

Episode #601 Judges 21 Part 1 – Israel Regrets

I. In the book of Judges, we have a brief record of the early history (the first centuries) of the history of the land of Israel. We see the leaders God chose, judges, who ruled under Jehovah, the King. Through the lives and work of these judges, we can learn about God's works and ways.

II. Last time we considered the response of the Israelite people to the moral outrage done by some men of Gibeah. They attacked the whole tribe of Benjamin with only a cursory enquiry of the LORD. Twice they were defeated, and yet still they refused to ask the LORD why. The LORD finally relented and gave them the victory in spite of their refusal to look at their own sin.

III. The Defeat of Benjamin. Judges 20:29-46.

A. Verse 43. Benjamin is surrounded and chased down and trampled them into the dust.

B. Verse 44. A slaughter of 18,000 Benjamites takes place at this time.

C. Verse 45. Benjamin tries to get away to the rock Rimmon (Pomegranate), but 5,000 of them are cut down on the way there. They pursue them to Gidom (Cutting Down) and slaughter 2,000 more on that road.

D. Verse 46. Few of Benjamin escaped and 25,000 died this day. All these mortal men were strong for war.

E. Verse 47. Only six hundred Benjamites managed to escape to the rock Rimmon where they lived for four months. Note the difference: we started with 26,700 Benjamites. What happened to the remaining 1,100 men? Probably they died during the first two days...no reason to think NO Benjamites died those days. Or they fled to one of the other Benjamite cities and were cut down in the following destruction.

IV. The Destruction of Benjamin. Verse 48. The men of Israel act as a systematic purge of Benjamin, as they had done to the Canaanite nations (except for the ones they made a treaty with!). They destroy every man, woman, and child, all the animals, all the spoil, and set all the cities on fire. In other words, they treated Benjamin as if they were devoted to destruction by God. Did God really want this? Certainly for Gibeah, but the whole tribe? We are not told. It seems this purge took four months. Then, in the next chapter, they seem to stop to think!

V. Wives for Benjamin. Judges 21:1-24.

A. Verse 1. Prior to going to war against their brother tribe of Benjamin in the heat of their zeal they had sworn not to support Benjamin with wives.

B. Verse 2. They return to the house of God. Does this mean Shiloh where the temple was, or Bethel, where Jacob saw his vision of the ladder and thought he was at the gate of heaven? Verse 12 seems to indicate Shiloh, but verse 19 seems to indicate NOT Shiloh! They come before God until evening. They weep bitterly. Now that the slaughter is over they regret it!

C. Verse 3. They realize that one tribe is all but wiped out of Israel. Remember, this follows on a four month war of extermination wherein they went through Benjamin systematically and wiped them all out! Now they regret it? It seems kind of late! Remember verse 25: this is what seemed good to them, not what had been commanded them by the LORD. They are acting on their own whims.

D. Verse 4. They build an altar and seek Jehovah with offerings. Question: why did they need to build an altar when there was one before the tabernacle? Perhaps this indicates they were at Bethel, not Shiloh.

E. Verse 5. They remember another oath they had sworn: to destroy any city that did not commit men to the assembly at Mizpeh. Apparently they had not checked to see yet.

- F. Verse 6. Now they remember their brother and weep for him. After wiping him out.
- G. Verse 7. They would seek wives for the escaped Benjamite men, since they have pledged not to give their daughters to the Benjamites as wives. Notice what they don't mention: the reason there are no Benjamite women is that they have executed them all in a terrible purge! They are acting on fickle feelings.
- H. Verse 8. They never checked before, but now they see if every city sent representatives. They learn that no one from Jabesh in Gilead had come to the camp.
- I. Verse 9. They take a census of everyone there and find not a single representative from Jabesh Gilead. Note: one single man from the city would have been enough to spare it.
- J. Verse 10. They send out twelve thousand most valiant (sons of strength) to wipe out Jabesh in Gilead according to their oath. Their solution: more slaughter. Wonderful!
- K. Verse 11. Every male and every woman who is not a virgin in Jabesh Gilead is to be wiped out systematically, as they had just wiped out Benjamin.

VI. Israel slaughters Benjamin as if they were under the ban or devoted to Jehovah. Yet the LORD had never demanded this; they just decided to do it. Then, after doing it, they regretted it, and wanted to bring Benjamin back. They are in trouble, though, for they have no women left, only 600 men. Their solution? Wipe out some Israelites and take their girls! Everything here is as Judges 21:25 says: all did what was right in their own eyes! We might criticize this, but do we do the same? Do we follow what God really says He wants, or do we do what seems good to us? This is the great lesson of this last section of Judges!