

Judges 19:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it came to pass on the fourth day, when they arose early in the morning, that he rose up to depart: and the damsel's father said unto his son in law, Comfort thine heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way.

Analysis

And it came to pass on the fourth day, when they arose early in the morning, that he rose up to depart—the Levite finally attempted to leave, rising **early** (vayashkimu vaboqer, וַיִּשְׁכִּימוּ בַבֹּקֶר), suggesting determination to depart before the father could delay him again. However, his resolve proved insufficient. The father's plea—**Comfort thine heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way**—uses the idiom **comfort thine heart** (se'ad libbeka, סַעַד לִבְּךָ), literally "sustain your heart," referring to physical refreshment through food (Genesis 18:5, Psalm 104:15).

The diminutive **a morsel of bread** (pat-lechem, פַּת־לֶחֶם) suggests a small, quick meal, not an elaborate feast. The father's request appeared reasonable—eat a little, then depart. Yet this "small" delay initiated a pattern of procrastination that would prove fatal. The narrative demonstrates how seemingly minor compromises accumulate into disaster. The Levite should have departed immediately on the fourth day, but accepting "just a morsel" led to further delays (verses 6-9), ultimately forcing late afternoon departure (v. 9) and the decision to lodge in Gibeah rather than press on safely.

This pattern mirrors spiritual warfare's subtlety. Satan rarely tempts with obvious evil but with seemingly harmless compromises: "just a little," "not yet," "after this small pleasure." Eve saw the fruit was "good for food... pleasant to the eyes"

(Genesis 3:6). Israel said, "Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt" (Numbers 14:4). Achan took "just" a garment and silver (Joshua 7:21). The Levite accepted "just" a morsel—each small compromise led to catastrophe. Believers must cultivate discernment to recognize that delayed obedience equals disobedience, and minor compromises create trajectories toward major sin (James 1:14-15).

Historical Context

Fourth-day departure would still allow daylight travel to reach safety before nightfall, assuming early morning start. The journey from Bethlehem to Mount Ephraim covered 15-20 miles, requiring 6-8 hours by donkey. Early departure (dawn, around 6:00 AM) should have allowed arrival before dark (around 6:00 PM in summer, earlier in winter). However, the father's repeated delays (this "morsel" in v. 5, the meal in v. 6, the breakfast in v. 8) consumed the morning hours, making timely arrival impossible.

The phrase "comfort thine heart with a morsel of bread" reflects ancient understanding of bread as staff of life. In subsistence economies, bread (typically barley for common people, wheat for the wealthy) provided the caloric foundation of every meal. The idiom "strengthen your heart" occurs throughout Scripture, always referring to physical sustenance (Genesis 18:5, Judges 19:5, 8, Psalm 104:15, Acts 27:33-36). This physical meaning points to spiritual realities—Christ is the bread of life (John 6:35), and God's word sustains the soul (Matthew 4:4, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3).

Ancient Near Eastern hospitality customs may also explain the father's insistence. Allowing guests to depart without proper provision brought shame on the host. The father may have genuinely believed he was showing appropriate generosity. However, the narrative's tragic outcome demonstrates that cultural customs, however well-intentioned, cannot substitute for wisdom and discernment. Following social expectations without considering timing, safety, and long-term consequences leads to disaster.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. When have seemingly small compromises or delays in your obedience created trajectories toward more serious sin or consequences?
2. How can we distinguish between legitimate rest and refreshment versus procrastination that endangers our spiritual well-being?
3. What does this passage teach about the necessity of setting boundaries even in relationships with well-meaning people whose influence hinders obedience?

Interlinear Text

וַיְהִי	בַּיּוֹם	הַרְבִּיעִי	וַשְׁכּוּ יְמֵהֶם			
H1961	day	And it came to pass on the fourth	when they arose early			
	H3117	H7243	H7925			
בַּבֹּקֶר	וַיָּקָם	לֵל כֶּת	וַיֹּאמֶר	אָבִי	הַנַּעֲמָה	אֶל
in the morning	that he rose up	H1980	said	father	and the damsel's	H413
H1242	H6965		H559	H1	H5291	
חֲתָנוֹ	סָעָד	לִבָּהּ	פֶּת	לֶחֶם	וְאַחֲרָיו	
unto his son in law	Comfort	thine heart	with a morsel	of bread	and afterward	
H2860	H5582	H3820	H6595	H3899	H310	
תִּלְכוּ:						
H1980						

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 18:5 (Parallel theme): And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said.

Judges 19:8 (Parallel theme): And he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart: and the damsel's father said, Comfort thine heart, I pray thee. And they tarried until afternoon, and they did eat both of them.

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