

Judges

Lesson 34

This is lesson number 37 In the book of Judges, and it is our last lesson in the book of Judges. Now we're in chapter 21. And I want you to open your Bible there because we have somethings that we need to cover to refresh our memory.

Now I want us to review the dilemma that we were facing with the nation of Israel, as we ended the last lesson. There were six hundred known men left of the tribe of Benjamin who had no wives. The plan was made that the men would come the next feast at Shiloh and steal a daughter of Shiloh when the young women would come out to dance in the fields.

Let us read the passage again to set the stage. Chapter 21, 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. 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.*

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

We do not know the name of the feast mentioned in this passage. It would have been one of three as instructed by Moses while he was still alive (Feast of Passover, Feast of Weeks, or Feast of Tabernacles). Most scholars believe that this festival had to be the feast of Tabernacle because the word "dances" was used in the text. The feast of Tabernacles was a joyous festival, and scholars imply that the word "dances" means joy. However, the women of Israel have danced at all three festivals since the time of the Tabernacle days. What does that mean to us? It means that the specific feast mentioned in this passage is still a mystery.

Notice that the feast is of the LORD. Also, notice that the "daughters of Shiloh came out to take part in the dances." This statement does not mean that the "daughters of Shiloh" were Jewish; they were might have been Canaanite. Why? Shiloh was not really a city, town, or village. It was the place where the Tabernacle complex sat for almost four hundred years. The priests and Levites who ministered in the Tabernacle complex had tents there, but the everyday Israelite did not live there. There were no hotels or places to stay. Each year, when the men arrived for one of the three feasts, they brought their own tents to set in the fields around the Tabernacle just as they did at Mount Sinai. When the feast was over, they would pack up and return home. Also, according to Exodus 23:17 and 34:23, all males were required to present themselves before the LORD three times a year, at the three feasts (Feast of Passover, Feast of Weeks, or Feast of Tabernacles). Samuel will tell us in 1 Samuel 1:3 and 9, that the whole family, wives, and children, would attend these feasts with their husbands. Single men would probably go alone or with their biological family unit.

The vow has been made that none of their daughters will be given to the Benjamites for wives. Where will they get them then? The women cannot be given from the Jewish families. At Shiloh, the virgin daughters of Shiloh would come to take part in the dances. But Shiloh was not a town of such. In addition, the writer tells us of the Canaanites in the area. Canaanites were not Israelites. They are not Jews. If virgin Canaanite women came to the outskirts of the Tabernacle complex to dance in the fields to the music, it seems possible that the elders of Israel hit on a workable solution.

It was not a biblical solution because all Canaanites were supposed to be destroyed. However, if the Benjamites stole a Canaanite virgin and the woman converted to the faith, all would be well, at least in their minds. For you see, the tribe of Benjamin had been reduced to six-hundred men that we know of with possibly another thousand somewhere, but not at the meeting in Shiloh. The cry to the LORD of the Israelites was to save the tribe of Benjamin from extinction. Between a rock and a hard place, the possibility of filling two hundred spots with Canaanite women who would join the faith would answer the problem and keep the Israelites from breaking their vows.

But let us address one more possibility. What if these *“daughters of Shiloh”* were Israelite women? What then? The elders answered that problem. When the fathers came to complain that their daughters were stolen by the Benjamites, the elders would say, *“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.”* In other words, the elders of Israel split hairs. No one would give a daughter to the Benjamites; the Benjamites stole the daughters. Thus, all men of Israel kept their vow, and the two hundred wifeless Benjamites obtained a wife by theft. Whether or not it was a theft of Canaanite virgins or Israelite virgins, it did not matter. It was still theft. And, because the Canaanites were living in the area, it may have been a mixture of Canaanite and Israelite virgins dancing in the field together. That is how lax the nations had become in adhering to the Law of the LORD. This kind of thinking will prevail among the Israelites throughout the rest of the Bible that we have in our hands. It is not God’s way of thinking. But, as we can recall, it seemed to be the way the Israelites thought all through the book of Judges. Think about the example of the woman who lost her eleven hundred pieces of silver that we just studied in the last section. When her son admitted that he had taken it, she dedicated it to the LORD and then took the silver to a smith and had it molded into a molten image to worship a false god. The two do not go together, but that is how lax the nation had become in following the LORD’s Law. With the wives in tow, the Benjamites returned to their tribal area and slowly, one baby at a time, began to rebuild the tribe of Benjamin.

