

Judges 21 - Consequences of the Israelite Oath at Mizpeh; Destruction of Jabesh-Gilead; Wives for 600 Surviving Benjamites; No King in Israel

III. Depravity in Israel thereby necessitating the need for a King (Judges 17:1—21:25)

(2) Moral disintegration (19:1—21:25)

(C) Consequences of civil war: wives for the Benjamites (21:1-25)

Review

The Levite and his concubine...the outrage...the civil war...the tribe of Benjamin decimated down to only 600 people.

The atrocity of Gibeah (19:25-26) had been punished and bloodguiltiness had been removed from Israel by the deaths of the Benjamites (20:35). However, with the war and destruction behind them, the Israelites became aware of another painful problem—1 of the 12 tribes of Israel had been nearly exterminated and since only 600 males remained alive, the tribe of Benjamin was in danger of extinction.

Judges 21

(C) Consequences of civil war: wives for the Benjamites (21:1-25)

1 Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, "None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage."

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1 Now the people of Israel had taken a vow in Mizpah that went like this: "Not even one of us will give his daughter in marriage to a descendant of Benjamin!"

1 Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpeh, saying, There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife.

- This part of the oath taken at Mizpeh was not mentioned earlier; it was made in the heat of anger, and mentioned now because of the implications it had after cooler heads prevailed

— And, of course, it was contrary to the Torah for the remaining 600 Benjamites to marry non-Israelites (Cf. Ex 34:16; Deut 7:3)

— A secondary matter faced by the Israelites was the fulfillment of another solemn oath to put to death any Israelites who failed to assemble at Mizpah (v5,8)

2 So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, and raised their voices and wept profusely.

2 So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly.

2 So the people went to Bethel, sat before God until dusk, where they cried out loud and wept bitterly.

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

- Once their anger cooled off, the eleven tribes realized that they had just about eliminated a tribe from the nation of Israel; this made them weep (v2,15)

3 And they said, "Why, LORD, God of Israel, has this happened in Israel, that one tribe is missing today from Israel?"

3 They said, "Why, O LORD, God of Israel, has this come about in Israel, so that one tribe should be *missing* today in Israel?"

3 "Why, LORD God of Israel," they asked him, "is one tribe missing from Israel?"

3 And said, O LORD God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to day one tribe lacking in Israel?

- The eleven Israelite tribes complained about the circumstances that led to their current crisis: what mysterious working of the providence of God allowed such a tragedy (one tribe missing) to happen?

4 And it came about the next day that the people got up early and built an altar there, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

4 It came about the next day that the people arose early and built an altar there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

4 The next day, the people got up early, built an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

4 And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people rose early, and built there an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

- They offered sacrifices to the Lord with a sense of urgency, but there's no record that the people humbled themselves, confessed their sin, and sought the help of the Lord

— Previously, the Lord had revealed His will to them (20:18,23,28); but there's no evidence that they received His Word after the battle was over

— Instead of getting directions from the Lord, the eleven tribes depended on their own wisdom to solve the problem (James 3:13-18)

- It's likely that the Lord wasn't pleased with the people of Benjamin because they still hadn't confessed their sin and admitted they were wrong

— The 600 soldiers who were stranded on the rock of Rimmon still weren't seeking God's face. They were simply fleeing from the victorious army.

— Had somebody suggested that they all meet the Lord at Shiloh and get the matter settled with the Lord, it might have made quite a difference

5 Then the sons of Israel said, "Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not go up to the LORD in the assembly?" For they had taken a **solemn oath** concerning *anyone* who did not go up to the LORD at Mizpah, saying, "He shall certainly be put to death."

5 Then the sons of Israel said, "Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up in the assembly to the LORD?" For they had taken a great oath concerning him who did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah, saying, "He shall surely be put to death."

5 The Israelites asked themselves, "Who didn't come up in our assembly in the LORD's presence from among all of the tribes of Israel?" They had taken a solemn oath concerning those who didn't come up to meet with the LORD at Mizpah that "They will certainly be executed."

