

Judges 20:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

(Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpeh.) Then said the children of Israel, Tell us, how was this wickedness?

Analysis

Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpeh—the Benjamites' absence from this assembly is ominous. They were notified of the gathering but chose not to attend, signaling defiance and tribal solidarity with Gibeah's criminals rather than covenant loyalty to Israel. **Then said the children of Israel, Tell us, how was this wickedness?** (וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל דַּבְּרוּ) (אֵיכָה נִהְיִיתָ הַרְעָה הַזֹּאת)—the demand for testimony shows proper judicial procedure: hear the case before rendering judgment.

The question **how was this wickedness?** uses ra'ah (רָעָה, 'evil, wickedness'), the same term used throughout Genesis for grave sins. Israel recognizes that Gibeah's crime demands corporate response. Yet Benjamin's absence reveals the tribal fractures beneath Israel's surface unity. When tribal loyalty supersedes covenant loyalty, even God's people divide over justice. This foreshadows the coming civil war—not because Israel was wrong to address the crime, but because Benjamin chose clan over covenant. The verse demonstrates that remaining silent or absent when evil is exposed constitutes complicity.

Historical Context

Benjamin's tribal territory was small but strategically located, including Jerusalem's hill country (still Jebusite at this time). The tribe's fierce reputation (Genesis 49:27, 'Benjamin is a ravenous wolf') and skilled warriors (20:16 mentions

700 left-handed slingers) made them formidable despite being outnumbered. Their refusal to attend Mizpah showed dangerous independence.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. When do family, tribal, or denominational loyalties tempt you to defend the indefensible?
2. How does absence or silence when wickedness is addressed constitute complicity?
3. What does proper justice require—both hearing truth and acting on it?

Interlinear Text

וּשְׁמָעוּ

heard

H8085

בְּנֵי י

Now the children

H1121

בְּנֵימָן

of Benjamin

H1144

כִּי

H3588

עָלָו

were gone up

H5927

בְּנֵי י

Now the children

H1121

יִשְׂרָאֵל ל

of Israel

H3478

הַמִּצְפָּה

to Mizpeh

H4709

וַיֹּאמְרוּ

Then said

H559

בְּנֵי י

Now the children

H1121

יִשְׂרָאֵל ל

of Israel

H3478

יִדְבָּר ו

Tell

H1696

אֵיכָּה

H349

נִהְיָה ה

us how was

H1961

הַרְעָה

this wickedness

H7451

הִזְאת:

H2063