The book ends with the words, *“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”* This is the fourth time the writer has said this since the end of the sixth cycle of sin in the Promised Land, after the death of Samson. Why did the writer pen these words five times? The whole purpose of the LORD leading Samuel to write this book was to come to this point, *“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”* Had Samuel written only his part of this story, as he will in the book of 1st Samuel, the LORD’s conversation with Samuel in 1st Samuel chapter 8 would not have made sense to us as the readers. We needed the history in this book to understand.

In summary, Samuel began the book with a review of the sin of Israel’s downfall without a leader after the death of Joshua. He then presented a review of the sequence of the sin of Israel’s downfall without a leader in the six cycles of idolatry, then foreign oppression, then a called judge, which began at the death of Joshua and was concluded at the death of Samson. With the death of Samson, Samuel was the living judge of Israel at that time, but he had not recorded his story as of yet. He would do that in the book of 1st Samuel. In that book, he would do, as he has done multiple times in the book of Judges, retrace some of the same timeline in Judges to tell the story of his birth and life. However, before he wrote the story of his life as an introduction to press on to talk about the first king in Israel, after the death of Samson, Samuel recorded a review of the sway of the sin of Israel’s downfall without a leader in the last chapters of Judges. In each case, Samuel stated, *“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”* About three years after the death of Samson, and surely within a decade of his death, the people would begin to ask Samuel for a king. The LORD would direct Samuel to the thirty-year-old man who would become King Saul, Israel’s first king. Israel had failed to accept the LORD as king, abiding by His covenant, commandments, and laws. That fact was clearly presented by Samuel in the book of Judges.

Therefore, an earthly king was needed, not because Samuel could not judge Israel, but because Israel had rejected the judgment of the LORD (1st Samuel 8:7).

"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" is a fitting end to this book. The sentence actually tells us something else about Israel when it says, *"everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* The nation had degraded in sin so far that the people did not care about the eyes of the LORD; they cared only about what they wanted and what they thought was right, following their own corrupt passions. Indeed, Israel needed a king. After completing the book of Judges, Samuel stepped back in time, back to the days before Samson was born, to tell his story. We will read it in 1st Samuel.

But my question here is this. As we come to the end of this series of 37 short, 27-minute lessons, the question is this. All that we have read in this book of Judges can apply to us today in this godless world in which we live, this ungodly world, of which we go to Church, and we listen to the Word of God read and we hear the stories, and we claim things for our lives, and we even pray to God but yet, when someone in our families or our neighborhoods or our companies, or the businesses in which we work, are cooking up things in the kitchen, that is against God's will, why do we go to that restaurant eat. If you knew how the sausage was being made and what was put into the sausage, most of you would not ever eat the sausage. If you knew at a restaurant, sometimes at a bad restaurant, sometimes at a good restaurant, if you knew what the cooks were doing to the food in the kitchen, you would never go to the restaurant. If you've ever had a food management license, and you've talked to the food managers who teach us and give us our certificates to handle food in the city of Houston, not one of them will ever eat at a restaurant because they are the ones who also do the inspections. And they say, if you knew what was happening in the kitchen, you wouldn't want to eat in the restaurant. What's my point? If you're talking out of one side of your mouth, talking about the Lord, Jehovah, and now the other side of the mouth, giving idols to your children, or even to yourself that are more important to you than God, something's wrong. The sway of the same sin in the book of Judges is on your lives, and something is wrong. But you got to make it right. You've got to turn from your sin. And as in every case of the six cycles in the book of Judges, when the oppression was so great, the people cried out to the Lord for salvation, and the Lord did not disappoint. The Lord answered, and he sent a judge to lead the nation out of great oppression. Our nation is under great oppression from within. Our country is under great oppression from within. Our city is under great oppression from within. And many of our churches are under great oppression from within. But we're also under great oppression from without.

The Nation of Islam is coming in with a vengeance to take over and people who do not know the difference. Christians are willing to stand up and say, the god of Islam is the same God of Christianity, the god of Buddha is the same God, but he is not the same God. None of those. They're all the false gods that were guilty of the same thing. Over and Dubai, in Islam country, three great buildings are being built right now. One to be the worship of Judaism, one to be the worship of Christianity, and one to be the worship of Islam, and yet they are all in Islam territory. So, therefore, a cross cannot be put in the one for Christianity. But they're going to call it the center of the One World Religion. That does not make sense. All this has to say to us today, as we read through the book of Judges, it makes sense of it. Change from your wicked ways. Turn to the Lord. Keep his Laws, keep His commandments. Keep His statutes, keep His ordinances and worship Him and only him. Starting right now!