

Judges

Lesson 36

Here we are told again about the thirty men of Israel that died. Upon their deaths, Israel retreated. It is the second time the writer is telling us the story. This time through the story, he is telling it from Benjamin's perspective. Benjamin thought it would be victorious again for the third time. They even said, "*Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle.*" But that would not be the case. It was not the promise from the LORD.

(c) The Burning of Gibeah

But then, Benjamin saw the burning of Gibeah behind them. Verse 40. "*But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, Benjamin looked behind them; and behold, the whole city was going up in smoke to heaven.* ⁴¹ *Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were terrified; for they saw that disaster was close to them.* ⁴² *Therefore, they turned their backs before the men of Israel toward the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them while those who came out of the cities destroyed them in the midst of them.* ⁴³ *They surrounded Benjamin, pursued them without rest and trod them down opposite Gibeah toward the east.* ⁴⁴ *Thus 18,000 men of Benjamin fell; all these were valiant warriors.* ⁴⁵ *The rest turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, but they caught 5,000 of them on the highways and overtook them at Gidom and killed 2,000 of them.* ⁴⁶ *So all of Benjamin who fell that day were 25,000 men who draw the sword; all these were valiant warriors.*" (20:40-46)

When the soldiers saw the burning of their city, they stopped fighting and began to run. Israel chased them and killed on that campaign 25,000 men. Back in verse 35, we were told that 25,100 Benjamites were killed. May I say, I interpret both as right, but both are rounded numbers, as is the case with the 18,000, 5,000, and 2,000 mentioned in this passage. Those numbers are all too sterile. All through this story, it seems that the writer is giving us rounded numbers. Therefore, the 25,100 that were killed in verse 35 is rounded to 25,000 in verse 46.

(3) The Third Battle Fugitives

Reading on, we learn of the third battle fugitives. Verse 47. "*But 600 men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they remained at the rock of Rimmon four months.* ⁴⁸ *The men of Israel then turned back against the sons of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, both the entire city with the cattle and all that they found; they also set on fire all the cities which they found.*" (20:47-48)

Six hundred Benjamite fugitive soldiers hid for four months at the rock of Rimmon. But when we do the math, we are missing one thousand Benjamite men. Where were they? Some scholars say they were killed in the first two days. But we do not have any information to tell us that is true. Some say that they were included in the rounding of the numbers, but nothing tells us that that is true. It seems best to take it for what it is. Six hundred of the soldiers got away and hid at the rock of Rimmon. Four months later, Israel will release them. Another one thousand soldiers got away and were never caught and killed. That scenario seems more plausible at this point in the story.

Chapter 21

D. The Nation's Determination

1. The Tribal Vow

Moving into chapter 21, the final chapter in the book of Judges, the fighting with the tribe of Benjamin may have been over, but the details were not. In this section of the book, we have seen the nation's defiance, the nation's disobedience, the Nation's defense, and now we come to the

nation's determination. Sin has consequences for those who are left to pick up the pieces. Even though the tribe of Benjamin was defeated, the relatives of the soldiers of Benjamin would suffer more than just the loss of their soldier in arms. Furthermore, the nation needed to account for those who helped and those who did not help with the punishment of the Benjamites. We come to the nation's determination and the tribal vow that was made. Chapter 21, verse 1. "*Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, 'None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage.'*" (21:1)

Since coming out of Egypt, the male sons of Israel could marry any female from any of the twelve tribes. The offspring of the marriage would become a descendant of the tribe of the father. However, now, after the battle with the Benjamites, a vow was made that no daughters of the remaining tribes would be allowed to marry a Benjamite. That meant that there had to be enough Benjamite daughters to marry the Benjamite sons who needed wives. Whether or not this vow was made in haste did not matter. The vow was made, and the tribes had to keep the vow according to the Law. Remember, Moses said it was better not to make a vow than to make one and not keep it. That law resulted in the tragic story in this book of Judges where Jephthah made a vow, and it resulted in the death of his daughter. The vow had to be kept.

