

# Judges 20:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is done among you?

## Analysis

**The tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin**—finally, diplomacy! Before attacking, Israel sends messengers throughout Benjamin's territory. **What wickedness is this that is done among you?** (מָה הַרְעָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר (נְהַיְתָה בְּכֶם)—they frame the question to emphasize that the crime occurred within Benjamin's borders ('among you,' בְּכֶם, bachem), making the tribe corporately responsible for justice.

This diplomatic overture represents proper covenant procedure: confrontation before warfare (Deuteronomy 20:10). The question acknowledges that not all Benjamites participated in Gibeah's crime, giving the tribe opportunity to surrender perpetrators and avoid bloodshed. Yet the question's phrasing reveals accusatory tones—'among you' implies complicity. The messengers don't ask 'Will you help us bring the guilty to justice?' but 'What wickedness is this among you?'—already assuming tribal guilt. Even righteous diplomatic initiatives can be undermined by accusatory framing. The verse shows Israel taking proper procedural steps while their hearts remained set on war. They fulfill the letter of covenant law (attempt diplomacy) while violating its spirit (seeking reconciliation). This explains why God will humble them despite their righteous cause—their motives mixed justice-seeking with vengeance.

## Historical Context

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Covenant law required attempts at peaceful resolution before warfare (Deuteronomy 20:10-12), though this applied to foreign cities, not brother tribes. The Torah prescribed procedures for handling crimes within Israel (Deuteronomy 13:12-18), including investigation and corporate punishment if cities tolerated idolatry or gross wickedness. Benjamin's territory was small, making comprehensive communication possible through messengers to all towns.

## Related Passages

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**Psalms 19:1** — Heavens declare God's glory

**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

## Study Questions

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1. How do you fulfill procedural requirements while harboring hearts set on conflict rather than reconciliation?
2. When does your diplomatic language reveal accusatory assumptions that undermine genuine peacemaking?
3. What distinguishes confrontation aimed at restoration from confrontation aimed at condemnation?

## Interlinear Text

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וַיִּשְׁלַח ו	שְׁבֵטֵי י	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֲנָשִׁים ים	בְּכָל	שְׁבֵטֵי י
sent	And the tribes	of Israel	men	H3605	And the tribes
H7971	H7626	H3478	H582		H7626
בְּנֵימָן	יֹאמֶר	מָה	הַרְעָה	הִזְאת	אֵשׁ ר
of Benjamin	saying	H4100	What wickedness	H2063	H834
H1144	H559		H7451		
נְהִיָּה	בְּכֶם:				
is this that is done	H0				
H1961					

## Additional Cross-References

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**Deuteronomy 13:14** (Parallel theme): Then shalt thou enquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you;

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