

# CHAPTER 21

The ruins of the tribe of Benjamin we read of in the foregoing chapter; now here we have,

**I.** The lamentation which Israel made over these ruins (v. 1-4, 6, 15).

**II.** The provision they made for the repair of them out of the 600 men that escaped, for whom they procured wives,

**1.** Of the virgins of Jabesh-Gilead, when they destroyed that city for not sending its forces to the general rendezvous (v. 5, 7-14).

**2.** Of the daughters of Shiloh (v. 16-25). And so this melancholy story concludes.

## ~~0201~~ JUDGES 21:1-15

### LAMANTATION FOR THE BENJAMITES

We may observe in these verses,

**I.** The ardent zeal which the Israelites had expressed against the wickedness of the men of Gibeah, as it was countenanced by the tribe of Benjamin. Occasion is here given to mention two instances of their zeal on this occasion, which we did not meet with before: —

**1.** While the general convention of the states was gathering together, and was waiting for a full house before they would proceed, they bound themselves with the great execration, which they called the *Cherum*, utterly to destroy all those cities that should not send in their representatives and their quota of men upon this occasion, or had sentenced those to that curse who should thus refuse (v. 5); for they would look upon such refusers as having no indignation at the crime committed, no concern for the securing of the nation from God's judgments by the administration of justice, nor any regard to the authority of a common consent, by which they were summoned to meet.

**2.** When they had met and heard the cause they made another solemn oath that none of all the thousands of Israel then present, nor any of those

whom they represented (not intending to bind their posterity), should, if they could help it, *marry a daughter* to a Benjamite, v. 1. This was made an article of the war, not with any design to extirpate the tribe, but because in general they would treat those who were then actors and abettors of this villany in all respects as they treated the devoted nations of Canaan, whom they were not only obliged to destroy, but with whom they were forbidden to marry; and because, in particular, they judged those unworthy to match with a daughter of Israel that had been so very barbarous and abusive to one of the tender sex, than which nothing could be done more base and villainous, nor a more certain indication given of a mind perfectly lost to all honour and virtue. We may suppose that the Levite's sending the mangled pieces of his wife'[s body to the several tribes helped very much to inspire them with all this fury, and much more than a bare narrative of the fact, though ever so well attested, would have done, so much does the eye affect the heart.

**II.** The deep concern which the Israelites did express for the destruction of the tribe of Benjamin when it was accomplished. Observe,

**1.** The tide of their anger at Benjamin's crime did not run so high and so strong before but the tide of their grief for Benjamin's destruction ran as high and as strong after: *They repented for Benjamin their brother*, v. 6, 15. They did not repent of their zeal against the sin; there is a holy indignation against sin, the fruit of godly sorrow, which is *to salvation, not to be repented of*, ~~ACTS~~ 2 Corinthians 7:10, 11. But they repented of the sad consequences of what they had done, that they had carried the matter further than was either just or necessary. It would have been enough to destroy all they found in arms; they needed not to have cut off the husbandmen and shepherds, the women and children. Note,

**(1.)** There may be over-doing in well-doing. Great care must be taken in the government of our zeal, lest that which seemed supernatural in its causes prove unnatural in its effects. That is no good divinity which swallows up humanity. Many a war is ill ended which was well begun.

**(2.)** Even necessary justice is to be done with compassion. God does not punish with delight, nor should men.

**(3.)** Strong passions make work for repentance. What we say and do in a heat our calmer thoughts commonly wish undone again.

(4.) In a civil war (according to the usage of the Romans) no victories ought to be celebrated with triumphs, because, which soever side gets, the community loses, as here *there is a tribe cut off from Israel*. What the better is the body for one member's crushing another? Now,

