

Day 259 - SATURDAY: September 16th

Judges 21

Judges 21:1-25 NKJV

Now the men of Israel had sworn an oath at Mizpah, saying, "None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife." Then the people came to the house of God, and remained there before God till evening. 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?" So it was, on the next morning, that the people rose early and built an altar there, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. 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." And the children of Israel grieved for Benjamin their brother, and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel today. 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?" 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. For when the people were counted, indeed, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead was there. 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. 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. Then the whole congregation sent word to the children of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon, and announced peace to them. 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. And the people grieved for Benjamin, because the LORD had made a void in the tribes of Israel. 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?" And they said, "There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe may not be destroyed from Israel. 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.' " 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." Therefore they instructed the children of Benjamin, saying, "Go, lie in wait in the vineyards, 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. 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.' " 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. 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. In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: "The slaughter of all the Benjamites except the 600 men holed up in Rimmon only worsened the situation—now an Israelite tribe was about to become extinct. The 600 men had no wives, for they had all been slain in the carnage that followed the war,

and all Israel had bound themselves with an oath that they would not give their daughters to any Benjamite man. What could be done?

While searching for an answer, the men of Israel determined that no men had come up to the war from Jabesh Gilead. Recalling that they had sworn to slaughter any who did not come up to the war against Benjamin (verse 5), the answer seemed obvious—send a company of soldiers down to Jabesh Gilead, slaughter all the men there, and their wives, but preserve alive the virgins for the 600 men of Benjamin. And so one rash action followed another and the trail of blood continued. With the slaughter of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead, 400 virgins were procured. But that was not enough.

In the strange twists of logic common in that day, again the answer seemed obvious: since all Israel was bound with an oath not to *give* their daughters to the Benjamite men, let the Benjamite men *take* the daughters! And so the Benjamite men were allowed to raid a group of women dancing in religious celebration and to carry away whomever they chose as wives. The fathers of the women were prevailed upon not to attempt to retrieve their daughters. And in this way, all oaths were kept and a tribe in Israel was preserved.

This kind of bizarre, torturous logic with regard to oaths might seem foolish to many of us today. Indeed, it all seems rather disingenuous, as they sought out loopholes to skirt the clear intent of their oaths. But the keeping of one oath, even if it was at the cost of some strange behavior, was another one of those social customs and expected morality that was common to all Middle Eastern society. Indeed, the keeping of oaths is commanded by God. But God expects those who give their word to follow through on the *intent*—not just the letter. Often a considerable degree of wordplay and shades of meaning were employed to extract one from a difficult circumstance (as the story of Hushai, 2 Samuel 15-17, will show), but in the end everyone was deemed to have kept his word.

Of course, none of this is to say that strange reasoning of this sort never happens today. Similar "logic" is often applied in our day when people try to avoid blatant lies while nevertheless attempting to completely mislead people.

So what should the Israelites have done instead? Following through on the intent of their oaths would have put them in an untenable position from their vantage point. Of course, that was the problem. They were looking at things from their own vantage point. What they should have been more concerned about was God's will. Thus, they should first have repented for making foolish vows to begin with. Then they should have returned to Phinehas and inquired of God about what to do. If they were truly seeking the Lord, He would have given them an answer. And God's direct commands always override any vow. Indeed, if a father could void his daughter's vows and a husband could void his wife's vows, God could certainly void the vows of Israel, who was His daughter by creation and wife by covenant. Furthermore, no vow is binding if it obligates one to violate commands God has already given. The real solution in such situations is, as already stated, humble repentance—something sorely lacking in the period of the judges, when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." [END]

Verse 19 – John Gill's commentary states: "where the tabernacle then was, and before which the males of Israel were obliged to appear three times of the year; and this was one of them, as is clear by its being called a feast of the Lord; and therefore cannot design any civil festival or fair kept for trade and commerce. Some have thought of the feast of the passover, but it is most likely to be the feast of tabernacles, as Abarbinel takes it to be; which in Jewish writings is emphatically called "the feast"; and the time of year when that was kept was a time of great rejoicing, on account of the fruits of the earth being gathered in, and the reading of the law and especially at the tithe of drawing of water at this feast;" [END]

Verse 25 – We come now to the last words of the book, which again solidifies the point that these chapters are clearly demonstrating. When mankind follows its own path, terrible results occur. Mankind is not capable of ruling themselves correctly. Mankind will never solve the problems of this world. The whole world desperately needs the Kingdom of God and the return of Jesus Christ. May God speed that day!