

Judges 19:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And his master said unto him, We will not turn aside hither into the city of a stranger, that is not of the children of Israel; we will pass over to Gibeah.

Analysis

And his master said unto him, We will not turn aside hither into the city of a stranger, that is not of the children of Israel; we will pass over to Gibeah.

The Levite's refusal contains tragic irony. The phrase **a city of a stranger** (ir nokriy, uses nokriy, נָכְרִי), meaning foreigner or alien—technically accurate for Jebusites, but revealing misplaced confidence. The Levite assumed that **children of Israel** (benei Yisrael, בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) guaranteed safety, while "strangers" meant danger. Events would prove the opposite: the Jebusites posed no recorded threat, while Benjamite Gibeah would become the site of horrific gang rape and murder (Judges 19:22-28).

The decision to **pass over to Gibeah** (ve'avor ad-Giv'ah, וְעֹבֵר עַד-גִּבְעָה reflected both ethnic preference and geographic ignorance. Gibeah lay several miles beyond Jebus, requiring additional travel as darkness approached. The Levite prioritized ethnic identity over safety, demonstrating the period's spiritual confusion: covenant people who had absorbed Canaanite practices while maintaining ethnic pride. This mirrors the Pharisees' error of trusting in Abrahamic descent while rejecting righteousness (Matthew 3:9, John 8:39-44).

Theologically, this verse exposes the bankruptcy of ethnic or institutional religion apart from heart transformation. Being "children of Israel" provided no protection when covenant faithfulness was absent. Similarly, church membership, baptism, or

Christian heritage cannot save apart from genuine regeneration (John 3:3-7). The Levite's confidence in Israelite identity over Jebusite "strangers" foreshadows Jesus's teaching that many "children of the kingdom" will be cast out while Gentiles enter (Matthew 8:11-12). Only those united to Christ through faith—whether Jew or Gentile, insider or stranger—receive salvation.

Historical Context

Gibeah (modern Tell el-Ful) was located about 3-4 miles north of Jerusalem, roughly halfway to Ramah. Archaeological excavations by William F. Albright (1922-1923) and later excavators found Iron Age I remains (c. 1200-1000 BCE) confirming occupation during the judges period. The site commanded a strategic position on the central ridge route, making it a natural stopping point for travelers. Gibeah would later become Saul's hometown and capital (1 Samuel 10:26, 11:4), adding historical irony—Israel's first king came from the city that committed an atrocity comparable to Sodom.

The Levite's ethnic reasoning reflects the complex relationship between Israel and Canaan during the judges period. While God commanded total destruction of Canaanite peoples (Deuteronomy 7:2, 20:16-17), incomplete conquest left many Canaanite enclaves (Judges 1:19, 21, 27-36). Some Israelites intermarried with Canaanites (Judges 3:5-6) and adopted their religious practices (Judges 2:11-13), while others maintained ethnic separation without spiritual faithfulness. The Levite represented this confused middle ground—ethnically particular but morally compromised (having a concubine, dwelling outside Levitical cities).

The phrase "city of a stranger" appears throughout Scripture, usually warning against foreign alliances or idolatry (Deuteronomy 7:1-5, Joshua 23:12-13). However, God also commanded hospitable treatment of strangers (*ger*, גֶּרֶת), recalling Israel's slavery in Egypt (Exodus 22:21, 23:9, Leviticus 19:33-34). The Levite's blanket rejection of Jebusite hospitality while accepting disastrous Benjamite hospitality demonstrates how ethnic pride can override both wisdom and God's law.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. In what ways do Christians sometimes trust in religious identity or institutional affiliation while neglecting genuine heart transformation?
2. How does this passage challenge assumptions about "safe" Christian environments versus "dangerous" secular contexts?
3. What does the Levite's poor judgment teach about the danger of letting ideological commitments override practical wisdom and discernment?

Interlinear Text

אָל תָּסַרֵּר לֵאמֹר אֶלְיוֹן אֶלְעָזֶר אֶל־אָמֵר
said H413 And his master H3808 unto him We will not turn aside H413
H559 H113 H5493

עַיר מִבְּנֵי רַכְבָּר נָכְרִי
hither into the city of a stranger H834 H3808 that is not of the children H1121
H5892 H5237 H5493

לִשְׁבָא שְׁבָא לְעַבְּרָנִים עַד גִּבְעָה
of Israel H2008 we will pass over H5674 H5704 to Gibeah H1390
H3478 H5237 H5493

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