

# Judges 19:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when he had lifted up his eyes, he saw a wayfaring man in the street of the city: and the old man said, Whither goest thou? and whence comest thou?

## Analysis

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**And when he had lifted up his eyes, he saw a wayfaring man in the street of the city: and the old man said, Whither goest thou? and whence comest thou?** The old man's actions demonstrate proper covenant response. "Lifted up his eyes" (vayyisa einav, וַיָּסָא עֵינָיו) indicates deliberate attention—not casual glancing but active seeking of those in need. This same phrase describes Abraham noticing the three visitors (Genesis 18:2) and the Good Samaritan who "saw" the wounded man (Luke 10:33, Greek idon).

Seeing the traveler "in the street" (birechov ha'ir, בִּרְחוֹב הָעִיר) prompted immediate inquiry. In ancient Near Eastern culture, no traveler should remain outdoors at night—hospitality was both moral obligation and survival necessity. The old man's questions "Whither goest thou? and whence comest thou?" establish relationship and assess need. Unlike Gibeah's residents who ignored the Levite (v. 15), the Ephraimite fulfills Torah commands: "The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself" (Leviticus 19:34).

From a Reformed perspective, this encounter illustrates the visible difference between regenerate and unregenerate hearts. External covenant membership (being Benjamites in Israel) doesn't guarantee transformed affections. The old man's compassion flows from internalized covenant values, while Gibeah's men display hearts hardened by sin. Genuine faith produces visible fruit (James

2:14-17)—hospitality being a specific test of authentic Christianity (Hebrews 13:2, 1 Peter 4:9).

## Historical Context

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Ancient city streets served as public gathering spaces where travelers without lodging would sleep. City gates closed at sunset for security, trapping late arrivals inside but without private accommodation. Spending the night in the street exposed travelers to theft, assault, and weather—precisely the dangers the Levite feared (v. 20). The old man's return from field work "at even" placed him perfectly to notice the stranded traveler, suggesting divine providence in the timing. Israelite law specifically commanded hospitality to sojourners, rooted in Israel's Egyptian bondage: "for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:21, 23:9). Gibeah's failure to provide lodging violated both cultural norms and covenant law.

## Related Passages

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**1 John 4:8** — God is love

**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

## Study Questions

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1. How does the old man's deliberate attentiveness ("lifted up his eyes") challenge passive Christianity that fails to notice others' needs?
2. What does the contrast between the old man's questions and Gibeah's silence teach about active versus passive righteousness?
3. In what ways do modern Christians pass by those in spiritual or physical need while claiming covenant status, similar to the Benjamites?

## Interlinear Text

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וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת  
And when he had lifted up  
H5375  
עֵינָיו  
his eyes  
H5869  
וַיַּרְא  
he saw  
H7200  
אֶת  
H853  
הָאִישׁ  
man  
H376  
הַדֹּלֵךְ  
a wayfaring  
H732

בְּרֹחַב  
in the street  
H7339  
הָעִיר  
of the city  
H5892  
וַיֹּאמֶר  
said  
H559  
הָאִישׁ  
man  
H376  
וְהַזָּקֵן  
and the old  
H2205  
אֶת  
H575  
תֵּלֶךְ  
H1980

וְיָמָּאֵן  
thou and whence  
H370  
תָּבוֹא:  
comest  
H935

## Additional Cross-References

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**Genesis 32:17** (Parallel theme): And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee?

**Genesis 16:8** (Parallel theme): And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.