has there been or have we seen anything like this, since the day the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until now." The violence that is appalling to readers now was also appalling to citizens then. 400,000 troops, therefore, gather at Mizpah, ready to fight the battle of their lives (20:1-2). As it says in Judges 20:11-13:

> So all the men of Israel, united as one man, massed against the town [of Gibeah]. And the tribes of Israel sent men through the whole tribe of

> Benjamin saying, 'What is this evil thing that has happened among you? Come, hand over those scoundrels in Gibeah so that we may put them to death and stamp out the evil from Israel.'[154]

The Benjaminites protect their own people, and a bloody battle ensues. They become engaged in a war with their Israelite brothers and with God. Trible writes, "Carnage is everywhere...Not a single woman (21:16), child or beast survives (20:48). The tribe of Benjamin is virtually annihilated."[155] The violence does not stop here. When the war is finally over, the small faction of men in Benjamin who remains is left without wives. Since all of Israel has vowed not to hand over their daughters, they must find women in another way (21:1). Ultimately, the men "seize" women from Jabesh-Gilead and Shiloh (21:21). They cannot marry them in a traditional way, so they must overtake them through violence yet again. To echo Trible for a second time: "the rape of one has become the rape of six hundred."[156]

The Bible condemns the Benjamites and the men of Gibeah. This vilification is evidenced by the outcome of the civil war and the near obliteration of the Benjaminite tribe. The Benjaminites pay dearly for the crimes perpetrated in Gibeah, and the war is a clear punishment for this wanton behavior. Apparently it takes a massacre to stamp out evil from the Israelite people. It is ironic, yet also fitting, that justice is here meted out with such uncontrollable rage and fury. On one hand, it is a terribly tragic sign when one crime must be avenged with another. On the other, this scene crystallizes the absolute disintegration of the Israelite society. As the end of Judges so forebodingly states: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did as he pleased" (21:25).

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[154] Translation from JPS 565.
[155] Trible 83.
[156] Trible 83.

The memory of Gibeah does not saturate the rest of the Bible in a significant way, though it does appear the Prophets section. The prophet Hosea refers to Gibeah as the iconic representation of sin: "They have been as grievously corrupt/As in the days of Gibeah," and "You have sinned more, O Israel/ Than in the days of Gibeah" (Hosea 9:9; 10:9).[157] These verses from Hosea make it clear that Gibeah and the events retold in Judges 19-20 continue to symbolize unspeakable violence and transgression. The Bible does not grant any redemptive attributes to Gibeah but instead harshly criticizes and denounces the incident, the people, and the time. The Bible gives readers permission to cry out against this text in horror, because it cries out as well.

B. Contemporary Responses

An interpretive silence fills the space between ancient and modern time. While there are pre-modern commentaries on this text, they do not, for the most part, address the core issues of this thesis. For this reason, we turn to contemporary evaluations of this chapter.

1. The Feminist Voice

Trible, one of the first to write about this text, asserts that this story is ultimately about male hegemony and female subjugation.[158] This is a time when men ruled the world and women existed merely to serve them. According to Trible, Judges 19, with its depiction of the Levite and the *pilegesh*, represents the emblematic example of the powerful man and the weak woman. He dominates her; she is subjugated by him.

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[157] Trible 86.
[158] Trible 65-87.

Nameless and speechless, the *pilegesh* cannot survive in this world without the aid of the men around her.

Susan Ackerman echoes Trible's conclusions claiming that the point of this story is "men's mastery over the women who are under their control."[159] The *pilegesh* is merely a "pawn" who lacks any ability to act "independently and autonomously."[160] Women like the *pilegesh* have little control over the course of their lives, and therefore leave their fates in the hands of men. Frymer-Kensky also reiterates this message when she asserts, "Girls are the coin of the realm, the bounty that men exchange as they jockey for power and survival."[161] In this case, the *pilegesh* is the cheap currency of choice, whose dispensability is made extraordinarily apparent throughout the chapter.