5 And the children of Israel said, Who is there among all the tribes of Israel that came not up with the congregation unto the LORD? For they had made a great oath concerning him that came not up to the LORD to Mizpeh, saying, He shall surely be put to death.

- The eleven tribes are searching for options to continue the Tribe of Benjamin...

- The missing at Mizpeh was a secondary matter that they were going to deal with in v8...

- "...solemn oath" - the same oath mentioned in v1, but now with another facet: a "great oath" meant that all members were bound to appear by an oath, which had a threat of death to any who were disobedient

The two problems the Israelites were dealing with were: (1) To abide by the oath to put to death any who did not come to Mizpeh; and (2) their anxiety to preserve the Tribe of Benjamin by providing the remaining 600 men with wives, without violating the oath that none of them would give them their own daughters as wives.

6 And the sons of Israel were sorry for their brother Benjamin, and said, "Today one tribe is cut off from Israel!"

6 And the sons of Israel were sorry for their brother Benjamin and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel today."

6 But the Israelis were mourning for their relatives in the tribe of Benjamin. They announced, "One tribe has been eliminated from Israel today!

6 And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day.

7 What are we to do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the LORD not to give them any of our daughters as wives?"

7 What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the LORD not to give them any of our daughters in marriage?"

7 What can we do to find wives for the survivors who remain, since we've already taken an oath in the LORD's presence not to give them any of our daughters in marriage?"

7 How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them of our daughters to wives?

- The 600 men who were left from Benjamin would need wives if they were going to reestablish their tribe, but the eleven tribes had sworn not to give them wives. Where would these wives come from?

— Remember, it was contrary to the Torah for the remaining 600 Benjamites to marry non-Israelites (Cf. Ex 34:16; Deut 7:3)

8 And they said, "What one is there of the tribes of Israel that did not go up to the LORD at Mizpah?" And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly.

8 And they said, "What one is there of the tribes of Israel who did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah?" And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly.

8 They asked, "What one group of the tribes of Israel didn't come up to meet the LORD at Mizpah?" It turned out that no one had come to the encampment from Jabesh-gilead,

8 And they said, What one is there of the tribes of Israel that came not up to Mizpeh to the LORD? And, behold, there came none to the camp from Jabesh-Gilead to the assembly.

9 For when the people were counted, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there.

9 For when the people were numbered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there.

9 since when they took a census of the assembly, not even one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was in attendance.

9 For the people were numbered, and, behold, there were none of the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead there.

- In researching their secondary problem (Cf. v5), the Israelites discovered that no one from the town of Jabesh-Gilead, the capital of Gilead, were present at Mizpeh

— The oath that the tribes pronounced at Mizpeh necessitated the punishing of its inhabitants for not joining the crusade against Benjamin

10 And the congregation sent twelve thousand of the valiant warriors there, and commanded them, saying, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, along with the women and the children.

10 And the congregation sent 12,000 of the valiant warriors there, and commanded them, saying, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the little ones.

10 So the congregation sent out 12,000 of their valiant soldiers, issuing these orders to them: "Go and attack the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with swords, including the women and little ones.

10 And the congregation sent thither twelve thousand men of the valiantest, and commanded them, saying, Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the children.

- Nobody had come to the war from Jabesh-Gilead, which meant that they hadn't participated in the oath, and the city deserved to be punished

- It appears that when the twelve parts of the concubine's body were sent throughout Israel, a warning was issued that any tribe or city that didn't respond and help fight Benjamin would be treated the same way

— The men of Jabesh-Gilead knew what was at stake when they remained at home, so the ensuing slaughter of their city was their own fault

— King Saul gave the same type warning when he used a similar approach (Cf. 1 Sam 11:7)

11 And this is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman who has slept with a male."

11 This is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every man and every woman who has lain with a man."

11 You're to completely destroy every man and every married woman."

11 And this is the thing that ye shall do, Ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man.

- The Israelites solved the problem by killing more of their own people!

