



Six Hundred Wives for the Tribe of Benjamin Judges 21

Introduction

The Book of Judges is summed up in the statements, *In those days there was no king in Israel* and, *everyone did what was right in his own eyes*. It was a nation with no king and everyone doing their own thing. The result was anarchy, violence, selfishness, a cheap view of life, and a confused groping for meaning and values. The cycle of sin, slavery, deliverance, and temporary freedom, repeated seven times in the book, could have gone on until it destroyed the nation. Sin would have destroyed the tribe of Benjamin, but for the grace of God.

Outline of Judges Chapter 21

- I. Israel's Oath - Judges 21:1-7
- II. Jabesh-Gilead's Fatal Mistake - Judges 21:8-12
- III. Benjamin's Provision and Restoration - Judges 21:13-24
- IV. Judges' Synopsis - Judges 21:25

I. Israel's Oath - Judges 21:1-7

A. No Wives to Benjamin - Judges 21:1

The tribes made a rash oath not to give their daughters as wives to men of Benjamin. This put them in an impossible situation very soon. The oath arose from a vague recollection that under Mosaic Law Israelites could marry only certain people. They were not to marry non-Israelites because God's people were consecrated to God, set apart, and called holy (Deuteronomy 7:1-4). Non-Israelites were unholy because they worshiped other gods.

"When people are governed by excitement, and not by the word of God, they bind themselves by oaths which lead to difficulty and sometimes bloodshed (21:3,10,21)." (The Student's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, George Williams).

B. Israel's Grief Over Benjamin - Judges 21:2-3

The people wept bitterly at Bethel and stayed until evening wailing, *O Lord God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that today there should be one tribe missing in Israel?* They realized that the twelve tribes were dangerously close to being eleven tribes and this was unacceptable. Fred Young gives one root cause of the reduction of numbers. "The Benjamites' failure to recognize the need of correcting evil at its source led

to a terrible decimation of their forces" (The Biblical Expositor, Fred Young). If Benjamin had surrendered the offenders, no other lives would have been lost.

There was another contributing factor that explains the ambivalence of the tribes who one day gained a spectacular victory and the next day wept profusely over it. They had gone too far in punishing Benjamin. The victory was adequate at the end of the third battle. However, the tribes continued the slaughter after the enemy fled in defeat, and *struck them down with the edge of the sword from every city, men and beasts, all who were found. They also set fire to all the cities they came to* (Judges 20:48). It was overkill. The cry, asking God why one tribe was missing in Israel, may have expressed their feelings of guilt. Keil and Delitsch expound the point in a way worth reading. "For although, when forming the resolution to punish the unparalleled wickedness of the inhabitants of Gibeah with all the severity of the law, they had been urged on by nothing else than the sacred duty that was binding upon them to root out the evil from their midst. The war against the whole tribe of Benjamin was justified by the fact that they had taken the side of the culprits. The tribes had even received the approval of the Lord. But there is no doubt that in the performance of their resolution, and the war that was actually carried on, feelings of personal revenge had disturbed their righteous cause. In consequence of the defeat which they had twice sustained at the hands of the Benjamites, the warriors had been carried away into a war of extermination which was neither commanded by the law nor justified by the circumstances. It had brought about the destruction, with the exception of a small vanishing remnant, of a whole tribe from the twelve tribes of the covenant nation. When the rash deed was done, the congregation began most bitterly to repent. And with repentance there was awakened the feeling of brotherly love and a sense of duty to provide for the continuance of the tribe of Benjamin. By finding wives for those who remained, the small remnant might grow into a vigorous tribe again" (Commentary on the Old Testament, Keil & Delitsch, Eerdmans).

Are you grieving over a situation for which you are partly responsible? Will you acknowledge your part in it to God, accept His forgiveness, and ask Him what you can do to make restitution?

C. Israel's Actions - Judges 21:4-9

1. The offerings - 21:4-6

The next morning the people of the eleven tribes

rose and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to acknowledge their sins. The burnt offering was a whole animal which represented their wholehearted offering of themselves to God. Jesus Christ fulfilled this offering by sacrificing Himself totally for us to present us to God (Ephesians 5: 25-27; Colossians 1:21-22). The peace offering stood for fellowship with God through having their sins forgiven. Jesus Christ also fulfilled this offering by the sacrifice of Himself so that we could have communion and sweet fellowship with God (Romans 5:1).

