

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 21

- Vv. 1-12 *Wives for Benjamin taken from Jabesh-gilead.* The Israelites had vowed that they would not give their daughters to the men of Benjamin to be their wives. As a result, the remaining six hundred men were likely to be the last of the entire tribe. The tribe was in danger of being extinguished. When the Israelites found a city, Jabesh-gilead, whose inhabitants had not helped to punish the crime, they sent 12,000 men to destroy the city and slay all but 400 young women who were spared and given as wives for the men of Benjamin.
- Vv. 13-25 *Wives taken for Benjamin in Shiloh.* The Levitical families living in Shiloh were not expected to send warriors into the battle, They had not been numbered with the rest of the Israelites in Numbers 1 and 26. It was therefore decided to permit the men of Benjamin to take wives from the daughters of Shiloh as they came to dance their yearly dances in connection with the Tabernacle services. They urged the fathers of the Levitical families to be lenient with the men of Benjamin in order to establish again this tribe in their midst.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.* After the children of Israel had slain all but six hundred of the men of Benjamin, their hearts were filled with sorrow. Even when society exacts punishment on evil doers, there is no pleasure in the sentencing. Christians most of all weep for the fate of the wicked.
2. *Blessed are the peacemakers.* Forty thousand men of Israel had died in battle, and only six hundred of the men of Benjamin were left in rock Rimmon. If Israel had been of a hard heart, they would have completely destroyed the men of Benjamin. Instead they went and called "peaceably" to them. Immediately they made preparations for establishing the tribe again in the midst of the Israelites.
3. *Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together (Hebrews 10:25).* Although civil war had drenched the land in blood, people were still going up yearly to the house of the Lord for the feasts. The apostle Paul urges Christians not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, and worship is especially needful in times of national distress. God's people should be regular in their worship whether they are in a period of war or peace.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Mourning for Benjamin 21:1-7

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

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;

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

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.

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,

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 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?

1. Why had Israel made the oath? 21:1

The other men of Israel did not want to associate with the wicked men in Benjamin. This verse gives additional information about the oath which the children of Israel took as they gathered in Mizpeh. This conference is described in chapter twenty, verses one and nine, of the book of Judges. While they were there asking the Levite how the crime was committed, they made a decision to go up to fight against Gibeah. At the same time they took this oath which is recorded in chapter twenty-one, verse one. Specifically, they had decided not to give any of their daughters to any of the men of Gibeah as their wives. They did not want to see their children brought into a society which was as corrupt as the community in this city of Benjamin.

2. *Why did the people assemble at Bethel? 21:2 (ASV)*

Bethel was a holy place not too far from the scene of the battle. Bethel was just east of the road which ran from Gibeah to Shechem. It was much closer than Shiloh, where the Tabernacle was. At Bethel, Jacob had received the revelation from the Lord telling him that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. Here he took the stone which he had used for his pillow and made it to be a pillar on which he poured oil. Here he took a vow saying that he would serve God (Genesis 28:12-20). Jacob and his family returned to Bethel when they came from Haran, Laban's home, to settle again in Canaan. Again Jacob worshiped at Bethel (Genesis 35:9-15). As the most readily accessible holy place, Bethel was chosen as a place for the assembly of the children of Israel. Bethel is "house of God" in the King James Version.

3. *Why had they made such a rash oath? 21:5*

They had vowed that they would kill anyone who did not go up to Mizpeh. The tide turned and another danger arose. A crowd roused to anger is hard to control. The tribes were right in deciding to punish the criminals at Gibeah, but they went too far when they made such strong vows. On numerous occasions different tribes had not rallied to support the judge who was trying to deliver the people of Israel from their oppressors. Although these judges chided those who were faint hearted, they did not always take such drastic actions against those who did not cooperate with them. Similar action was necessary in the days of Gideon and Jephthah, but even in these instances the emotions of the people were not out of control to a large extent. Such was surely the case with the children of Israel in this instance.

4. *Why was there a question about wives? 21:7*

They did not intend to wipe out the tribe. Having once tasted of vengeance, the children of Israel did not

cease in their slaughter until Benjamin was almost exterminated. The slaughter extended not only to the fighting men, but to women and children. The six hundred who fled to the rock fort of Rimmon appear to be the only survivors of the tribe. Justice overshot its mark and while eradicating one evil created another. Even those who had most fiercely used their swords looked at the result with horror and amazement for almost an entire tribe was lacking in Israel. If wives were not found for the six hundred men who were left, the tribe would eventually be lost completely.

Wives for the Benjamites 21:8-25

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 the people were numbered, and, behold, there were none of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead there.

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

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

12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead 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.

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.

21:14-23 STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

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.

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, How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?

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.

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

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

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.

22 And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, Be favorable 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.

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.

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.

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

5. *Where was Jabesh-gilead? 21:9*

Jabesh-gilead was east of the Jordan and southeast of the Sea of Galilee. The town was attacked by Nahash, king of Ammon, but was rescued by Saul (I Samuel 11:1 ff.) . On account of this kindness shown to them by Saul, the inhabitants later rescued the bodies of Saul and his sons when the Philistines gibbeted them on the wall of Bethshan (I Samuel 31:8 ff.) . Josephus called Jabesh a metropolis of Gilead (*Antiquities* VI, v, 1) . Although the people of Israel had looked with horror and amazement, they still were not willing to give any of their daughters to be the wives of the men of Benjamin. Since the people of Jabesh-gilead had not taken the vow entered into by the rest of the men of Israel, the leaders saw the women of this town east of the Jordan as possible wives for the men of Benjamin.

