

Judges 19:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And her husband arose, and went after her, to speak friendly unto her, and to bring her again, having his servant with him, and a couple of asses: and she brought him into her father's house: and when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to meet him.

Analysis

And her husband arose, and went after her, to speak friendly unto her, and to bring her again—the phrase **speak friendly** (ledabber al-libbah, לְדַבֵּר עַל־לִבָּהּ) literally means "to speak to her heart," the same tender idiom used when Shechem sought Dinah (Genesis 34:3), Boaz comforted Ruth (Ruth 2:13), and God promised to woo wayward Israel back (Hosea 2:14). Despite the marital breach, the Levite's pursuit demonstrates commendable desire for reconciliation. He came **having his servant with him, and a couple of asses**, indicating proper preparation for bringing his wife home with dignity, not as a shamed fugitive.

The father's response—**when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to meet him**—reveals complex family dynamics. The verb **rejoiced** (vayismach, וַיִּשְׂמַח) suggests genuine gladness, perhaps reflecting relief that his daughter's marriage would be restored rather than ending in divorce (get, גֵּט, Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Ancient Near Eastern culture placed enormous importance on family honor; a divorced or abandoned daughter brought shame. The father's warm reception contrasts sharply with the absence of any recorded response from the daughter herself—her silence throughout the narrative is ominous, hinting at her powerlessness in a patriarchal system where reconciliation was negotiated between men without her apparent consent.

This attempted reconciliation carries theological weight. God consistently pursues wayward Israel with covenant love (*hesed*, חֶסֶד), speaking tenderly to woo them back despite their spiritual adultery (Jeremiah 3:1-14, Ezekiel 16, Hosea 1-3). Yet the Levite's pursuit, while seemingly noble, occurs within a relationship founded on compromise (concubinage rather than full marriage). The narrative's tragic trajectory demonstrates that human reconciliation efforts, apart from covenant faithfulness to God, cannot produce lasting restoration. Only Christ's pursuit of His bride, the church, through sacrificial love accomplishes true redemption (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Historical Context

The journey from Mount Ephraim to Bethlehem covered approximately 15-20 miles through the central hill country. Travel by donkey was standard for longer journeys, with donkeys serving both as transportation and pack animals. The Levite's servant (*na'ar*, נָעַר) indicates modest economic means—not wealthy enough for multiple servants but comfortable enough to maintain household help. This socioeconomic detail reinforces that the Levite was not destitute but chose concubinage for cultural rather than economic reasons.

The father's enthusiastic reception reflects ancient Near Eastern hospitality customs, which required welcoming guests (especially family) with warmth and generosity. Hospitality was sacred duty, violating which brought severe social stigma. The subsequent narrative (verses 4-9) describes the father's insistent hospitality, repeatedly urging the Levite to stay longer—behavior that follows expected cultural patterns but also serves narrative purposes, delaying the departure until late afternoon (v. 9), forcing the fateful decision to travel at dusk.

The reconciliation attempt also reflects legal customs regarding marriage dissolution. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 regulated divorce, requiring a written certificate and prohibiting remarriage to the original husband if the woman married another. The concubine's flight without formal divorce left the legal relationship intact, making her return to her husband's house legally proper. However, the absence of

divorce law for concubines (as opposed to full wives) created legal ambiguity that may have complicated the situation.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the idiom "speak to her heart" challenge modern approaches to conflict resolution that focus on legal rights rather than tender reconciliation?
2. What does the father's rejoicing reveal about cultural pressures to preserve marriage appearances even when underlying issues remain unaddressed?
3. In what ways does the Levite's pursuit of his concubine point to (yet fall short of) Christ's perfect pursuit of His wayward bride, the church?

Interlinear Text

וַיָּקָם	אִישׁ הָ	וַיִּלָּךְ	אַחֲרַיָּה	לֵדְבַר	עַל	לְבָהּ
arose	And her husband	H1980	after	her to speak	H5921	friendly
H6965	H376		H310	H1696		H3820
לְהָשִׁיבָהּ	וְנָעַר	עִמָּהּ	וְצָמָד			
unto her and to bring her again	having his servant	H5973	with him and a couple			
H7725	H5288		H6776			
חֲמֹרִים	וַתְּבִיֵּא הִיא	בֵּית	אָבִיהָ	וַיַּרְא הִיא		
of asses	and she brought	house	and when the father	saw		
H2543	H935	H1004	H1	H7200		
אָבִיהָ	הַנַּעֲמָה	וַיִּשְׂמַח	לִקְרֹאתָהּ:			
and when the father	of the damsel	him he rejoiced	to meet			
H1	H5291	H8055	H7125			

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 50:21 (Parallel theme): Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

Genesis 34:3 (Parallel theme): And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel.