

Judges 19:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father's house to Beth-lehem-judah, and was there four whole months.

Analysis

And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father's house to Beth-lehem-judah, and was there four whole months.

The phrase **played the whore** (vattizneh alav, וַתִּזְנֶה עָלָיו) uses the verb zanah (זנה), meaning to commit fornication or act unfaithfully. The Septuagint translates this "became angry with him," suggesting textual ambiguity—some manuscripts may have read vatizanach (she was angry) rather than vattizneh (she fornicated). Whether literal adultery or marital conflict, her departure to **her father's house to Beth-lehem-judah** for **four whole months** (arba'ah chadashim, ארבעה חודשים) indicates severe breakdown in the relationship.

The social context illuminates this crisis. A concubine (pilegesh, פִּלְגֵשׁ) held secondary wife status—legally married but without full bride-price and inheritance rights. Her flight to her father's house violated patriarchal norms where the husband's authority was absolute. The four-month duration suggests either protracted negotiation for reconciliation or the Levite's reluctance to pursue her immediately. Bethlehem in Judah (distinguished from Bethlehem in Zebulun, Joshua 19:15) would later be David's birthplace and the Messiah's prophesied origin (Micah 5:2), though here it serves merely as the concubine's family home.

This sordid domestic crisis introduces Judges 19's catastrophic narrative,

demonstrating the moral decay characterizing Israel's judges period. The repetition "there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6, 21:25) frames these closing chapters. Without covenant faithfulness and godly leadership, even Levites—the tribe consecrated to God's service—lived in sexual immorality and spiritual compromise. The tragedy foreshadows Israel's desperate need for a righteous King who would shepherd His people in truth.

Historical Context

The narrative occurs during the dark period of the judges (c. 1200-1050 BCE), characterized by cyclical apostasy, oppression, and deliverance. Levites held no tribal territory (Numbers 18:20-24) but lived in cities assigned throughout Israel's tribes (Joshua 21), supported by tithes and offerings. This Levite's residence in "the side of mount Ephraim" (v. 1) places him in central hill country, far from Levitical cities, suggesting the breakdown of proper Levitical organization during this chaotic period.

Concubinage was practiced throughout the ancient Near East, governed by legal codes like Hammurabi's Code and Middle Assyrian Laws. While permitted in Mosaic law (Exodus 21:7-11, Deuteronomy 21:10-14), concubinage fell short of God's creational design for monogamous marriage (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-6). The practice often created household conflict, as seen with Abraham and Hagar (Genesis 16), Jacob's wives and concubines (Genesis 30), and David's household (2 Samuel 3:2-5). The domestic turmoil here reflects spiritual decay—Israel's failure to follow God's word in sexual ethics mirrored their failure in covenant faithfulness.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does the Levite's moral compromise (taking a concubine) illustrate the danger of religious leaders who fail to model biblical standards in personal life?
2. What does the four-month separation reveal about patterns of unresolved conflict and the importance of pursuing reconciliation promptly (Ephesians 4:26-27)?
3. In what ways does this narrative's setting in Bethlehem (later David and Christ's birthplace) point to humanity's need for the true King who restores covenant faithfulness?

Interlinear Text

וַתֵּצֵב הָעָלֵי	וְפִילְגָּשׁ וְלֹגֶת	בְּיַתְּמָאָתָה	בְּיַתְּמָאָתָה	בְּיַתְּמָאָתָה	בְּיַתְּמָאָתָה
played the whore	And his concubine	H1980	H853	H413	house
H2181	H6370				H1004
אָבִיכֶם	בְּיַתְּמָאָתָה	לְחַמֵּת	לְחַמֵּת	לְחַמֵּת	לְחַמֵּת
from him unto her father's	H413	H0	to Bethlehemjudah	H3063	H1961
H1			H1035		
שְׁמַרְתָּם כִּי	אָרְבַּע הַיּוֹם	שְׁמַרְתָּם כִּי	שְׁמַרְתָּם כִּי	שְׁמַרְתָּם כִּי	שְׁמַרְתָּם כִּי
whole	and was there four	months	months	months	months
H8033	H3117	H702	H2320		

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