Exum uses these feminist ideas as her platform, but she expands upon them in her interpretation. She asserts that the story focuses on the *pilegesh*, but not on the issue of subjugation alone. In her mind, the most important issue is the gender code embedded within the text and the messages transmitted about the female. She explains that the story transmits an implicit message about sexual behavior to women: "By leaving her husband the woman makes a gesture of sexual autonomy so threatening to patriarchal ideology that it requires her to be punished sexually in the most extreme form."[162] Exum argues that the ultimate theme of Judges 19 is that female sexual independence is both "terrible and

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[159] Susan Ackerman, Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel, (New York: Doubleday, 1998) 238.
[160] Ackerman 237-238.
[161] Frymer-Kensky 125.
[162] Exum 181.

deadly."[163] The *pilegesh's* autonomous act of separation will therefore bring about fatal consequences.

Because men refuse to take responsibility for their actions, women, like the *pilegesh*, are ultimately blamed for the very violence that victimizes them. In this case, the rape represents the narrator's punishment of the *pilegesh*. Ultimately, this story imparts a lesson about the limits of female behavior and male protection.[164]

Exum also warns readers not to subjugate the issue of gender in comparison to other prominent themes in the text, such as hospitality or behavioral codes. By focusing on these types of themes, the issue of gender often gets lost in the discussion and forgotten altogether. The very fact that many commentators have concentrated on other such thematic issues serves to demonstrate what Exum describes as the success of the "androcentric agenda."[165] The *pilegesh* must be at the center. She must be the focus in order that gender represents the core of this story.

2.The Moral Decline

Reis veers away from both Trible and Exum.[166] This chapter is not about hospitality, she posits, nor is it about patriarchal dominance. Judges 19, rather, is the climactic end to the tale of moral and social dissolution told throughout the book of Judges. It is about deviance and denigration. The events which unfold in these verses demonstrate the moral collapse of Israel and the desperate need for new leadership. What

[163] Exum 183.
[164] Exum 194.
[165] Exum 182.
[166] Though Reis is also a feminist, she has a very different take on the story from Trible and Exum. Her focus is not on the *pilegesh* alone, nor is it on the feminist issues at stake in this story. Reis, rather, speaks about the moral decline of Israel as a whole. She looks at this story as a metaphor for the social and moral collapse in Israel.

the reader should take away from this chapter is a sense of hopelessness and despair. If events like this can happen among a people chosen to bring light to the nations, there is something fundamentally wrong with the way this people is living. Israel has rejected its commitment to the covenant and its dedication to God and abdicated its responsibility to model compassion and dignity. According to Reis, this story signals an urgent need for change and contrition, a vital call for penitence and regret.

3. A Polemical Fantasy

Boling is one of the first modern commentators to take a thorough look at this story. His interpretation marks the reading against which many feminists respond. Still, his thoughts remain fresh and viable, and they present a view different from what has been previously discussed. He explains that this story "is presented in the genre of the tragicomic," meticulously crafted by the author.[167] Judges 19 is not meant to be taken at face value. For the details are more hyperbolic than hyper-realistic. Boling notes the abundance of dramatic irony in the text. Quoting S.D. Currie he states:

> It is the hospitable and courteous urgings of the Levite's father-in-law which cause the delay in departure that prevents the party from reaching the safety of Ephraim by nightfall. The servant's advice...would if followed have averted the calamity. The disgraceful lack of hospitality by the Benjaminites is repaired through the offer of possibly the one man in town...not protected.[168]

The series of bad luck and bad choices create an effect of outrageous exaggeration. This interpretation is deepened by contemporary professor Marc Zvi Brettler.

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[167] Boling 277.
[168] S.D. Currie, "Biblical Studies for a Seminar o Sexuality and the Human Community," (*Austin Seminary Bulletin* 87, 1971) 14, quoted in Boling 277-78.

Marc Brettler expands upon Boling. He asserts that this is a "fanciful" text that was likely understood very differently in antiquity.[169] Brettler poses the questions: Would people really believe that a woman would be cut up into twelve pieces? Would they believe that one of those twelve pieces would be sent to Benjamin, the very tribe that committed this horrific crime? Would they really believe that a man would follow his wife after she potentially "whored after him?"[170] He argues that ancient readers were intelligent, intuitive and sophisticated. They understood that these details were devices of fantasy, not reality. Judges 19 is meant to be read through satirical eyes, rather than sentimental ones. The obvious exaggerations were used to transmit an important message about morality and leadership.

