

Judges 19:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And, behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at even, which was also of mount Ephraim; and he sojourned in Gibeah: but the men of the place were Benjamites.

Analysis

And, behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at even, which was also of mount Ephraim; and he sojourned in Gibeah: but the men of the place were Benjamites. This verse introduces the narrative's tragic hero—an old man (ish zaqen, אִישׁ זָקֵן) returning from field work at evening. The narrator emphasizes he is from Ephraim, not a native Benjamite, making him a fellow sojourner (gar, גַּר) with the Levite. This detail is theologically significant: only a sojourner, an outsider, shows covenant hospitality in Israel.

The contrast "he sojourned in Gibeah: but the men of the place were Benjamites" indicts the native population. The conjunction "but" (ve, ו) creates deliberate tension—the Ephraimite immigrant displays covenant loyalty while native Benjamites abandon it. This inverts expectations: Israelites should exemplify hospitality (chesed, חֶסֶד), yet only the stranger fulfills Torah obligations (Leviticus 19:33-34, Deuteronomy 10:18-19). The phrase "men of the place" (anshei hamaqom, אֲנָשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם) echoes Genesis 19:4 describing Sodom's men, reinforcing the typological parallel. When covenant people fail to practice covenant love, strangers must become examples—a theme Jesus develops in the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:25-37).

Historical Context

The time marker "at even" (ba'erev, בָּעֶרֶב) indicates late afternoon, when field laborers returned home before sunset. Ancient Near Eastern hospitality customs made evening a critical time for welcoming travelers, as spending the night in the open exposed them to bandits, wild animals, and exposure. The Levite's earlier delay at his father-in-law's house (vv. 4-9) had forced late departure, resulting in this dangerous evening arrival. Gibeah's residents violating hospitality norms constituted serious covenant breach—Abraham (Genesis 18:1-8), Lot (Genesis 19:1-3), and Reuel (Exodus 2:20) all exemplified urgent hospitality to strangers. The old man's Ephraimite origin connects him to the Levite (v. 1), creating kinship bond and shared vulnerability in Benjamite territory.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the old man's status as a sojourner showing hospitality while native Israelites refuse challenge assumptions about who truly lives out covenant faith?
2. What does this reversal—outsiders demonstrating covenant loyalty while insiders fail—teach about the nature of genuine faith versus external religious identity?
3. How does Jesus use similar reversals (Good Samaritan, Canaanite woman, Roman centurion) to challenge religious pride and expand understanding of kingdom citizenship?

Interlinear Text

וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ זָקֵן וְיָבֵא מֵעֵשׂ הָעֹמֵל מִן	H2009	man	an old	And behold there came	H4480	from his work	H4480
		H376	H2205	H935		H4639	
וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ זָקֵן וְיָבֵא מֵעֵשׂ הָעֹמֵל מִן	out of the field	at even	man	of mount	Ephraim	H1931	and he sojourned
	H7704	H6153	H376	H2022	H669		H1481
וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ זָקֵן וְיָבֵא מֵעֵשׂ הָעֹמֵל מִן	in Gibeah	man	of the place	H0	were Benjamites		
	H1390	H376	H4725		H1145		

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 104:23 (Parallel theme): Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening.

Judges 19:1 (Parallel theme): 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.