— As harsh as this sounds, the sin and punishment of Jabesh-Gilead must be viewed in light of the sacredness of the bond linking the several tribes into a tribal union

— They now applied the *cherem* curse on Jabesh-Gilead, and once again, a Jewish city suffers the *cherem* curse

12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young **virgins** who had not known a man by sleeping with him; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

12 They discovered among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who hadn't had sex with a man, and they brought them to the encampment at Shiloh in the territory of Canaan.

12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead four hundred young virgins, that had known no man by lying with any male: and they brought them unto the camp to Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

- The executioners found 400 virgins in the city, women who could become wives to two-thirds of the surviving Benjamite soldiers

- "...virgins" - *betulah*, often refers to a virgin, but can also refer to a maid or maiden; not as clear as the Hebrew word *almah* (Cf. Is 7:14), so a further explanation was necessary

- The Israelites brought the virgins back to Shiloh, where the Tabernacle was located, which would provide a safe place that other locations such as Mizpeh and Bethel would not — It was at Shiloh where they could undergo ceremonial cleansing after the war

How did the 12,000 Israelite soldiers know whether a woman was a virgin or not? The text does not tell us specifically, but married women were often differentiated by the clothes they wore.

13 Then the whole congregation sent *word* and spoke to the sons of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them.

13 Then the whole congregation sent *word* and spoke to the sons of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them.

13 Then the entire congregation sent for the surviving descendants of Benjamin who were living at the rock of Rimmon and assured them that their intentions toward them were peaceful.

13 And the whole congregation sent some to speak to the children of Benjamin that were in the rock Rimmon, and to call peaceably unto them.

- These men had been on the rock for four months (20:47), but now they could take their brides and go home

— What a price was paid for these wives! But such are "the wages of sin" (see Num 31:17 and Deut 20:13-14 for precedents).

- The assembly of Israelites next sent to the 600 surviving Benjamites a formal offer of peace (*Shalom*, implying restoration to covenantal participation)

14 And *the tribe of Benjamin* returned at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had allowed to live from the women of Jabesh-gilead; but they were not enough for them.

14 Benjamin returned at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had kept alive from the women of Jabesh-gilead; yet they were not enough for them.

14 So the survivors of the tribe of Benjamin returned at that time, and the Israelis gave them the women whom they had kept alive from the raid on Jabesh-gilead. Even so, there weren't enough for them.

14 And Benjamin came again at that time; and they gave them wives which they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh-Gilead: and yet so they sufficed them not.

- They accepted the peace offer and were married to the 400 virgins of Jabesh-Gilead. Israelite grief continued, however, because 200 Benjamites were still without wives.

15 And the people were sorry for Benjamin, because the LORD had created a gap in the tribes of Israel.

15 And the people were sorry for Benjamin because the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.

15 The people felt sorry for the tribe of Benjamin because the LORD had broken one of the tribes of Israel.

15 And the people repented them for Benjamin, because that the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.

16 Then the elders of the congregation said, "What are we to do for wives for those who are left, since the women have been eliminated from Benjamin?"

16 Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?"

16 So the elders of the congregation asked, "What will we do to obtain wives for the survivors, since the women of Benjamin have been devastated?"

16 Then the elders of the congregation said, How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?

- They still had the problem of 200 Benjamite men without wives

— All the Benjamite women and children had been killed, and there was no other place the Israelites could find young people who were not part of the oath

17 And they said, "*There must be an **inheritance** for the survivors of Benjamin, so that a tribe will not be wiped out from Israel.*

17 They said, "*There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, so that a tribe will not be blotted out from Israel.*

17 They continued, "*Let's make sure that there's an inheritance for the survivors of the tribe of Benjamin, so that a tribe won't be blotted out from Israel.*

17 And they said, "*There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin, that a tribe be not destroyed out of Israel.*

- "...inheritance" - *yerushah*, usually used of the Land allotted to Israel or one of the tribes — The elders were concerned that this small group of survivors could not retain the possession of the territory allotted to Benjamin. The 400 families and 200 single men were evidently not enough to maintain its independent existence.

