

Jeremiah 41:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went forth from Mizpah to meet them, weeping all along as he went: and it came to pass, as he met them, he said unto them, Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam.

Analysis

Ishmael's deceptive greeting to the pilgrims—'Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam'—exploited their trust and likely desire to meet with Judah's governor. By invoking Gedaliah's name, Ishmael used the murdered man's reputation to lure victims, compounding betrayal with exploitation. The phrase 'when they came into the midst of the city, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slew them, and cast them into the midst of the pit' shows cold efficiency: bringing them to an isolated location before executing them and disposing of bodies in a cistern. This wasn't heat-of-moment violence but calculated mass murder. The detail about the 'pit' suggests Ishmael used existing infrastructure (likely a large cistern or storage pit) as mass grave, showing premeditation—he had planned disposal of bodies before committing murders. The ten men who accompanied Ishmael (v.1) likely participated in or witnessed these killings, making them accomplices and demonstrating how sin corrupts communities beyond initial perpetrators. That only 10 of 80 pilgrims survived (v.8) indicates systematic slaughter, not selective judgment.

Historical Context

The practice of invoking a governor's name to establish trust reflects ancient Near Eastern protocols where travelers sought protection and hospitality from regional

authorities. The pilgrims would naturally desire to pay respects to Gedaliah and perhaps receive his blessing for their worship activities. Cisterns (pits) in ancient Israelite cities were large underground chambers for water storage, often 20-30 feet deep and 10-15 feet in diameter. Using a cistern as mass grave served dual purposes: concealing bodies and making retrieval difficult. Archaeological excavations at sites like Tell en-Nasbeh (likely Mizpah) have uncovered large cisterns that could accommodate multiple bodies. The murder of pilgrims traveling to worship violated multiple covenant obligations: hospitality to travelers, respect for those engaged in religious activity, and the sanctity of those traveling under peace. Such violations demonstrated complete moral collapse. That Ishmael felt confident committing these murders suggests he expected either to maintain control of Mizpah or to flee before discovery.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does Ishmael's exploitation of trust through invoking Gedaliah's name illustrate tactics of manipulative evil?
2. What does the murder of these pilgrims teach about how violence against innocent people pursuing righteous activities represents the complete corruption of conscience?
3. In what ways do believers need to balance appropriate trust with wise discernment to avoid exploitation by those masquerading as godly authorities?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּצֵא	וְשָׁמַע אֶל	בֶּן	נָתַן הָ	לְקַרְאָתֶם	מִן	הַמִּצְפָּה הָ
went forth	And Ishmael	the son	of Nethaniah	to meet	H4480	from Mizpah
H3318	H3458	H1121	H5418	H7125		H4709
בָּל גַּם	וּבָכְךָ הָ	בְּלֹגַת	וְיָהִי	כִּפְגָּשׁ	אָתָה מָ	
all along	all along	them weeping	H1961	and it came to pass as he met	H6298	H853
H1980	H1980	H1058				
וְיָמַר מִ	אֶלְיָהָה בְּ אֹתָהָר	אֶל בְּ אֹתָהָר	אֶל גְּדַלְיָה הָ	בֶּן אַחִיקָּם		
them he said	H413	unto them Come	H413	to Gedaliah	the son	of Ahikam
H559		H935		H1436	H1121	H296

Additional Cross-References

2 Samuel 3:16 (Parallel theme): And her husband went with her along weeping behind her to Bahurim. Then said Abner unto him, Go, return. And he returned.

Jeremiah 50:4 (Parallel theme): In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the LORD their God.