

BI BLE BRI EFIN G

“Be Gentle on Ben”

JUDGES 20b - 21

Introduction

Perverted men in the city of Gibeah had attempted a homosexual rape of a traveling Levite. To save his own skin, the Levite shoved his concubine out to the mob. They raped and ravaged her. She crawled back to the house where she and her Levite husband were lodging, but no one was up to hear her cries, let her in, and tend to her wounds. She died.

In the aftermath, the Levite dismembered her body and sent pieces to all the tribes in Israel. Outraged, they demanded justice; but the Benjamites decided to defend the perverts! Twice the much larger Israelite tribes were massively defeated by the much smaller Benjamite army.

That was all going to end in a third, decisive battle, in which the Benjamites were almost totally wiped-out.

Judges 20:26 Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

Judges 20:27 So the children of Israel inquired of the LORD (the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days,

Judges 20:28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days), saying, “Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?”

And the LORD said, “Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand.”

Phinehas was the aggressive grandson of Aaron who had once killed an Israelite man and a Moabite woman as they were having sex in their tent. It ended a plague that God had sent among His people because of their sin. His mention here tells us that this entire episode is not in chronological order with the rest of Judges. It happened before the time of Samson. It is here in a kind of thematic order – to show how bad things got during the time of the Judges.

They had sought the Lord twice before and had been defeated:

1. The first time they sought the Lord, they had already determined to go to battle. They only asked the Lord, *Who should lead?* God told them Judah... But He never promised them victory.
2. The second time they sought the Lord, they only asked if they should go out again to battle. The Lord said Yes, but He never promised them victory.

This third time, they waited until they heard the entire message!
We need to ask rightly, and wait patiently.

Judges 20:29 Then Israel set men in ambush all around Gibeah.

Judges 20:30 And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in battle array against Gibeah as at the other times.

Judges 20:31 So the children of Benjamin went out against the people, *and* were drawn away from the city. They began to strike down *and* kill some of the people, as at the other times, in the highways (one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah) and in the field, about thirty men of Israel.

Judges 20:32 And the children of Benjamin said, "They *are* defeated before us, as at first."

But the children of Israel said, "Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways."

Judges 20:33 So all the men of Israel rose from their place and put themselves in battle array at Baal Tamar. Then Israel's men in ambush burst forth from their position in the plain of Geba.

Judges 20:34 And ten thousand select men from all Israel came against Gibeah, and the battle was fierce. But *the Benjamites* did not know that disaster *was* upon them.

Judges 20:35 The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel. And the children of Israel destroyed that day twenty-five thousand one hundred Benjamites; all these drew the sword.

While the rest of the tribes were learning a lesson in humility and seeking the Lord, the Benjamites were swelling with pride. Thus they **did not know that disaster was upon them**. Previous success, and even the sense of present success, is no guarantee of victory. Humility and seeking the Lord **are** the victory.

Judges 20:36 So the children of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. The men of Israel had given ground to the Benjamites, because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah.

Judges 20:37 And the men in ambush quickly rushed upon Gibeah; the men in ambush spread out and struck the whole city with the edge of the sword.

Judges 20:38 Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they would make a great cloud of smoke rise up from the city,

Judges 20:39 whereupon the men of Israel would turn in battle. Now Benjamin had begun to strike *and* kill about thirty of the men of Israel. For they said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as *in* the first battle."

Judges 20:40 But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and there was the whole city going up *in smoke* to heaven.

Judges 20:41 And when the men of Israel turned back, the men of Benjamin panicked, for they saw that disaster had come upon them.

Judges 20:42 Therefore they turned *their backs* before the men of Israel in the direction of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them, and whoever *came* out of the cities they destroyed in their midst.

Judges 20:43 They surrounded the Benjamites, chased them, *and* easily trampled them down as far as the front of Gibeah toward the east.

Judges 20:44 And eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell; all these *were* men of valor.

Judges 20:45 Then they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon; and they cut down five thousand of them on the highways. Then they pursued them relentlessly up to Gidom, and killed two thousand of them.

Judges 20:46 So all who fell of Benjamin that day were twenty-five thousand men who drew the sword; all these *were* men of valor.

Judges 20:47 But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they stayed at the rock of Rimmon for four months.

