

Judges 19:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Beth-lehem-judah.

Analysis

And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Beth-lehem-judah. The repeated phrase "no king in Israel" introduces one of Scripture's most horrific narratives, demonstrating the depths of moral collapse during this period. A "Levite" (ish Levi)—one called to teach God's law and maintain holiness—takes a "concubine" (pilegish, פִּלְגֵּשׁ), a legal but secondary wife with less status than a full wife. That a Levite, who should exemplify covenant faithfulness, enters such a relationship reveals spiritual compromise. His residence in Ephraim while taking a woman from Bethlehem will lead to a tragic journey that exposes Israel's Sodom-like depravity.

From a Reformed perspective, this verse introduces a narrative demonstrating total depravity and the consequences of rejecting God's kingship. What follows—the concubine's unfaithfulness, the Levite's journey, the Gibeah atrocity paralleling Sodom, and the resulting civil war—shows how far Israel had fallen. The Levite's own moral failures (his harsh treatment of the concubine in verse 25-29) demonstrate that even covenant mediators had become corrupt, necessitating not just better leadership but heart transformation through the new covenant.

Historical Context

Concubinage was practiced throughout the ancient Near East as a legal form of marriage, though with less honor and fewer rights than primary wives. For a Levite to have a concubine, while not explicitly forbidden, suggests accommodation to cultural norms rather than pursuit of holiness. The woman's origin "out of Beth-lehem-judah" (the same town mentioned in chapter 17) connects these narratives thematically—Bethlehem, future birthplace of David and Jesus, produces both a corrupt Levite priest (chapter 17) and this tragic concubine (chapter 19), highlighting the pervasiveness of Israel's moral decay. The subsequent Gibeah atrocity occurred in Benjamite territory, leading to civil war that nearly annihilated Benjamin (chapter 20), demonstrating how individual sin escalates to tribal and national catastrophe.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the Levite's moral compromise warn about the danger when spiritual leaders accommodate cultural norms rather than maintain holiness?
2. What does the phrase "no king in Israel" teach about the relationship between rejecting God's authority and societal moral collapse?
3. How does this narrative prepare us for the horrific events that follow, and what does it teach about human depravity?

Interlinear Text

וַיְהִי	בַּיָּמִים	הָהֵם	וְלֹא	אֶיךָ	
H1961	And it came to pass in those days	H1992	when there was no king	H369	
	H3117		H4428		
לְ	וַיְהִי	אִישׁ	לֵוִי	גֵר	בְּרֶכֶת
in Israel	H1961	that there was a certain	Levite	sojourning	on the side
H3478		H376	H3881	H1481	H3411
הַ	אֶפְרַיִם	וַיִּקַּח	לוֹ	אִשָּׁה	מִבֶּתְלֵם
of mount	Ephraim	who took	H0	to him a concubine	H6370
H2022	H669	H3947		H802	H0
	לְ	יְהוּדָה:			
	out of Bethlehemjudah	H3063			
	H1035				

Additional Cross-References

Judges 18:1 (Kingdom): In those days there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel.

Judges 17:8 (Parallel theme): And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehem-judah to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed.

Matthew 2:6 (References Israel): And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Joshua 24:30 (Parallel theme): And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which is in mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Gaash.

Joshua 24:33 (Parallel theme): And Eleazar the son of Aaron died; and they buried him in a hill that pertained to Phinehas his son, which was given him in mount Ephraim.

Malachi 2:15 (Parallel theme): And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.

Judges 21:25 (Kingdom): In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Judges 17:6 (Kingdom): In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

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