Are you enjoying God's acceptance of you? Do you have a close relationship with Him through Jesus Christ? If not, you may enjoy it today by accepting His sacrifice for you and putting your faith in Him.

2. The decision to provide wives for Benjamin – 21:7-9

The tribes wanted to help build Benjamin up again. But their oath kept them from giving their daughters to them in marriage. Then the tribes remembered another vow they had made, that anyone who did not go to Mizpah and did not fight against Benjamin would be put to death (21:5). They remembered that no one from Jabesh-Gilead had gone up to Mizpah. A bizarre plan began to take shape.

II. Jabesh-Gilead's Fatal Mistake - Judges 21:10-12

A. Jabesh-Gilead's Punishment – Judges 21:10-11

Twelve thousand of Israel's most valiant soldiers were sent to strike down the people of Jabesh-Gilead, including men, women, and children.

Because they dwelt on the other side of the Jordan River, the people of Jabesh-Gilead may have thought they could be neutral in the war against Benjamin. But surely they must have been aware of both the meeting and the penalty for absence from it.

B. Booty of the Battle – Judges 21:12

Four hundred virgins were found, spared from the slaughter, and taken to Shiloh.

III. Benjamin's Provision and Restoration - Judges 21:13-24

A. 400 Wives from Jabesh-Gilead - Judges 21:13-16

The nation sent a message of peace to the Benjamites at the rock of Rimmon. Benjamin came back and, no

doubt to their surprise, were given the four hundred virgins. That left two hundred men without wives. The people still grieved for Benjamin because the tribe was so small. The elders felt responsible and said, *What shall we do for wives for those who remain, since the women of Benjamin have been destroyed?*

Prayer would have been wise at this point. Prayer would also have been expedient earlier, before the mass destruction of Jabesh-Gilead.

The Scripture tell us, *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding* (Proverbs 3:5). The elders were about to lean heavily on their own understanding and plan a scheme that was rife with ethical blunders.

B. Two Hundred Wives from Shiloh - Judges 21:17-23

There were two hundred men who still needed wives to perpetuate their inheritance. The reasoning of the tribes was, *However, we cannot give them wives from our daughters, for the children of Israel have sworn an oath, saying, Cursed be the one who gives a wife to Benjamin.* It is possible that God would have forgiven them if they had repented of their rash oath and not hatched the wild scene that followed.

A yearly feast was held in Shiloh. The men of Benjamin were to lie and wait in the vineyards and when the daughters of Shiloh danced, they could get a wife by running out and seizing one. If anyone was so impolite as to complain at the tactics, they would be told to be kind and remember that they had not technically broken their oath for they had not willingly given their daughters away.

The men of Benjamin snatched enough wives, went home, and rebuilt houses to resume living. The tribes went home to enjoy their inheritance. The book would seem to end on a happy note except for the last verse which reminds us of all that went before and would have continued in a downward course to destruction. But God had a plan for His people. He was committed to them and to their salvation.

IV. Judges' Synopsis - Judges 21:25

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did right in his own eyes. "Judges 17-21 vividly demonstrates how bizarre and deep sin can become when people throw off the authority of God" (John MacArthur, [The MacArthur Bible Commentary](#)).

Proverbs 14:12 says, *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.* When we do what is right in our own eyes, we do not do what is

right in God's eyes. We fall into sin repeatedly, as Israel did seven times. Deliverance comes only through the Deliverer in response to repentance. "Unbelief and apostasy lead only to anarchy. The result of this state of lawlessness was servitude and punishment" (Unger's Survey of the Bible, Merrill Unger).

A commitment to daily Bible study, meditation on God's word, and obedience to it through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit received by faith in Jesus Christ: this is the way of escape from the downward cycle today.

Applications

1. Is there no king in your life? Will you name the Lord Jesus Christ as King of your life today? In what ways should this change your life?
2. What is your standard of right? Do you make yourself judge of what the Bible says? God's word judges you! In John 12:48 Jesus warned, *He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him --- the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.* What attitudes do you need to change so you will not face this judgment?