

### Wives for the Men of Benjamin

#### Judges 21:1-25

Judges 21:1-25 - *"Now the men of Israel had sworn an oath at Mizpah, saying, "None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife." <sup>2</sup> Then the people came to the house of God, and remained there before God till evening. They lifted up their voices and wept bitterly, <sup>3</sup> and said, "O LORD God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that today there should be one tribe missing in Israel?"*

*<sup>4</sup> So it was, on the next morning, that the people rose early and built an altar there, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. <sup>5</sup> The children of Israel said, "Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up with the assembly to the LORD?" For they had made a great oath concerning anyone who had not come up to the LORD at Mizpah, saying, "He shall surely be put to death." <sup>6</sup> And the children of Israel grieved for Benjamin their brother, and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel today. <sup>7</sup> What shall we do for wives for those who remain, seeing we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them our daughters as wives?"*

*<sup>8</sup> And they said, "What one is there from the tribes of Israel who did not come up to Mizpah to the LORD?" And, in fact, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh Gilead to the assembly. <sup>9</sup> For when the people were counted, indeed, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead was there. <sup>10</sup> So the congregation sent out there twelve thousand of their most valiant men, and commanded them, saying, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead with the edge of the sword, including the women and children. <sup>11</sup> And this is the thing that you shall do: You shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman who has known a man intimately." <sup>12</sup> So they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young virgins who had not known a man intimately; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.*

*<sup>13</sup> Then the whole congregation sent word to the children of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon, and announced peace to them. <sup>14</sup> So Benjamin came back at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh Gilead; and yet they had not found enough for them.*

*<sup>15</sup> And the people grieved for Benjamin, because the LORD had made a void in the tribes of Israel.*

*<sup>16</sup> Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who remain, since the women of Benjamin have been destroyed?" <sup>17</sup> And they said, "There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe may not be destroyed from Israel. <sup>18</sup> 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.'" <sup>19</sup> Then they said, "In fact, there is a yearly feast of the LORD in Shiloh, which is north of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah."*

*<sup>20</sup> Therefore they instructed the children of Benjamin, saying, "Go, lie in wait in the vineyards, <sup>21</sup> and watch; and just when the daughters of Shiloh come out to perform their dances, then come out from the vineyards, and every man catch a wife for himself from the daughters of Shiloh; then go to the land of Benjamin. <sup>22</sup> Then it shall be, when their fathers or their*

*brothers come to us to complain, that we will say to them, 'Be kind to them for our sakes, because we did not take a wife for any of them in the war; for it is not as though you have given the women to them at this time, making yourselves guilty*

*of your oath.”*

*<sup>23</sup> And the children of Benjamin did so; they took enough wives for their number from those who danced, whom they caught. Then they went and returned to their inheritance, and they rebuilt the cities and dwelt in them. <sup>24</sup> So the children of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family; they went out from there, every man to his inheritance.*

*<sup>25</sup> In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”*

## Background Notes

In the last section of the book of Judges, twice we read the words, *“There was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes”* (17:6 & 21:25, the last verse of the book). There was no king or central authority in Israel during the time of the Judges, and everyone just did their own thing! As a result, there was spiritual and moral anarchy. This fact helps to explain the almost unbelievable events that we’ve just read about in Judges 20 and 21.

The tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped out in the civil war, so In Judges 21 the leaders of Israel decided to try to restore it. All the women of the tribe had been massacred after the defeat, so the 600 surviving men of Benjamin had no wives and no one to marry. The people of Israel had sworn they would never allow their daughters to marry men from the tribe of Benjamin, so as a result, the tribe of Benjamin would be eliminated from the nation of Israel.

So how did the leaders of Israel find a way to provide wives for these men? By committing yet another atrocity. They decided to massacre the people of Jabesh Gilead, because this tribe had not sent any troops to help in the battles! *“So the congregation sent out twelve thousand of their most valiant men, and commanded them, saying, ‘Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead with the edge of the sword, including the women and children. And this is the thing that you shall do: You shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman who has known a man intimately.’ So they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young virgins who had not known a man intimately; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan”* (v10-12). What carnage! Unbelievable!

If you’re wondering how they differentiated between the married women and the virgins, remember that in many ancient cultures married women used some kind of visible sign or symbol to make that distinction, such as different clothing or hair style. Even in modern times, Bedouin families in the Middle East will sometimes fly a white flag on their tent to indicate that there’s an unmarried woman in that family!