Judges 20:48 And the men of Israel turned back against the children of Benjamin, 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.

Victory was complete, and almost total. They had won the war; now how could they win the peace? (Tongue-in-cheek).

Judges 21:1 Now the men of Israel had sworn an oath at Mizpah, saying, "None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife."

Judges 21:2 Then the people came to the house of God, and remained there before God till evening. They lifted up their voices and wept bitterly,

Judges 21:3 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?"

They regretted their oath. They hadn't really thought it through. Why do we make these rash, over-reaching promises to God?

We may sometimes have conflict with our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we do, we need to focus on reconciliation – not on how we can overcome them.

Only 600 male Benjamites were left alive. They had sworn not to let these guys marry their daughters; and it was forbidden to marry foreigners. The tribe was an endangered species, facing extinction.

Judges 21:4 So it was, on the next morning, that the people rose early and built an altar there, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

Judges 21:5 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.”

Judges 21:6 And the children of Israel grieved for Benjamin their brother, and said, “One tribe is cut off from Israel today.

Judges 21:7 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?”

Judges 21:8 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.

Judges 21:9 For when the people were counted, indeed, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead was there.

They went back and looked at the minutes of their meeting at Mizpah. They remembered a second rash oath – to kill anyone who had not joined with them in the battle against the Benjamites. In fact, the men of Jabesh Gilead had not come. So a plan was formed: Let’s kill the men from Jabesh Gilead and that will free-up some wives for the last remaining Benjamites.

Judges 21:10 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.

Judges 21:11 And this *is* the thing that you shall do: You shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman who has known a man intimately.”

Judges 21:12 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.

Murder and then kidnapping. These were the same guys who had just learned a lesson about seeking the Lord. Or did they? Apparently not.

Judges 21:13 Then the whole congregation sent *word* to the children of Benjamin who *were* at the rock of Rimmon, and announced peace to them.
Judges 21:14 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.

The question of how these young virgins would have felt about seeing their loved ones slaughtered is overlooked. They were stolen and forced into marriage.

Judges 21:15 And the people grieved for Benjamin, because the LORD had made a void in the tribes of Israel.

They were sad because there were not enough gals to go around. **They blamed it on the Lord** – saying He made the void. It's amazing how much we blame the Lord for things we bring upon ourselves.

Judges 21:16 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?"

Judges 21:17 And they said, "*There must be* an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe may not be destroyed from Israel.

Judges 21:18 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.'"

Judges 21:19 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."

Judges 21:20 Therefore they instructed the children of Benjamin, saying, "Go, lie in wait in the vineyards,

Judges 21:21 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.

Judges 21:22 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.'"

There was really no danger of a tribe of 400 families going extinct. They just felt bad about the 200 guys who would never marry.

We can feel bad for a person's situation. It doesn't excuse us from giving them bad advice. Sure, life was not 'fair' for the 200. But who ever said life was fair?

Notice how clever this strategy was in keeping their oaths. Since the girls were being kidnapped, then technically the fathers from Shiloh were not really 'giving them' to the Benjamites as wives, and were therefore not guilty of breaking the oath not to give their daughters as wives!

They thus kept the very letter of the law. Technically, they kept it; but spiritually they did not.

Judges 21:23 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.
Judges 21:24 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.

Everything was back to normal. Everyone was happy. On the surface, anyway. This is a statement of wanting to preserve the status quo at any spiritual cost. It didn't matter they had murdered, kidnapped, and forced women into marriages.

Happiness is not the goal; holiness is the goal. When happiness is the goal, this is the best that can be said of any society:

Judges 21:25 In those days *there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

Conclusion

The society we've just studied is not unlike our own. We have sunk to many gross sexual perversions. Legalized abortion is perhaps the greatest mass murder of all time. Everyday the news reports kidnappings and rapes. Serial killers torture, dismember, and cannibalize their victims. We make movies about them. Where should we begin to address the problem? Listen to this, from Dr. J. Vernon McGee:

Where [does] our trouble begin? Because our trouble is primarily spiritual, **it actually goes back to the church.**

Revival begins among those who already have life; among Christians – who start to understand that holiness, not happiness, is the greatest good.