2. The Tribal Question

With the knowledge that the vow was made by the tribes, you would think that all was well. But it was not. Even though the Benjamites were guilty of grave sin, the rest of the tribes still wept for the sinful tribe. We should take that as a lesson. We should all weep for the guilty and evil. They will get their due punishment in the LORD's time. It was true even with Benjamin. The tribes of the nation gathered back at Bethel with the tribal question. Verse 2. "*So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly.*"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?'"* (21:2-3)

Yes, more than forty-thousand men of these eleven tribes were dead. Yes, more than twenty-five thousand men of the tribe of Benjamin were dead. But what were the tribes at Bethel weeping about? Not the loss of the men, but the loss of an entire tribe. For the first time since coming out of Egypt, a tribe was not participating in worship and weeping as a combined nation before the LORD. Not one Benjamite was at Bethel. Why did this happen this way? One tribe was missing.

Just to mention it, notice that *fasting* was not part of this time with the LORD. Enough said.

3. The Tribal Worship

Still at Bethel, we come to the tribal worship. Verse 4. "*It came about the next day that the people arose early and built an altar there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.*" (21:4)

As always, the burnt offerings were for their own sins. The peace offerings were to thank the LORD for all He had done even when they were guilty of sin. This worship happened on the morning after they gathered at Bethel. Notice one more time, *fasting* was not part of that worship.

4. The Tribal Inquiry

a) The Missing Men

But after the time of worship, there came a tribal inquiry for the missing men. Who among the tribes of Israel did not come to fight against Benjamin? Verse 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.*" (21:5)

More happened at Mizpah than the writer told us in the first telling of the meeting. At Mizpah, where Israel heard the testimony of the Levite who sent the body parts of his concubine to the tribes, the men vowed several things. First, to bring judgment on Benjamin. Second, to not let any of their daughters marry Benjamite men. Third, to put to death anyone of the tribes of Israel who did not join them in the fight against Benjamin. Even if one person from a town came to fight, the whole town was saved from this vow. We will learn about that in verse 8.

b) The Missing Wives

For now, we are in verse 6. Here the sons of Israel are weeping because of the missing wives for the remaining young men of Benjamin who had not reached fighting age. Verse 6. *“And the sons of Israel were sorry for their brother Benjamin and said, “One tribe is cut off from Israel today. 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?”* (21:6-7)

Notice that, even though Benjamin was not represented at Bethel, the rest of the tribes were still concerned about the future generations of Benjamin. Without wives, how would the tribe recoup its numbers with the birth of children? The question will be answered, but not yet. Another problem was at hand.

5. The Tribal Punishment

a) The Destruction of Jabesh-gilead

The tally had been taken, and members of one city in Israel did not adhere to the summons of Israel to meet at Mizpah. The tribal punishment had to be exerted. The destruction of Jabesh-gilead was necessary. Here is the story in verse 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. 9 For when the people were numbered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there. 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. 11 This is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every man and every woman who has lain with a man.”* (21:8-11)

As we said before, if only one person from Jabesh-gilead had come to Mizpah, all the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead would have been spared. Not one came. The vow was to be completed with 12,000 soldiers sent to the city to kill every “*man and every woman who has lain with a man.*”

This instruction is difficult to understand as to why it was done, but it is clear. Every man, woman, boy, and girl were to be killed, except virgin women or virgin girls, who had reached the age where they could be married. We are not clear how young that would have been, but it might have been as young as eleven or twelve.

b) The Salvation of the Virgin Women

(1) Saved for Benjamin

The destruction of Jabesh-gilead occurred. The salvation of the virgin women who were saved for Benjamin occurred. How many virgin girls were saved for the Benjamites? Verse 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.” (21:12)

The men were sent from Bethel to attack Jabesh-gilead, but they took the virgin girls back to Shiloh. Why? And why did the writer say, “*Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.*”

Shiloh was not in the tribal area of Benjamin, as was Bethel. Shiloh was just up the road between Bethel and Shechem in the tribal area of Ephraim. As will find out in verse 19, a festival of Israel was soon to be held in Shiloh. Therefore, while the troops were at Jabesh-gilead on the east side of the Jordan River, the rest of the tribes would move from Bethel just a short distance to Shiloh for the festival.

