

Judges 21

Introduction – “God’s Word comes to us in letters and laws and proverbs and prophecies and poetry and history. Each type of literature must be interpreted with the form of writing in mind. History in the Bible is not to be read as simply names, dates, and places. It is to be read as preached history, as a sermon. The facts are true, but the literary structure, the words and phrases used and repeated, that which is recorded and that which is emphasized, all play into interpreting the narrative. Jesus instructs us that all of the scriptures pointed to Him (Luke 24:27, Heb 1:1, 2 Tim 3:15-16). So we are to look at this history as teaching redemptive history, instructing us in the work of Christ for His people.” – [intro to sermon on Judges 1](#).

As we end this story of the rebellion of Benjamin, if we keep these same principles in mind, we see the grace of God in this final chapter. The Levites had been faithless to protect the people from idolatry and immorality (and like a bookend, this is made clear in the final verse). The judgment of the Lord fell hard upon the house of the Lord in chapter 20. Benjamin is dead. And God, in His extraordinary and unpredictable ways, raises him from the dead.

The Death of Benjamin (vv1-3) – There are 600 men of Benjamin left at the rock of Rimmon (20:47f), but they have no wives. Israel swore an oath, a curse upon herself, if she gave any daughters to Benjamin (v1, 18). In light of the Canaan/Sodom-heart of Benjamin, this was a faithful vow (Deut 7:3-4). But the excommunication of Benjamin is no joy to Israel (v3). In the midst of her own true repentance, Israel asks the absolute sovereign God, “Why?” (see also Isaiah 63:17ff). God has bound Himself to these twelve tribes, how can He lose one? Their question is in essence a prayer for restoration.

Sacrifice On Behalf of Benjamin (v4) – Israel had already offered sacrifices for their sins, but now they do so again for all of Israel, including Benjamin, as they cry out to the Lord for Benjamin’s restoration. We see the covenant connection of brothers in the Lord, of family, of the church herself when someone else is in sin (Eph 4:4-6, 1 Cor 5:6).

Another Vow (vv5-9) – The sacrifices provide a basis for Benjamin’s forgiveness, but they don’t provide wives for the remnant, and so Israel still is mourning before the Lord (v6). But they had taken another vow as well (v5). Jabesh Gilead had refused to come to Israel’s aid when every other city had sent men to battle the Benjamites. It was not that they fought *against* the Lord, but they didn’t fight *with* the Lord either. If you are not with the Lord, you are against Him (Luke 11:23).

Was the vow appropriate – “*He shall surely be put to death*”? Another city under Deborah, Meroz, had been cursed, but not utterly destroyed, men, women, and children (Judges 5:23). Possibly the best way to understand this is to remember that this battle had not been against those outside of Israel; judgment was beginning in the household of God. Deut 17:7b required that all the people unite in carrying out such ‘church discipline’, even in carrying out a death sentence – “*you must purge the evil from among you.*”

Utter Destruction (vv10-14) – Another “Hormah” is carried out, as we saw earlier in Judges 1:17. 12,000 men are gathered together, in the days of Phineas, and all are killed except the virgin women. This is a repeat of the slaughter against the Midianites in Num 31. Just as Gibeah had become a spiritual Sodom, so Jabesh Gilead had become a spiritual Midian. The fruit of this ‘sacrifice’ is 400 women to give as wives to the 600 Benjamites.

Extending Peace (vv16-24) – A peace offering had been made (v4), peace had been extended to the remnant of Benjamin (v13), and they were brought to Shiloh, the place of rest (peace) to receive the first 400 wives and then to provide them with this third episode of peace and reconciliation with God and with His people.

Grieving Again (vv16-18) – Israel wants to see the full restoration of Benjamin in spite of the curse placed upon these men.

The Daughters of Shiloh (vv19-24) – This dance of virgins at the festival in Shiloh must have declared their desire to be married, or their father’s declaration to give them in marriage, maybe in a way similar to when we see a group of women scrambling to catch the bouquet at a wedding. The fathers had declared that they would never give their daughters to Benjamin, but this strange event allows them to stay faithful to that vow while allowing their desire (and apparently the Lord’s) to restore Benjamin as a tribe and a part of Israel. In an unexpected way, Benjamin is ‘born again.’

Conclusions – On the one hand, the book of Judges is a history of dark days for the people of Israel. We see their constant rebellion, the Levites failure to protect and lead the people out of idolatry and immorality, and the recurring consequences of oppression by God’s enemies. On the other hand, the cycle of God’s deliverance reveals His overriding grace for those He has sworn to be their God.

Rock of Salvation – Here was the only way of escape for the Benjamites. In the same way, though Israel has as a nation rejected the Messiah as their King, still there is a remnant (Rom 11:5). The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Rock of salvation, where both Jew and Gentile must flee from the wrath of God.

Strange Salvation – The old hymn says it well – “God works in mysterious ways.” Who would have thought God would provide wives for Benjamin in such a strange way? Who would have thought that God would provide His New Covenant grace by crucifying His own Son on our behalf? How could we ever be ‘born again’ – must we enter back into our mother’s womb? And for each one of

us, there is grace upon grace for each individual trial and tribulation that comes - and that grace often comes in the strangest ways. **“There Was No King...”** - Finally, if Jesus Christ is not acknowledged as King of kings and Lord of lords by a people, eventually that society and culture will experience the effect of such anarchy. In the end, if there is no Lord, then there is no basis for law - everyone will do what is right in his own eyes. We must pray for reformation in this land. We must pray that God would raise up preachers, like judges, who will call the people back to faithfulness in word and deed. But we can look to the stories of the Judges of Israel and see God's immeasurable grace to answer such prayers - and to provide for His people.

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