

Judges 19:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they turned aside thither, to go in and to lodge in Gibeah: and when he went in, he sat him down in a street of the city: for there was no man that took them into his house to lodging.

Analysis

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The phrase **they turned aside thither** (vayasuru sham, שָׁמָר וַיָּשָׁרֶר) indicates leaving the main road to enter Gibeah's gate. Ancient cities were walled, with gates closed at nightfall for security. The Levite's party arrived while gates remained open but faced immediate crisis: **there was no man that took them into his house to lodging** (ve'ein ish me'assef otam habayitah lalin, לֹא־יָשַׁב אִישׁ מְאַסֵּף אֶתְּמָנָה לְלִין). The verb **took them in** (asaf, אָסָף) means to gather, receive, or bring in—a basic hospitality obligation in ancient Near Eastern culture.

The detail that **he sat him down in a street of the city** (vayeshev birechov ha'ir, וַיָּשֵׁב בִּרְכֹּת הַעִיר) depicts the travelers waiting visibly in the town square—the normal place for strangers to await hospitality offers. Yet no offers came. This violation of hospitality customs parallels Sodom, where Lot sat in the gate and had to insist the angels lodge with him because the city's men sought to abuse them (Genesis 19:1-3). The prophets later used Gibeah alongside Sodom as emblems of covenant unfaithfulness: "They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah" (Hosea 9:9); "O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah" (Hosea 10:9).

This hospitality failure reveals Gibeah's spiritual bankruptcy. While the Levite

foolishly refused lodging in "pagan" Jebus, "covenant" Gibeah refused him lodging entirely. The absence of even one righteous household contrasts with Sodom, where Lot at least offered hospitality (however compromised). This demonstrates that external covenant identity without heart transformation produces not merely hypocrisy but active wickedness—the knowledge of God's law making rebellion more culpable (Romans 2:17-24, James 4:17). Christ's judgment on Capernaum applies: better to have been Sodom than a covenant city that rejects God (Matthew 11:23-24).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern hospitality customs made the Gibeah citizens' refusal shocking. Providing food and lodging to travelers was sacred duty, violations of which brought severe social stigma and sometimes divine judgment (Genesis 18:1-8, 19:1-11, Matthew 25:35-43, Hebrews 13:2). The city gate/square served as the customary meeting place where residents could encounter travelers and extend invitations. Job described his hospitality: "The stranger did not lodge in the street: but I opened my doors to the traveller" (Job 31:32).

The narrative's emphasis on "no man that took them in" suggests deliberate avoidance, not mere oversight. In small ancient towns, strangers were immediately visible. The entire community apparently saw the Levite, his concubine, servant, and donkeys yet chose not to offer hospitality. This collective failure indicates either hostility toward strangers, moral decay that made residents fear contamination from righteous visitors (unlikely given later events), or perhaps awareness that offering hospitality would expose guests to the town's wickedness.

Archaeological evidence from Iron Age I sites shows typical Israelite towns had limited public spaces—gates and small plazas where residents gathered. Houses opened onto these communal areas, making strangers highly visible. The social dynamics expected prominent citizens (elders, wealthy families) to assume hospitality responsibilities, distributing the burden equitably. Gibeah's complete hospitality failure therefore represented systemic social breakdown, not individual oversight—the entire community had abandoned covenant faithfulness.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Gibeah's hospitality failure challenge assumptions that religious communities will naturally demonstrate biblical values?
2. What does the Levite's experience teach about the loneliness and vulnerability of those seeking faithful community in spiritually compromised environments?
3. In what ways might contemporary churches fail the "hospitality test," leaving spiritual seekers sitting "in the street" without welcome or care?

Interlinear Text

רֹא שָׁם	וְיָבָא	לִלְוִי	בְּגִבְעָה
And they turned aside	and when he went in	and to lodge	in Gibeah
H5493	H8033	H3885	H1390
וְיָשַׁב אָיָה	בָּרְחָה וְבָרְחָה	בָּעֵיר	בְּאִי
and when he went in	he sat him down	in a street	of the city
H935	H3427	H7339	H369
וְאֵשׁ מִאָצָר אָוֹת	תָּמִיקָה בְּבֵית	לִלְוִי	לִלְוִי
for there was no man	that took	them into his house	and to lodge
H376	H622	H1004	H3885

Additional Cross-References

Judges 19:18 (Parallel theme): And he said unto him, We are passing from Beth-lehem-judah toward the side of mount Ephraim; from thence am I: and I went to Beth-lehem-judah, but I am now going to the house of the LORD; and there is no man that receiveth me to house.

