

Judges 21:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the children of Israel departed thence at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family, and they went out from thence every man to his inheritance.

Analysis

And the children of Israel departed thence at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family, and they went out from thence every man to his inheritance. This verse describes the assembly's dissolution—**every man to his tribe... to his family... to his inheritance** (ish lishveto u-lemishpachto... ish lenachalato, אִישׁ לְשִׁבְטוֹ וּלְמִשְׁפָּחָתוֹ ... אִישׁ לְנַחֲלָתוֹ). The threefold repetition emphasizes return to normal life after the crisis. The phrase mirrors Israel's ideal state—each tribe in its God-given territory, families intact, inheritances secure (Micah 4:4). Yet this apparent restoration masks profound moral failure.

From a Reformed perspective, this return to normalcy without genuine repentance or addressing the root spiritual problems prefigures Israel's repeated pattern throughout the monarchy period. They resolved immediate crises through human wisdom but never addressed the heart issues driving covenant unfaithfulness. The narrative's silence about the kidnapped women's suffering or consequences for the perpetrators demonstrates moral blindness—Israel's leaders considered the problem "solved" because Benjamin survived and their oath remained technically unbroken.

The verse's positioning immediately before the book's final condemnation (21:25) is significant. The apparent resolution—tribes preserved, inheritances restored, normal life resumed—is immediately undercut by the diagnosis: "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." This teaches that pragmatic solutions to

moral crises without genuine repentance and return to God's law provide only superficial resolution. The problems that led to the Gibeah atrocity, civil war, and kidnapping scheme—rejection of God's authority, moral relativism, corrupt leadership—remained unaddressed, setting the stage for continued decline until the monarchy period.

Historical Context

Israel's return to their inheritances after the assembly at Shiloh marked the end of the crisis that consumed Judges 19-21: the Gibeah atrocity, Benjamin's near-extinction, Jabesh-gilead's destruction, and the Shiloh kidnapping. From the narrative's perspective, the tribal structure was preserved—all twelve tribes survived with territorial inheritances intact. However, this came at devastating human cost the text doesn't acknowledge: the Levite's murdered concubine, 65,000+ dead in civil war, Jabesh-gilead's slaughtered inhabitants, and 200 kidnapped women from Shiloh.

The period of the Judges (approximately 1375-1050 BC) was characterized by this cyclical pattern: sin, judgment, deliverance, return to normalcy, followed by renewed sin. The book's conclusion (21:25) points forward to the monarchy as one (imperfect) solution to the chaos of "every man doing what was right in his own eyes." Yet 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings demonstrate that human kingship alone couldn't solve Israel's fundamental problem—the need for heart transformation through the new covenant in Christ (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How do we sometimes mistake temporary resolution of crisis symptoms for genuine repentance and spiritual transformation?

2. What does Israel's return to normalcy without addressing root problems teach about the inadequacy of pragmatic solutions to spiritual issues?
3. In what ways does contemporary church or cultural life mirror the Judges pattern of crisis-response-normalcy without heart change?

Interlinear Text

וַתֵּלֶךְ וּ	מִשָּׁם	בְּנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	בָּעֵת	הַהִיא
departed	H8033	And the children	of Israel	thence at that time	H1931
H1980		H1121	H3478	H6256	
אֵשׁ	לְשִׁבְתּוֹ	וּלְמִשְׁפַּחַתּוֹ	וַיֵּצְאוּ	מִשָּׁם	אֵשׁ
every man	to his tribe	and to his family	and they went out	H8033	every man
H376	H7626	H4940	H3318		H376
לְנַחֲלָתוֹ:					
to his inheritance					
H5159					