In this case, the particular message was a polemic against the reign of Saul. Saul had come from Gibeah. Saul was a Benjaminite. Brettler uses the negative behavior as a way of pointing away from Saul's monarchy and towards the Davidic line. Because Saul is a Benjaminite who hails from Gibeah, all things related to him are tainted by the events in this chapter. David, the new king, would bring a renewed sense of purity, purpose, and faith to his reign.[171]

Brettler also impresses upon readers the importance of taking the focus off of the *pilegesh*. She cannot be the sole focus of the story, he writes. Otherwise, we "misread the text from a historical-literary perspective, missing many significant clues."[172] By shifting the focus to the woman, we bring to the forefront what would naturally be a more minor detail of the story. Brettler continues, "A woman is dismembered in a text to

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[169] Brettler 90.
[170] Brettler 90.
[171] Brettler 89
[172] Brettler 91

express the collapse of pre-monarchical society...and the inability of Saul to correct that collapse."[173] The rape and the crime are not about the individual woman. Nor should they be expanded to describe the pain and suffering of biblical women in general. Rather, he asserts that the violence depicted here is figurative, representing a societal collapse and the failure of a leader. The society in which the Israelites live is chaotic and unruly. "The concubine of Gibeah is highlighted as a type of parody of Samuel 11:7, to create a world upside-down."[174] Only in a world gone mad could events like these occur. The story is meant as a warning and was designed for a readership who would understand the literary devices as such.

C. In Summary

All of the modern commentators present important points. Trible was a vital first voice on the feminist front, putting the women's agenda on the map and calling attention to the great disparity so obvious in this chapter. Her analysis gave rise to commentators like Ackerman, Frymer-Kensky and Exum. Trible opened the doorway to the *pilegesh's* plight and invited others to come in and inspect. Yet her reading now feels narrow. This story is not all about the subjugation of women, nor is it all about the supremacy of the patriarchate.

Both Reis and Brettler read the story through a more macrocosmic valence. This is not about the individual *pilegesh*, nor is it about the Levite. It is not even about the men who come knocking on the door. It is about the Israelite society as a whole. All of these characters play a part in the grand-scale devastation of a once-holy society. All

[173] Brettler 91.
[174] Brettler 108.

represent the kind of moral, social, and political disintegration of this people chosen for greatness and enlightenment. Reis focuses on the notion of depravity; Brettler concentrates on the political dissolution.

Which reading, therefore, is the most useful? Several interpretations have been presented, though no single one is sufficient. I believe we must take into account the views presented by Trible, Reis, and Brettler, and combine them into a single, layered perspective. On one hand, this is a story of the Israelite community, as Reis and Brettler emphasize. Here lies an example of what happens when the social, political, and moral systems break down. The Israelites have no excuse; they have no one to blame but themselves. The road to the enchanted monarchy of David is not a smooth one, and this chapter exemplifies that bumpy path. This story highlights the Israelites' crumbling nation and reminds readers that even the "Chosen People" must endure pain.

In many ways, folding this story into the larger context of Judges is not only the most logical, but also the most painless method of looking at the story. The story of Judges 19 becomes part of a greater whole and cannot be read alone. The characters become symbols, and the situation representative of a life gone awry. This type of reading removes much of the human element from the story, and minimizes the violence perpetrated against the *pilegesh*. A reader should be aware of this macro-social arc, but not to the exclusion of the micro-social arc within the story.

The individual focus is just as, if not more important than the social focus in Judges 19. For it is the individual suffering that calls out to readers, the personal story of torment that is most pressing to students. What happens on the interpersonal level is a tragic tale of miscalculation, misunderstanding, and misogyny. What happens to the

pilegesh is more than simple metaphor. She is a victim in the most powerful sense of the word. She has been stripped of name, speech, and body. She has endured endless violence and neglect, both in and out of the text, and is ultimately left to suffer alone, buried within the pages of a seemingly lost story of our text.

In order for this text to maintain its place within our sacred scripture, we as readers must take responsibility for rescuing characters like the *pilegesh*. We must read them, see them, and give them an interpretive life. We must also take the opportunity to speak for them, and to use the power of analysis as a tool of liberation. If we fail to raise our voices for the *pilegesh*, we fail to speak out on behalf of so many marginalized women in our own culture. We demonstrate a complacence that is rampant throughout the world today, and we, in effect, sanction the very violence we so despise.

