

# 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־לִבָּה) 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, וַיִּשְׁמַח) 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

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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

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**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

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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

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לְבָתָה עַל לִדְבָּר אֶחָד יְלִגְמָן  
and her husband arose H1980 after H310 her to speak H1696 friendly H3820

אֵצֶן מִדְבָּר עַמְּנָא וְלִבְשִׂיבָה  
unto her and to bring her again having his servant H5973 with him and a couple H6776

וְלֹא הָיָה אָב אֶת בָּתָה  
of asses and she brought house and when the father saw H7200

לְקַרְאָתָנוּ אָב וְלֹא  
and when the father of the damsel him he rejoiced to meet H7125

## Additional Cross-References

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**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.