

Judges 21:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then they said, Behold, there is a feast of the LORD in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Beth-el, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Beth-el to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah.

Analysis

Then they said, Behold, there is a feast of the LORD in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Beth-el, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Beth-el to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah. This verse introduces the scheme's setting: a **feast of the LORD in Shiloh** (חַג־יְהוָה בְּשִׁילוֹ, chag-YHWH beShiloh). The phrase "feast of the LORD" likely refers to the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:33-43), celebrated with joy, dancing, and vineyard festivities. Shiloh was the location of the tabernacle (Joshua 18:1), making it the central worship site for all Israel. The detailed geographical markers—**north of Beth-el... east of the highway... south of Lebonah**—provide precise directions, suggesting either historical accuracy or emphasizing the premeditated nature of the plan.

The horror of this verse is its casual conjunction of sacred worship and planned kidnapping. Israel would exploit a worship festival—celebrating God's covenant faithfulness and provision—to abduct women for Benjamin. From a Reformed perspective, this represents the nadir of spiritual corruption in Judges: using God's ordained worship as cover for violence against innocent women. This warns against the danger of maintaining religious externals while hearts are far from God (Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 15:8-9).

The irony is profound: they scrupulously avoided "giving" daughters (preserving

their oath) while orchestrating mass kidnapping during a feast celebrating God's deliverance and provision. Technical obedience to the letter while violating the spirit epitomizes the legalism Jesus condemned. The juxtaposition of "feast of the LORD" with kidnapping scheme demonstrates how far Israel had fallen—religion divorced from righteousness produces only hypocrisy.

Historical Context

Shiloh served as Israel's central worship site during the Judges and early monarchy period (approximately 1400-1050 BC). Archaeological excavations at Khirbet Seilun have uncovered remains consistent with significant religious activity during this period, including storage jars, cooking installations, and large quantities of animal bones suggesting sacrificial feasts. The site's destruction (referenced in Jeremiah 7:12-14, 26:6) likely occurred during the Philistine conflicts of 1 Samuel 4.

The annual feast with dancing in the vineyards was part of Israel's agricultural calendar celebrations. The Feast of Tabernacles, harvest festival celebrating God's provision and commemorating wilderness wandering, included joyful celebration with dancing and singing (Psalm 149:3, 150:4). Young women's participation in public festival dancing was culturally appropriate within Israel's worship context. The elders' exploitation of this innocent celebration for kidnapping reveals the moral bankruptcy characterizing the end of Judges.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How do we sometimes maintain religious practices while planning or tolerating actions that completely contradict God's character?

2. What does the exploitation of worship festivals for sinful purposes teach about the danger of form without substance in religious life?
3. In what ways does contemporary culture use Christian language or settings to justify or disguise morally problematic actions?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמְרוּ	הִנֵּה	חַג	יְהוָה	בְּשִׁיל	יָמֵי יִמָּה
Then they said	H2009	Behold there is a feast	of the LORD	in Shiloh	yearly
H559		H2282	H3068	H7887	H3117
אֶשֶׁר	מִצֵּפ וְנָה	לְבֵית	אֶל		
yearly	in a place which is on the north side	H0	from Bethel		
H3117	H834	H6828	H1008		
מִזְרָח	הַיָּשׁ מִשׁ	לְמִסְלָה	הָעֹלָה	מִבֵּית	אֶל
on the east side	H8121	of the highway	that goeth up	H0	from Bethel
H4217		H4546	H5927		H1008
שָׁכֶם	וּמִן גִּב	לְלִבְנָה:			
to Shechem	and on the south	of Lebonah			
H7927	H5045	H3829			

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