It is imperative that readers begin confronting difficult texts like Judges 19. Though many texts like this one are off-putting, frightening, and unpleasant, they too possess an unlimited potential to impart valuable lessons and precious wisdom. This knowledge can only be unlocked through analysis and interpretation; a text that goes unread may just as well be dead. Using Judges 19 as a model, it is possible to prepare oneself to read other disturbing texts. In the next chapter, I will look at various methods of grappling with troubling texts and a myriad of ways to cope with the challenges they pose.

Chapter 9: Judges 19 as a Guide for Tackling Troubling Texts

A. Embracing the Interpretive Struggle

Judges 19 is, undoubtedly, one of the most disturbing stories included within the biblical canon. The misogyny and violence, the subjugation of the *pilegesh* and the patriarchal dominance of the Levite are all reasons why this story is so difficult for readers today. Many readers who approach this text are often inclined to dismiss it on account of its controversial subject matter. Yet, it is a shame to reject this story, to allow our own limited spheres of acceptability to determine the scope of our "canon within the canon."[175] In spite of the brutality, we find a rich and remarkable story in Judges 19, one marked by linguistic sophistication and literary artistry. Judges 19 is filled with complex themes and characters, both of which give rise to a world of interpretive possibilities. The controversial situations discussed in this story provide incredible source material for debate, discussion, and reflection. And while the imagery employed here is disturbing and graphic, it is astonishingly striking and vivid as well. Judges 19 is a text marked by pain, but the very aspects which make it so excruciating also make it so fascinating.

To simply ignore Judges 19 is to disregard one of the most important aspects of the Bible itself: the interpretive struggle. As Benjamin Edildin Scolnic contends regarding issues of troubling texts, "What we need is interpretation, not rejection."[176] He insists, "[A text that] provokes our intellects and emotions on such key issues of our day should not be rejected and omitted; it deserves to be honored and quoted as a textual

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[175] Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, "Ezekiel's Justifications of God: Teaching Troubling Texts," *JSOT* 55 (1992) 110.
[176] Benjamin Edildin Scolnic, "Bible-Battering," Conservative Judaism 45 (1992) 52.

foundation of our lives."[177] To confront the text, to question its purpose, its language, its themes, and its characters is one important way of dealing with its disturbing subject matter. To grapple with Judges 19 is to forge a unique understanding of this biblical text, whether negative or positive. Such a conclusion, in and of itself, is far better than simply discarding the text altogether.

The study of Judges 19 raises a larger question: How do we read troubling texts? How do we find room for them in our schools, our synagogues, and even in our sanctified tradition? Does the analysis of Judges 19 give us an efficient and effective means of reading other troubling texts in the Bible? Can this analysis lend insight into understanding the violence, misogyny, and abuse we see in other sections of our sacred canon? Is there a "best practices" way of reading these difficult texts? Are there helpful ways to explain their place in our biblical canon? These questions, among others, are tackled by authors Barry Holz and Katheryn Pfisterer Darr.[178] Both of these scholars attempt to provide readers with tangible ways of approaching difficult texts and seeing them through more expansive and embracing perspectives. Holz and Darr both hope to challenge readers use their feelings of uneasiness as a means of guiding their study and directing their engagement.

B. The Holz Approach to Difficult Texts

Barry Holz sets up the problem of difficult texts by explaining, in detail, why texts often feel so unsettling. He discusses two distancing factors that often come with

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[177] Scolnic 52.

[178] Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, "Ezekiel's Justifications of God: Teaching Troubling Texts," *JSOT* 55 (1992), 97-117 and Barry Holz, Textual Knowledge: Teaching the Bible in Theory and in Practice, (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2003), 129-149.

ancient writings, like the Bible. First is the issue of cultural distance. Oftentimes, these texts are filled with allusions to events long past, descriptions of objects and mechanisms long out of use, and references to situations that are no longer relevant. Time distances readers from the original meaning of these cultural references. Whatever punch they once packed often gets lost in lengthy explanations and discussions.[179] The beauty of the literature risks ruin by these drawn-out digressions.