18 But we cannot give them wives from our daughters." For the sons of Israel had sworn, saying, "Cursed is he who gives a wife to Benjamin!"

18 But we cannot give them wives of our daughters." For the sons of Israel had sworn, saying, "Cursed is he who gives a wife to Benjamin."

18 But we can't give them wives from our own daughters, since we've taken this vow: 'May the LORD curse anyone who gives his daughter as a wife to the tribe of Benjamin!'"

18 Howbeit we may not give them wives of our daughters: for the children of Israel have sworn, saying, Cursed be he that giveth a wife to Benjamin.

19 So they said, "Behold, there is a feast of the LORD from year to year in Shiloh, which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the road that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south side of Lebonah."

19 So they said, "Behold, there is a feast of the LORD from year to year in Shiloh, which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south side of Lebonah."

19 So they concluded, "Look, there's a festival to the LORD every year in Shiloh on the north side of Bethel, south of Lebonah and on the east side of the highway that runs from Bethel to Shechem..."

19 Then they said, Behold, there is a feast of the LORD in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah.

- Somebody remembered that many of the virgins from the tribes participated in an annual feast at Shiloh

20 And they commanded the sons of Benjamin, saying, "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards,

20 And they commanded the sons of Benjamin, saying, "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards,

20 So they told the descendants of Benjamin, "Go and hide in the vineyards.

20 Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, Go and lie in wait in the vineyards;

21 and watch; and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to take part in the dances, then you shall come out of the vineyards, and each of you shall seize his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.

21 and watch; and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to take part in the dances, then you shall come out of the vineyards and each of you shall catch his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.

21 Watch when the unmarried women from Shiloh come out to participate in the dances. Then come out of the vineyards and each of you grab a wife from the unmarried women from Shiloh. Then go back home to the territory of Benjamin.

21 And see, and, behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.

- Conveniently the girls of Shiloh (about 13 miles north by northeast of Mizpah) would soon be participating in a local harvest feast where they would dance in the fields near the vineyards. Lebonah (modern el-Lubban) was about 3 miles north of Shiloh.

- The Israelites conceived a plan, based on a loophole in their oath, which they suggested to the Benjamites. The oath said the Israelites could not "give" (v1,7,18) their daughters to the Benjamites, but it said nothing about their daughters being "taken."

— If the remaining 200 men of Benjamin hid near the place, they could each kidnap a girl and take her home as a wife. The tribes wouldn't be violating their oath because they wouldn't be giving the girls as brides. The girls were being taken. It was a matter of semantics, but they agreed to follow the plan.

22 And when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, we shall say to them, 'Give them to us voluntarily, because we did not take for each man *of Benjamin* a wife in battle, nor did you give *them* to them, otherwise you would now be guilty.'

22 It shall come about, when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, that we shall say to them, 'Give them to us voluntarily, because we did not take for each man *of Benjamin* a wife in battle, nor did you give *them* to them, *else* you would now be guilty.'

22 If their fathers or brothers come complaining to us, we'll tell them 'Be generous! Give them to us voluntarily, because we didn't take anyone to be a wife for the men of the tribe

of Benjamin as a result of the battle. And you haven't incurred guilt by giving your daughters to them."

22 And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, Be favourable unto them for our sakes: because we reserved not to each man his wife in the war: for ye did not give unto them at this time, that ye should be guilty.

- The excuse given to the fathers of the chosen girls was:

— The Israelites ran 200 women short of providing wives to the surviving Benjaminites

— Since the fathers were part of the oath, but did not give the girls willingly, they would not be guilty of violating the oath

23 The sons of Benjamin did so, and took wives according to their number from those who danced, whom they seized. And they went and returned to their inheritance, and rebuilt the cities and lived in them.

23 The sons of Benjamin did so, and took wives according to their number from those who danced, whom they carried away. And they went and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the cities and lived in them.

23 So the descendants of Benjamin did all of this: they chose and carried away just enough wives from those who danced to meet the number needed, then they left to return to their inheritance, to rebuild their cities, and to live there.

