

Judges 19:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly.

Analysis

And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly. This verse begins Gibeah's darkest hour. "The men of the city, certain sons of Belial" (v. 22) surround the house demanding to rape the Levite. The old man's response shows desperate negotiation with evil. His address "my brethren" (achai, אַחִי) appeals to common humanity and covenant membership—these are Israelites, not pagans, yet they act like Sodom's mob (Genesis 19:4-5).

His plea "do not so wickedly" (al-tare'u na, אַל-תַּרְעוּ נָא) uses the root ra'a (רָעָה, "to do evil, act wickedly"), the same root describing human evil before the flood (Genesis 6:5). The word "folly" (nevalah, נִבְלָה) is stronger than English suggests—it denotes moral outrage, disgraceful wickedness violating community standards. The term describes rape (Genesis 34:7), sexual immorality (Deuteronomy 22:21), and sacrilege (Joshua 7:15). That such nevalah occurs in Israel, not Canaan, reveals spiritual catastrophe.

The old man's argument invokes sacred hospitality: "seeing that this man is come into mine house" (acharei asher-ba haish hazeh el-beiti, אַחֲרַי אֲשֶׁר-בָּא הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה אֵלַי). Ancient hospitality created sacred obligations—the host protected guests even at personal cost. Lot made similar arguments in Sodom (Genesis 19:8). While

we rightly critique the old man's subsequent offer of women (v. 24), his initial appeal to hospitality obligations reflects legitimate moral reasoning. Tragically, "sons of Belial" recognize no moral constraints.

Historical Context

"Sons of Belial" (benei beliyaal, בְּנֵי בְלִיַּאל) appears 27 times in the Old Testament, always describing moral reprobates. Later Jewish tradition personified Belial as a demon (2 Corinthians 6:15), but the Hebrew term means "worthlessness, wickedness." That such men dominated Gibeah shows complete moral collapse. The parallel to Sodom is deliberate—Genesis 19:4-5 describes "men of the city, even the men of Sodom" surrounding Lot's house with identical demands. Gibeah had become a second Sodom within covenant Israel, fulfilling Moses's warning that disobedience would make Israel like the nations God judged (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). The old man's appeal to hospitality obligations reflects universal ancient Near Eastern values—violating guest-host relationships provoked divine judgment (compare Greek myths of Zeus punishing hospitality violations).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the existence of 'sons of Belial' within covenant Israel demonstrate that external religious identity doesn't guarantee heart transformation?
2. What does the old man's appeal to hospitality obligations teach about natural law and moral reasoning even in depraved cultures?
3. How should Christians respond when moral reasoning and appeals to conscience fail to restrain wickedness in society?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּצֵא א	אֵלָיָהּ ׀	הָאִישׁ	בַּעַל	בֵּיתִי	וַיֹּאמֶר
went out	H413	And the man	the master	into mine house	unto them and said
H3318		H376	H1167	H1004	H559
אֵלָיָהּ ׀	אֵל	אֶחָי	אֵל		
H413	unto them Nay	my brethren	unto them Nay		
	H408	H251	H408		
תְּרַעַו		אֵל	אֶחָי	אֵל	הָאִישׁ
nay I pray you do not so wickedly		H4994	seeing	H834	is come
H7489			H310	H935	H376
הִזָּה	אֵל	בֵּיתִי	אֵל	תַּעֲשֵׂה ו	אֶת
H2088	H413	into mine house	unto them Nay	do	H853
		H1004	H408	H6213	not this folly
					H5039
הִזָּאת:					
H2063					

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 34:7 (Parallel theme): And the sons of Jacob came out of the field when they heard it: and the men were grieved, and they were very wroth, because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter; which thing ought not to be done.

2 Samuel 13:12 (Parallel theme): And she answered him, Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: do not thou this folly.

Judges 20:6 (Parallel theme): And I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel: for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel.

Deuteronomy 22:21 (Evil): Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die:

because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you.

Joshua 7:15 (Parallel theme): And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel.

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