The second factor Holtz discusses is more damaging: philosophical distancing. Holz explains that notions of the world, science, and reality in general were very different during biblical times. The perspective of the Bible and the "ideational framework" mandates explanation and elucidation.[180] As well, our concepts of holiness, divinity, law, and prophecy often are very different from those expressed in the Bible. Moreover, our concepts of morality differ vastly. A perfect example of this distancing can be found in Judges 19. Not only is the social system of this biblical story foreign, but so is the communal context. The misogyny and hostility also increase this philosophical breach. The question is: How do we deal with texts that make the Bible seem like "a harsh and brutal document, wrapped up in vengeance and violence?" How are we to accept places in the text where the "moral compass of the Bible feels askew to the modern reader?"[181]

Holz offers a number of techniques for reading disturbing texts. His first idea is to approach texts using what he calls "the Principle of Charity." With this principle, he suggests that readers "de-emphasize their evaluative faculties, their desire to leap to judgment, and put more of a focus on understanding the texts that they study."[182] With

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[179] Holz 134-135.
[180] Holz 135.
[181] Holz 135.
[182] Holz 136.

the Bible, for example, Holz encourages readers to see the text as one that has endured for thousands of years. Keeping this fact in mind, it is important to maintain a sense of humility and honor when approaching the text. He asserts that "the more canonical a text, the more generous its treatment."[183] Therefore, it is important that we, the readers, do not determine the parameters of morality, sanctity, and righteousness, but rather allow the text to do so. We need to remove the emphasis from ourselves—from our reactions, our likes and dislikes, and instead place that focus upon the text. Holz concludes this section by simply suggesting we treat the Bible as we would "a wise old relative."[184]

Holz continues by offering a second suggestion: the use of commentaries. By consulting the venerable minds of our past, we as readers realize that there have been differing views and interpretations throughout the ages. Reading what previous commentators have written gives students a sense of the "enduring dilemmas" in the Bible. The study of commentaries also brings forward the idea that opinions are not only valuable, but they are an integral and revered part of the biblical tradition. When students voice their own ideas, they link themselves to that chain of interpretation.[185] Still, Holz warns that students often encounter similar problems of cultural and philosophical distancing while reading the commentaries. Sometimes, earlier commentators may remark on issues of no interest to us today, and sometimes their solutions are just as egregious or offensive as the narrative problems themselves.

Holz reiterates that the reader need not defend the Bible. Though the teacher and the student are charged to find what is significant about the text, "[they are] not required to assent personally to the answers given by the Bible," stresses Holz as he quotes scholar

[183] Holz 137.
[184] Holz 138.
[185] Holz 140.

Moshe Greenberg.[186] There is no need to apologize for the faults we now find in the text. The unsavory and unappealing aspects of the Bible come from an extraordinarily different time and context. Rather, it behooves us and the text to allow the Bible to "speak for itself," and stand on its own, time-earned merit. Conveying the meaning of the Bible has "nothing to do with simplifying, missionizing, or manipulating either students or the text." Rather, the essence of biblical study is about delving into the text wholeheartedly. [187]

If a reader, however, finds a biblical text too unfamiliar, too strange, or too offensive, Holz offers a few more suggestions. First, try to embrace that element which makes the text so different. Rather than seeking out texts that are simply reflections of ourselves, we should attempt to digest those that are different, so that we grow and develop. Holz claims that when we confront that which is alien, we are often surprised by the results.

Still, Holz admits, these encounters are not always positive. There are times when we cannot abide by a text as it is, or even hear the message at its core. During these times, Holz recommends a one last method, what he calls "Gadamer's Genetic Alternative," or an appeal to the "truth" of the text. This "truth" is what he dubs the original context, "in an attempt not to justify the text in question but to view it sympathetically within the context of its own times."[188] In such cases, the reader should mine the works of historical biblical scholars, anthropologists, and sociologists for help deciphering the primary framework of the text. Ironically, this method is what feminist scholars Trible, Exum, Bal, and Frymer-Kensky write against. They demand that readers

[186] Holz 142.
[187] Holz 143.
[188] Holz 145-46.

look at the Bible, and in this case the *pilegesh*, through modern eyes. They insist that we use our modern, evaluative sensibilities. Otherwise, any and all violence, misogyny, and cruelty can be rationalized away. Holz, too, cautions readers when describing "Gadamer's Genetic Alternative," for he recognizes that this method distances the reader even further from the text, and thus allows the reader to create a meaning detached from this world and from the concerns of contemporary society. In some ways, this method of finding the original context fossilizes the text, thereby reinforcing its alien character and dissociation from the reader.

