

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?** *לֹא אָמַרְתִּי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל זָבֵרָו*—(אַיִלָּה נָהִימָה בְּכֻעָה 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

בָּנִים בָּנִי	בָּנִים בָּנִי	בָּנִים בָּנִי	בָּנִים בָּנִי	בָּנִים בָּנִי	בָּנִים בָּנִי
heard H8085	Now the children H1121	of Benjamin H1144	H3588	were gone up H5927	Now the children H1121
of Israel H3478	to Mizpeh H4709	Then said H559	H1121	of Israel H3478	Tell H1696
איך H349	הו הנית ה H1961	נָהִית ה H7451	בָּנִים בָּנִי	בָּנִים בָּנִי	בָּנִים בָּנִי

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