

Judges 21:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore;

Analysis

And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore. After destroying Benjamin and realizing they had nearly annihilated an entire tribe (only 600 men survived), Israel came to "the house of God" (Bethel, where the ark temporarily resided) in grief and repentance. The phrase "abode there till even before God" indicates they remained in God's presence seeking guidance. Their weeping "sore" (beki gadol, בְּכִי גָדוֹל, "great weeping") reveals belated recognition of the tragedy—they had been zealous to punish Benjamin's sin but failed to temper justice with mercy, nearly destroying their brother tribe.

From a Reformed perspective, this verse demonstrates that even righteous causes can be pursued unrighteously through pride, excessive zeal, and failure to seek God's wisdom before acting. Israel's initial inquiries of God (20:18, 23, 27-28) focused on military strategy, not whether their massive response was proportionate or wise. Only after the catastrophic result did they weep before God, realizing their harsh justice had compounded rather than resolved evil. This teaches the necessity of seeking God's wisdom not just for tactical questions but for broader discernment about right response to sin—balancing justice with mercy, discipline with restoration.

Historical Context

The "house of God" where Israel assembled was Bethel, where the ark of the covenant temporarily resided during this period (Judges 20:26-27). Bethel was centrally located between Judah and Ephraim, making it accessible for national assemblies. The reference to Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, as high priest (20:28) helps date these events to the early Judges period, shortly after Joshua's death. The 600 surviving Benjamite men had fled to the rock of Rimmon (20:47), a limestone ridge east of Bethel offering natural fortress protection.

Israel's grief stemmed from realizing they had fulfilled their rash oath that "none of us shall give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife" (21:1), threatening Benjamin's extinction. Their subsequent actions—destroying Jabesh-gilead for not participating in the war, providing 400 virgin women to Benjamin (21:8-12), then condoning the kidnapping of 200 women from Shiloh (21:19-23)—reveal continued moral confusion. Even in attempting to remedy their excessive vengeance, they committed further violence. The entire Judges 19-21 narrative demonstrates the chaos resulting from "everyone doing what was right in his own eyes" (21:25) rather than seeking God's wisdom from the outset.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How do we sometimes pursue righteous causes with excessive zeal that compounds rather than resolves problems?
2. What does Israel's belated weeping teach about seeking God's wisdom before acting, not just tactical guidance during action?
3. How can we balance necessary discipline for sin with mercy and concern for restoration rather than destruction?

Interlinear Text

וַיָּבֹא	הָעָם	בֵּית	אֵל	וַיָּשְׁבוּ	שָׁם	עַד
came	And the people	to the house	H1008	and abode	H8033	H5704
H935	H5971	H1004		H3427		
הָעַרְבָּ	לִפְנֵי י	הָאֱלֹהִים	וַיִּשָּׂא ו	קוֹלָם	וַיִּבְכּוּ	בְּכִי
there till even	before	God	and lifted up	their voices	and wept	H1065
H6153	H6440	H430	H5375	H6963	H1058	
גְּדוֹל:						
sore						
H1419						

Additional Cross-References

Judges 20:26 (References God): Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

Judges 20:18 (References God): And the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God, and said, Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up first.