6. *Why did they take the captive women to Shiloh?*

21:12

Shiloh is described as being in the land of Canaan because Jabesh was in Gilead. Shiloh was the usual meeting place of the congregation for it was the place where the Tabernacle was established. The representatives of the thousands of Israel had gone there after their deliberations concerning the men of Jabesh. From this place they were able to send a delegation to the surviving men of Benjamin. The women taken from Jabesh-gilead were to be kept at Shiloh until all the details of the arrangements were finalized.

7. *Why were the men of Benjamin still at rock Rimmon?*

21:13

The children of Israel had spoken peaceably to the six hundred men of Benjamin who had fled to the rock of Rimmon, but the entire matter had not been settled satisfactorily. Consequently, these men who survived the dreadful slaughter were still on their guard. They were not yet at peace completely, and they were evidently afraid to return to Gibeah or to any other of the cities of Benjamin. Only when their differences with the children of Israel had been completely settled were they in a position to resume anything resembling a normal life.

8. *Why did the author say the Lord had made a breach?*

21:15

Quite often the writers of Scripture refer to God as the ultimate cause of all things. For example, Moses said God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 10:20), whereas earlier it had been said that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:32). Moses also said Pharaoh's heart was hardened when the magicians imitated Moses' miracles (Exodus 7:22) without saying whether Pharaoh hardened his own heart or God hardened it. In the days of the judges, Israel had made a breach in Israel—they had nearly destroyed one entire tribe—but since they had asked God whether to go to war or not, the statement is made that God made the breach. God allowed it. The people themselves actually made it.

9. *What yearly feast was this? 21:19*

It might have been either Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles. The festivities best fit the first one. All three feasts—Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles—were held yearly. From the importance of it, it was likely one which lasted seven days—either the Passover or the feast of Tabernacles. Since a dance was held in connection with the feast, the festivities appear to be an imitation of the

dances of the Israelitish women who celebrated the safe crossing of the Red Sea. At that time Miriam led the women of Israel singing of the triumph of the Lord over Pharaoh (Exodus 15:20).

10. Where was Lebonah? 21:19

Lebonah was three miles west of Shiloh. There is a community now known as El Lubban. The village stands on the slope of a hill bordering a valley called Wady Lubban. The houses are grey and have an ancient appearance, In the cliffs above the community are caves and sepulchers which testify of its having been of importance through the centuries. The location of Shiloh is thus fixed as being north of Bethel and somewhat south but mostly east of Lebonah.

11. Why did Israel devise such a plan? 21:20, 21

The children of Benjamin were encouraged to go and hide in the vineyards of the area around Shiloh. They were instructed to wait until the daughters of Shiloh came out to dance in the celebration of the feast. At that point the men were to come out of hiding and catch wives from among the daughters of Shiloh. They would then be in a position to return to their homes and begin a semblance of normal life. Since the daughters of Shiloh were probably the children of the Levites, the vow which the children of Israel had taken at Mizpeh did not apply. In this way, the Israelites were enabled to follow the letter of the oath while preventing the complete annihilation of the tribe of Benjamin.

12. Why did they expect the fathers and brothers to complain? 21:22

Although the Levites had not entered into the warfare, they might naturally be reluctant to have their daughters marry men who had been guilty of protecting the criminals at Gibeah. Since all the other fathers and brothers of Israel had decided not to give any of their daughters

and sisters as wives to these men, the Levites would feel a similar repugnance for such marriages. The leaders of Israel had promised the men of Benjamin they would encourage the Levites to be lenient in the matter since they had not actually taken the oath themselves.

13. What light does verse 25 throw on the question of authorship? 21:25

This final verse of the book of Judges, along with such other verses making reference to the kind of government in Israel at the time, points to the book's having been written when the monarchy was in the thinking of the people. Such statements as this one (see 19:1 and 18:1) bring the era of the judges into sharp contrast with the time of the monarchy. No era in the history of Israel was so filled with this kind of discussion as that of the closing days of Samuel's judgeship. At that time the people of Israel had begun to clamor for a king in order that they might be like all the other nations. Samuel had tried to tell them what kind of person a king would be. He even wrote the manner of a kingdom in a book (I Samuel 10:25). The closing of Samuel's judgeship would be the most appropriate time for such a book as Judges to be written and given to the people of Israel as a part of their Scriptures. Of course, Samuel was filled with the spirit of God. His work has found a place in the canon of the Bible. For that reason it is a part of the Word of God preserved for all *men* to the present age.

14. What was the condition of life in Israel? 21:25b

Along with the statement telling of there being no king in Israel, we find a collateral statement of every man doing that which was right in his own eyes. Such a statement may point to anarchy; but since it speaks of men doing what was right, we are led to believe conditions may have been better than often supposed. There was rudeness degenerating into unbridled licentiousness. The law given

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by Moses was well above the standard by which the people lived. The worst traits of the Canaanites surrounding the Israelites had written their mark in the characters of many. When we read of the people going "to the house of the Lord" (19:18), of the yearly feasts at Shiloh (21:19), of all Israel rallying as one man to punish crime (20:1), and of men doing that which was right (21:25), we are led to believe many in Israel were striving to follow the Lord's leading even though they had no central government in the form of a king.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 21

1. Where had Israel gathered to
2. What town had not sacrifice after the war? sent any Israel?
3. How many men of soldiers to fight with Israel went to fight against these people?
4. How many wives were found there for the men of Benjamin?
5. Where was the camp to which these women were brought?
6. Where were the remaining men of Benjamin?
7. Where was the feast to the Lord?
8. Where did the highway run which went past Shiloh?
9. How many wives were taken from the women who danced at Shiloh?
10. Was there a king in Israel in those days?