

# Judges 19:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And his father in law, the damsel's father, retained him; and he abode with him three days: so they did eat and drink, and lodged there.

## Analysis

**And his father in law, the damsel's father, retained him; and he abode with him three days: so they did eat and drink, and lodged there.**

The verb **retained** (vayechezaq-bo, וַיָּכְזַבְּוּ) comes from chazaq (חִזַּק), meaning to strengthen, seize, or hold fast. This suggests more than polite invitation—the father insisted, perhaps even physically detained, the Levite to stay. The phrase recalls Lot's visitors "laying hold upon his hand" to compel his escape from Sodom (Genesis 19:16), using the same verb. Here, however, the compulsion served hospitality rather than salvation, delaying departure in ways that would prove catastrophic.

The **three days** of eating, drinking, and lodging reflects ancient Near Eastern hospitality customs where extended visits strengthened family bonds and demonstrated generosity. However, the narrative's emphasis on eating and drinking (vayochlu vayishtu, וַיָּכְלֻ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ) without mention of addressing the marital crisis suggests avoidance behavior. The father's hospitality, while culturally appropriate, functioned as distraction from uncomfortable realities. Like Lot's lingering in Sodom despite angelic warnings (Genesis 19:16), the Levite's extended stay demonstrated poor judgment—accepting comfort when urgency was required.

Theologically, this scene illustrates the danger of confusing hospitality with

faithfulness. The father's generosity cannot substitute for addressing the underlying sin. Similarly, Christian fellowship and enjoyment of communal blessings can become distractions from confronting sin and pursuing holiness. The phrase "they did eat and drink" echoes Israel's idolatry at Sinai: "the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play" (Exodus 32:6, quoted in 1 Corinthians 10:7). Feasting without repentance, comfort without covenant faithfulness, leads inevitably to judgment.

## Historical Context

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Three-day visits appear throughout Scripture as significant time periods—Jonah in the fish (Jonah 1:17), Jesus in the tomb (Matthew 12:40), the journey to Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:4). While not necessarily symbolic here, the three days allowed ample time for the father and son-in-law to discuss the marital situation, though the narrative provides no evidence they did so. This silence reinforces the moral decay theme—even a Levite, who should know God's law, avoided addressing sexual sin directly.

Ancient Near Eastern hospitality codes, reflected in texts like the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Tale of Sinuhe, required hosts to provide food, drink, and lodging generously. Refusing hospitality or treating guests poorly brought social shame and sometimes divine judgment (note Sodom's fate, Genesis 19). The father's insistence on extended hospitality thus followed cultural expectations. However, hospitality could also serve strategic purposes—building alliances, demonstrating wealth, or (as here) delaying unwelcome departures.

The emphasis on eating and drinking may also hint at excessive indulgence. While Scripture commends shared meals as covenant fellowship (Exodus 24:11, Luke 22:14-20), excessive feasting often signals spiritual compromise (Amos 6:4-6, Luke 12:19). The Levite's willingness to linger in comfort while his relationship remained unresolved demonstrates the moral laxity characterizing the judges period, where even religious leaders prioritized personal pleasure over covenant obedience.

## Related Passages

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**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

## Study Questions

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1. How can legitimate Christian fellowship and hospitality become distractions from addressing necessary confrontations with sin in our lives or relationships?
2. What does the father's "retaining" of the Levite reveal about well-intentioned interventions that ultimately enable avoidance of difficult but necessary decisions?
3. In what ways might we, like the Levite, accept comfort and delay when God calls us to urgent action or difficult obedience?

## Interlinear Text

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רָתַּתְנָה	בְּ	וְ	תִּמְלִיכָה	חַתְנָה	אָבִי	בְּנָעָם	הַ	בְּנָעָם	שָׁבֵךְ	לְ
<b>retained</b>	H0	<b>And his father in law</b>		<b>father</b>	<b>the damsel's</b>	<b>him and he abode</b>				
H2388		H2859		H1	H5291	H3427				

  

אָתָה	שְׁלַשֶׁת	יְמִים	יְאַכְלָה	וְיִשְׂתַּחֲתָה	וְיִשְׂתַּחֲתָה	וְיִשְׂתַּחֲתָה	וְיִשְׂתַּחֲתָה	וְיִשְׂתַּחֲתָה	שָׁמָן	לְ
H854	<b>with him three</b>	<b>days</b>	<b>so they did eat</b>	<b>and drink</b>	<b>and lodged</b>					
H7969		H3117	H398	H8354	H3885				H8033	

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