Why the writer states that Shiloh was in Canaan, we do not know. There are two logical answers. First, another Shiloh existed somewhere near, one that had been lost to all knowledge except that of the LORD in time. Second, and more likely, over the past three hundred years, the area around Shiloh had been re-populated by the Canaanites. It was their land before Israel took it. We are not talking about the whole of the Promised Land. It was indeed inhabited by Canaanite descendant tribes and thereby being Canaanite land in total. However, by the time Joshua marched into Canaan Land to take it for the Promised Land, the Canaanite descendants had become known by different

names. The Hivites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Amorites, Gergesenes, and the original Canaanites. Each new name represented a descendant of Canaan whose family became a strong offshoot tribe. However, they were all Canaanites. The original Canaanite group still controlled two areas when Joshua took the Promised Land. They controlled a strip of land next to the Great Sea and a strip of land next to the Jordan River. Shiloh sat in the original strip of Canaanite land next to the Jordan River. The nation of Israel never fulfilled the command of the LORD to destroy every Canaanite in the Promised Land totally. Earlier, the book of Judges identified all the tribes that did not remove the Canaanites from their tribal area. Manasseh and Ephraim were the worst (1:19). Shiloh was in the tribal area of Ephraim. Undoubtedly, the Canaanite descendants who lived in the area given to Ephraim had re-established themselves around Shiloh over the three hundred years and six cycles of sin recorded in the book of Judges. The writer is probably telling us that Shiloh is in Canaan because of the Canaanite population that lived in the surrounding area of Shiloh.

(2) Given to Benjamin

At Shiloh, peace was made with Benjamin, and the virgin women were given to Benjamin. Verse 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. 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. ¹⁵ And the people were sorry for Benjamin because the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel."* (21:13-15)

The rock of Rimmon was where the fugitives from the battle were hiding for four months. But, we must remember, about one thousand men were not killed nor found. Four months from the battle had passed, and the nation of Israel stationed at Shiloh sent word to the men at Rimmon and released them with a word and promise of peace between the tribes. The men at Rimmon, as well as all the men of the tribe of Benjamin, joined the other tribes at Shiloh, where the virgin women of Jabesh-gilead were given by the Benjamite men who needed wives.

6. The Tribal Need

But Israel was short on virgin women to give to the men of Benjamin. What would they do to make up the difference? Verse 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?'"*¹⁷ They said, *"There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, so that a tribe will not be blotted out from Israel. 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."* (21:16-18)

As mentioned before, every family in the tribe of Benjamin needed to be protected in the fight against the eleven tribes. When the ambush came, when Gibeah was destroyed, all the families of the entire tribe of Benjamin who were in Gibeah were destroyed. The tribe of Benjamin had not grown in number over the three hundred years – they had decreased. Only the six-hundred men, fighting age, whose wives were at Gibeah, if they had wives, were hiding at Rimmon and were left. We do not know about the extra one-thousand men. Be that as it may, six-hundred Benjamites arrived at Shiloh for wives, but only four-hundred virgin women were there. Israel was short two hundred women. Still true to their vows, Israel would not let one of their virgin daughters marry a Benjamite.

7. The Tribal Plan

We come to the tribal plan set forth by the elders. It was a plan to furnish the remaining two-hundred virgins for the Benjamites who had never been married or who had lost their wives in the ambush on Gibeah. Verse 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.'*²⁰ And they commanded the sons 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 catch his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin."*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.'"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. ²⁴The 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.

²⁵In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (21:19-25)