Holz ends his discussion by repeating his call for dedicated teachers of this material; yet he admonishes teachers to be cognizant of how they are translating the work. How they transmit the information and what they choose to convey demonstrates a personal bias with regards to the Bible. It is important that teachers recognize that they are, in effect, editing the Bible when they cut out various parts or focus on certain passages. They are determining the canonical priorities of their students. These choices, indeed, carry with them enormous responsibilities.

C. The Darr Approach to Difficult Texts

In her article "Ezekiel's Justifications of God: Teaching Troubling Texts," Darr also attempts to discuss what happens when readers stumble upon texts which cause them distress, and raise questions like, "How can I understand a God who acts this way?" or "How can we accept what we read [as sacred text]?"[189] Darr writes that many readers respond to these questions with theories of "dispensationalism," stating that "God has

[189] Darr 109.

acted differently during various discrete epochs in world history."[190] This reaction allows students to maintain an ideal vision of a pure, less complicated God, smacking of naiveté and bias. Other students respond to these difficult texts by simply ignoring them, setting them outside their own parameters of the biblical canon. Yet this reaction, too, is self-serving, and literarily dangerous. Censorship, according to Darr, is not the answer to dealing with troubling texts. Often times, these first solutions not only denigrate the text but also the intellectual process as well.

What Darr recommends to readers is a change in their initial approach to texts such as Judges 19, or in her case, Ezekiel 20. Taking a page from Professor Jonathan Z. Smith and John Robert Seeley, she advocates that readers turn these "narratives into problems." Probe the text, seek out the "presuppositions and convictions" embedded within it, dig for answers and become a biblical investigator.[191] Bal provides a good example of this technique. In reading Judges 19:2, she was perplexed by the various ways in which people had translated the phrase "וַתִּזְנֶה עָלָיו." She sought a more creative solution by looking to the disciplines of biblical history, sociology, and anthropology. Her answer to this "narrative problem" was found in the differences between virilocal and patrilocal marriage. Asking questions not only empowers the reader, but makes the text more accessible.

Darr also demands that readers not only ask questions, but argue with, debate, and scrutinize the text. Engagement is the second step to this process, because it forces readers to take responsibility for a stance. Make choices, defend them, and be accountable for a clear perspective. Use other texts—biblical or not—as "conversation

[190] Darr 110.
[191] Darr 110.

partners," with the text in question. Darr, for example, looks to the book of Job and writings from Elie Wiesel as a counterpart to Ezekiel 20.[192] Exum compares the episode at Gibeah with what she calls the "rape" of Bathsheba.[193] In this thesis, I have looked at Judges 19 in comparison with the Lot story in Genesis 19 and the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22. Each of these narratives has shed important light on the violence which is so prevalent in Judges 19. Comparisons like these allow for deeper understanding of the text at hand.[194] Darr reminds teachers that they must model this mode of engagement by taking interpretive risks themselves; otherwise they cannot expect students to do the same.

Debate, argument, and investigation often lead to disagreement with a text. Discovering differences (after engaging in a thorough study of the text) is completely permissible, emphasizes Darr. She writes:

> I must suggest that in a world where holocausts happen, we dare not follow Ezekiel when he insists that suffering, alienation, and exile are God's just punishments for sin... I must tell Ezekiel, 'No, in this, I cannot follow you.'[195]

Darr allows for thoughts of uneasiness and anxiety with regards to various texts, and encourages readers to acknowledge these feelings and express them as well. Grappling with difficult imagery and violence does not mean we must accept that violence. She writes, "I must acknowledge that I become uneasy when Ezekiel employs female sexual imagery to depict the ostensible wickedness of sixth-century Judeans."[196] She adds that this imagery can have "serious repercussions" if it is ignored or accepted as appropriate.

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[192] Darr 113.
[193] Exum 172.
[194] Darr 112.
[195] Darr 114.
[196] Darr 115.

Most of the commentators ground their interpretations in this method. Trible dubs this text one of "terror," and begins her investigation on this principal. Exum calls this story a "[rape] of the pen."[197] They, along with Bal, Frymer-Kensky, and Reis are responding to the parts of the narrative they find inexcusable. These commentators are using their horror and dismay as a means of guiding their study.