23 And the children of Benjamin did so, and took them wives, according to their number, of them that danced, whom they caught: and they went and returned unto their inheritance, and repaired the cities, and dwelt in them.

- Thus, the 600 men got their brides, the eleven tribes kept their vow, the citizens of Gibeah were punished, the tribe of Benjamin was taught a lesson, and the twelve tribes of Israel were saved

- The 600 men of Benjamin, with their brides, returned to their inheritance, cleaned up the debris, repaired the cities, and started life all over again

All of this carnage and destruction happened because one Levite didn't have the courage to stand up for what was right and treat his wife honorably. Once again, as with Jonathan, Micah, and the Danites (Judges 17-18), the problem started in the home. As goes the home, so goes the nation.

24 And the sons of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and each one departed from there to his inheritance.

24 The sons of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and each one of them went out from there to his inheritance.

24 The Israelis left there at that time, each man to his tribe and family, and each of them went down from there to his territorial allotment.

24 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.

- Though the people were guilty of scheming to get around their oath, the tribe of Benjamin was saved from extinction. The few that remained returned to the inheritance of that tribe (v23)

Tribe of Benjamin

- Descended from Jacob's twelfth son (Gen 35:18)
- Predictions respecting (Gen 49:27; Deut 33:12)
- Formed the rear of the third division of Israel in their journeys (Num 10:22,24)
- Encamped on west side of the tabernacle under the standard of Ephraim (Num 2:18,22)
- Celebrated as bowmen and slingers (1 Chr 12:2)
- Assisted against Sisera (Judges 5:14)
- Oppressed by the Ammonites (Judges 10:9)
- Almost annihilated for protecting the men of Gibeah (Judges 20:12-48)
- Remnant of, provided with wives to preserve the tribe (Judges 21:1-23)
- Furnished the first king to Israel (1 Sam 9:1-2,15-17; 10:20-21; 2 Sam 2:8-10)
- Adhered for a time to the house of Saul against David (2 Sam 2:9,15,25,31)
- Revolted from the house of Saul (2 Sam 3:19)
- Remained faithful to Judah (1 Kings 12:21)
- Furnished an army to Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 17:17)
- Celebrated persons of Benjamin include Ehud (Judges 3:15); Kish (1 Sam 9:1); Saul (1 Sam 9:1; 10:1); Abner (1 Sam 14:51; 17:55); Elhanan (2 Sam 21:19); and Paul (Phil 3:5)
- From among them sprang Ehud, who was famous in his generation, the second judge of Israel (Judges 3:15)

25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

25 Back in those days, Israel didn't yet have a king, so each person did whatever seemed right in his own opinion."

25 In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

- For the fourth time (17:6; 18:1; 19:1), the writer tells us that "there was no king in Israel"; and for the second time (17:6), he adds that "every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

— Today, there is no king in Israel because the nation chose Barabbas instead of Jesus (Luke 23:13-25)

— They said, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14)

— Because there’s no king in Israel, people are rebelling against God and doing whatever pleases them; and it will be that way until the King returns and takes His throne on earth

- The fact that everyone did as he wished is a sad commentary on the deplorable spiritual condition of the nation in those days. The Book of Judges concludes with a final restatement of human failure concerning the moral and social anarchy of this period which preceded the monarchy.

- Though Israel suffered under the oppression of many enemies, God’s grace was repeatedly evident when the people turned to Him in repentance. The Book of Judges illustrates both God’s justice and His grace—justice in punishing sin and grace in forgiving sin.

No King In Israel

(1) No king in Israel to destroy idolatry.

(2) No king in Israel to enforce proper worship.

(3) No king in Israel to conquer the enemies, especially the Philistines, so that the Tribes of Israel could gain full possession of the Land.

(4) No king in Israel to bring law and order into the country and to enforce the Law of Moses.

(5) No king in Israel to bring order among the tribes.

(6) No king in Israel to punish wicked cities.

(7) No king in Israel to enforce a just way of solving problems like the one concerning the wives of Benjamin.

The result of not having a king in Israel was that every man did that which was right in his own eyes.