

# Judges 19:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when he was come into his house, he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, together with her bones, into twelve pieces, and sent her into all the coasts of Israel.

## Analysis

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**And when he was come into his house, he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, together with her bones, into twelve pieces, and sent her into all the coasts of Israel.** This shocking act served as a graphic summons to national assembly. The Levite's dismemberment of his concubine's corpse into twelve pieces—one for each tribe—was designed to provoke outrage and demand justice. The Hebrew verb "divided" (vayenattecheha, וַיְנַתְּכֵהָ, from natach) is used for butchering sacrificial animals (Leviticus 1:6), creating a grotesque parody of sacrifice. This wasn't just notification of a crime; it was prophetic symbolism declaring Israel's body politic had been violated and dismembered by internal sin.

From a Reformed perspective, this act reveals the Levite's hardness of heart and moral blindness. While he rightly sought to expose Benjamin's wickedness, his method—mutilating the woman he failed to protect—compounds the outrage rather than brings genuine justice. His subsequent account to Israel (20:4-7) omits his own cowardice in forcing her outside, presenting himself solely as victim rather than participant in the tragedy. This warns against selective truth-telling and self-justification when confronting sin. True justice requires honest confession of all parties' guilt, not just convenient scapegoating.

## Historical Context

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The dismemberment of a body as a message was practiced in ancient Near Eastern cultures for shocking communication and summons to action. However, this particular method—dividing into twelve pieces representing Israel's tribes—makes explicit theological statement: Israel's covenant unity had been violated by internal sin. The immediate response confirms the message's effectiveness: "all that saw it said, There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of Egypt unto this day" (verse 30).

This incident triggered the first intertribal war in Israel's history. The subsequent assembly at Mizpah (20:1) brought 400,000 warriors from "Dan to Beer-sheba," demonstrating both Israel's size and their unified outrage. The civil war that followed cost Israel 40,000 initial casualties (20:21, 25), then annihilated Benjamin except for 600 men (20:46-47). The Levite's symbolic act thus initiated a sequence of violence that nearly destroyed an entire tribe. While exposing sin is necessary, the method matters—this Levite's grotesque message, combined with his incomplete truthfulness, contributed to disproportionate vengeance rather than restorative justice.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

## Study Questions

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1. How do we sometimes expose others' sins while concealing our own complicity in wrongdoing?
2. What does this passage teach about the danger of disproportionate outrage and vengeance that multiplies rather than resolves evil?
3. How can we pursue justice for genuine wrongs without self-righteous scapegoating or selective truth-telling?

## Interlinear Text

בְּמַאֲכָלָת	לְתַת	אֶת	יְקָנָה	בֵּית	וְאֶל	יְבָא	וְאֶל
And when he was come	H413	into his house	H1004	he took	H3947	a knife	H3979
H935				H853			
לְשָׁנָה יָמָם	לְעָצָם יְהָבֵד	תִּנְתַּחַת בְּ	בְּפִילְגָּשׁ וְ	תִּחְדַּד	לְעָצָם יְהָבֵד	תִּנְתַּחַת בְּ	בְּפִילְגָּשׁ וְ
and laid hold	on his concubine	H5408	and divided	H6106	her together with her bones	H8147	into twelve
H2388	H6370		H5408		H6106		H8147
רַעַשְׂנָאָל:	גַּבְעָל	בְּכָל	יְשָׁלָחַת	בְּ	גַּתְחָה יָמָם	עָשָׂר	רַעַשְׂנָאָל:
H6240	pieces	H3605	and sent	H1366	her into all the coasts	H3478	of Israel
H5409	H7971						

## Additional Cross-References

**1 Samuel 11:7** (References Israel): And he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent.

**Romans 10:2** (Parallel theme): For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

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