The 400 virgins obtained at Jabesh Gilead were given to the 600 men of Benjamin, but 200 more women were needed. So how did Israel solve this problem? Well, they decided that the 200 men without wives would go up to the annual

festival held at Shiloh, and let every man would run out of the bushes and catch a wife for himself when the young maidens came out to dance at the feast. This “feast” may have been the Feast of Tabernacles because the Tabernacle

was at Shiloh at this time, and the feast of Tabernacles was a time of celebration. However, it may have been a local feast. We can't be sure.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Just because it's a vow before God doesn't make it right.

The men of Israel made two foolish vows. *“Now the men of Israel had sworn an oath at Mizpah, saying, “None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife” (v1).* And, *“The children of Israel said, “Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up with the assembly to the LORD?” For they had made a great oath concerning anyone who had not come up to the LORD at Mizpah, saying, “He shall surely be put to death” (v5).* These were foolish vows that were made in the emotion of the moment. None of God's Laws said that there should be no intermarriage between the tribes of Israel, and the people of Jabesh Gilead could certainly have been disciplined for their failure without everyone being killed! These rash vows were improper, even though they were made before the Lord.

Now notice the legal hoops that Israel had to jump through to get around their own foolish vows: “We made a vow not to give our daughters as wives to the men of Benjamin, but Jabesh Gilead didn't go to war with us. So let's kill everybody in Jabesh Gilead except the unmarried women. We'll keep the virgins alive, and that will be our legal loophole for getting wives for Benjamin.” And then at the feast of Shiloh they “legally” got around their vow by letting the men of Benjamin steal their daughters. That way they wouldn't be giving away their daughters as wives. How ridiculous! They shouldn't have made these foolish vows in the first place.

Just because a vow is a vow made before God doesn't make it right. Have you ever made a foolish vow or oath before the Lord? It's easy to do! “I will never give a single dime to any ministry that doesn't use the King James Version.” Or, “I will never attend a church that doesn't believe in the Rapture of the Church.” Or, “We will never have drums in the sanctuary of this church.” Here's an example of a “loophole” a church used to get around a solemn agreement. An agreement was made that there would be no piano or organ in the sanctuary, because the people who gave much of the money for that church preferred singing without instruments. So how did the church members get around that agreement, whenever they wanted instrumental music? They placed a piano in a side wing of the sanctuary! The agreement was “upheld” because the instrument was not in the main sanctuary! It would have been far better to not to make such an agreement in the first place - but the church was stuck with that agreement, because an agreement made before the Lord is binding.

Many examples of foolish vows and agreements could be given, but you see the point. Making a vow before God doesn't make it right.

### 2. Just because it “works” doesn't make it right.

Israel's plan to get 600 wives for the 600 men of Benjamin worked. The men got their wives, and the tribe was preserved. But just because the plan worked, didn't mean the plan was right! And just because God picked up the pieces and Benjamin became a very significant tribe in Israel didn't make it right. King Saul, Queen Esther, and the Apostle Paul all came from the tribe of Benjamin - but even this important result didn't justify the actions of the people of Israel.

The ends don't justify the means! Nowhere do we read that the Lord approved of Israel's actions in Judge 21. Although Israel (rightly) came before the Lord and offered sacrifices, they (wrongly) didn't wait for the Lord's direction. They moved on with their own plan apart from God's guidance. Their plan worked, but that didn't make it right.

This is still true today. Just because a plan "works" that doesn't make it right. I know of some teens in Christian families who are kept perfectly in line because the father rules the family as an autocrat. However, just because that method works and the kids stay in line doesn't make the method right. Unfortunately, those teens are practically zombies. They haven't learned to think or make proper decisions for themselves. I know of at least one Christian ministry that decided to change its administrative leadership. The change was needed, and it worked, but they went about it the wrong way. People were needlessly hurt, the name of the Lord suffered - and it didn't have to be that way! The directors should have waited on the Lord for guidance. Just because something "works" doesn't make it right!

## Practical Application

### Let's not blame God for our problems!

Israel blamed **God** after Benjamin was almost wiped out! *"Then the people came to the house of God.... They lifted up their voices and wept bitterly, and said, "O LORD God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that today there should be one tribe missing in Israel?"* Notice that they're blaming God? They could have answered their own question! Benjamin was almost wiped out because the people of Israel had gone way beyond God's direction in disciplining the tribe - and now they're trying to blame God?!

Have you ever blamed or questioned God because of problems of your own making? How often we get ourselves into all kinds of trouble because we go way beyond God's direction, and then we have the audacity to blame God, or question "His" plan, when many of our problems are problems of our own making! Think it through. Are you blaming God for a problem in your life? Let's not blame God for problems we created ourselves!

The good news here is that if we come to God in sorrow and repentance, He will help us with our problems - even problems of our own making. Look to Him! He can pick up the pieces. But let's not blame God for our problems!