Darr concludes by saying we must keep a number of criteria in mind when we approach the Bible, especially the troubling texts within it. She stresses that we must acknowledge the artistry of the book and the canon. We must remember that these words were written long, long ago, and come from a complex historical context. Therefore, when we confront the text, we should remember that to simply ignore the words is to disrespect a venerable work of art. As Holz also explains in his "charity" section, Darr reiterates that by probing and digging and taking responsibility for our opinions, we are giving honor to this age-old document. Lastly, Darr suggests that readers continue to embrace the text, "not because we affirm [its] answers, but rather because they force us to confront the important questions."[198]

D. Reading Judges 19

These methods have helped shape my own view as to why we must continue to engage with troubling texts such as Judges 19. I believe that all of the verses in our Bible, controversial or not, are part of a sacred canon which we affirm in our Jewish tradition. If the words offend or the situations affront us, we must be prepared to engage the text rather than separate from it, to dive in rather than divest out. As readers of the

[197] Exum 170.
[198] Darr 117.

tradition, we must approach it with the respect that it is due. But that does not mean that we must always agree, or that we must always acquiesce.

Though the biblical text looms large in our minds, we must understand that its fluidity and openness to commentary is part and parcel of its timeless nature. Our engagement with the unsettling sections, rather than our blind acceptance of them, is what gives the Bible its rich complexity and permanence. If we were to simply stop commenting, the text would atrophy and die. To neglect the parts we like least is the worst thing we could ever do. Our debates and our questions give our tradition life. By exploring these narratives with intellectual honesty, we are providing a vital support system necessary for the survival of our Biblical tradition.

Perhaps even more important is the fact that reading a chapter such as Judges 19 is a method of bearing witness to characters like the *pilegesh*. Trible sees Judges 19:30, "שִׂימוּ־לָכֶם עָלֶיהָ עֲצוּ וְדַבֵּרוּ," "Consider, take counsel, and speak," as a rallying cry on behalf of the *pilegesh*. She affirms, "To speak for this woman is to interpret against the narrator, plot, other characters, and the biblical tradition because they have shown her neither compassion nor attention."[199] By focusing on the *pilegesh*, we give her the respect that has been taken from her over the years. We create a balance within a text that has operated via inequity for so long. The reader has the power to reframe the text:

> We can recognize the contemporaneity of the story. Misogyny belongs to every age...Violence and vengeance are not just characteristics of a distant, pre-Christian past; they infect the community of the elect to this day. Woman as object is still captured, betrayed, raped, tortured, murdered, dismembered and scattered. To take to heart this ancient story, then, is to confess its present reality.[200]

The task of the reader, she argues, is to use the text as a catalyst for feminist advocacy.

[199] Trible 86.
[200] Trible 87.

Our tradition is filled with figures who have been marginalized or cast aside, even forgotten. When we read these texts and recall these characters, we are resurrecting their plots and plights. We are bringing their struggles to the forefront and calling attention to their wounds. Such a focus has ripple effects, and helps to propel work that goes on in the real world. When the *pilegesh* is unearthed in the *Tanakh*, readers are more likely to look for her in their own midsts. The *pilegesh* is not a static character from an ancient story, but rather a representation of suffering in our world today. She is a symbol of abuse and anguish, of distress and despair. Her pain recalls the troubles which affect men and women alike, and the crises which infuse our world today.

Ultimately, this exercise is about more than simply reading the stories buried in the pages of the Hebrew Bible. Reading texts like Judges 19 is the first step. Commenting upon them is the second. And using them as a platform of action, justice, and equality is a third. Learning about the *pilegesh* and taking note of her suffering is a call to conscience. We must heed the silent call of the *pilegesh*, that we may never be silent in the face of death, destruction or devastation. We must treat the troubling text as a catalyst rather than a stumbling block, to move readers to eradicate the violence that still permeates our world. We must see the *pilegesh* as a vehicle for change, stirring readers to stand up for those in need of attention, assistance and love. We must "consider, take counsel, and speak" so that we, our children, and our children's children may look at these scenes of violence and say, "Never again" (19:30).[201]

[201] Trible 87.

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