2. How did they express their concern?

(1.) By their grief for the breach that was made. They came to the house of God, for thither they brought all their doubts, all their counsels, all their cares, and all their sorrows. There was to be heard on this occasion, not the voice of joy and praise, but only that of lamentation, and mourning, and woe: They *lifted up their voices and wept sore* (v. 2), not so much for the 40,000 whom they had lost (these would not be so much missed out of eleven tribes), but for the entire destruction of one whole tribe; for this was the complaint they poured out before God (v. 3): *There is one tribe lacking*. God had taken care of every tribe; their number twelve was that which they were known by; every tribe had his station appointed in the camp, and his stone in the high priest's breast-plate; every tribe had his blessing both from Jacob and Moses; and it would be an intolerable reproach to them if they should drop any out of this illustrious jury, and lose one out of twelve, especially Benjamin, the youngest, who was particularly dear to Jacob their common ancestor, and whom all the rest ought to have been in a particular manner tender of. Benjamin is not; what then will become of Jacob? Benjamin is become a Benoni, the son of the right hand a son of sorrow! In this trouble they built an altar, not in competition, but in communion with the appointed altar at the door of the tabernacle, which was not large enough to contain all the sacrifices they designed; for they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, to give thanks for their victory, yet to atone for their own folly in the pursuit of it, and to implore the divine favour in their present strait. Every thing that grieves us should bring us to God.

(2.) By their amicable treaty with the poor distressed refugees that were hidden in the rock Rimmon, to whom they sent an act of indemnity, assuring them, upon the public faith, that they would now no longer treat them as enemies, but receive them as brethren, v. 13. The falling out of friends should thus be the renewing of friendship. Even those that have sinned, if at length they repent, must be forgiven and comforted, <del>2</del>2 Corinthians 2:7.

(3.) By the care they took to provide wives for them, that their tribe might be built up again, and the ruins of it repaired. Had the men of Israel sought themselves, they would have been secretly pleased with the extinguishing of the families of Benjamin, because then the land allotted to them would escheat to the rest of the tribes, *ob defectum sanguinis* — for want of heirs, and be easily seized for want of occupants; but those have not the spirit of Israelites who aim to raise themselves upon the ruins of their neighbours. They were so far from any design of this kind that all heads were at work to find out ways and means for the rebuilding of this tribe. All the women and children of Benjamin were slain: they had sworn not to marry their daughters to any of them; it was against the divine law that they should match with the Canaanites; to oblige them to that would be, in effect, to bid them *go and serve other gods*. What must they do then for wives for them? While the poor distressed Benjamites that were hidden in the rock feared their brethren were contriving to ruin them, they were at the same time upon a project to prefer them; and it was this: —

[1.] There was a piece of necessary justice to be done upon the city of Jabesh-Gilead, which belonged to the tribe of Gad, on the other side Jordan. It was found upon looking over the muster-roll (which was taken, <sup><0711></sup>Judges 20:2) that none appeared from that city upon the general summons (v. 8, 9), and it was then resolved, before it appeared who were absent, that whatever city of Israel should be guilty of such a contempt of the public authority and interest that city should be an anathema; Jabesh-Gilead lies under that severe sentence, which might by no means be dispensed with. Those that had spared the Canaanites in many places, who were devoted to destruction by the divine command, could not find in their hearts to spare their brethren that were devoted by their own curse. Why did they not now send men to root the Jebusites out of Jerusalem, to avoid whom the poor Levite had been forced to go to Gibeah? <sup><0791></sup>Judges 19:11, 12. Men are commonly more zealous to support their own authority than God's. A detachment is therefore sent of 12,000 men, to execute the sentence upon Jabesh-Gilead. Having found that when the whole body of the army went against Gibeah the people were thought too many for God to deliver them into their hands, on this expedition they sent but a few, v. 10. Their commission is to put all to the sword, men, women, and children (v. 11), according to that law (<sup><1872></sup>Leviticus 27:29), *Whatsoever is devoted of men, by those that have power to do it, shall surely be put to death.*

[2.] An expedient is hence formed for providing the Benjamites with wives. When Moses sent the same number of men to avenge the Lord on Midian, the same orders were given as here, that all married women should be slain with their husbands, as one with them, but that the virgins should be saved alive, <sup><0617></sup>Numbers 31:17, 18. That precedent was sufficient to support the distinction here made between a wife and a virgin, v. 11, 12. 400 virgins that were marriageable were found in Jabesh-Gilead, and these were married to so many of the surviving Benjamites, v. 14. Their fathers were not present when the vow was made not to marry with Benjamites, so that they were not under any colour of obligation by it: and besides, being a prey taken in war, they were at the disposal of the conquerors. Perhaps the alliance now contracted between Benjamin and Jabesh-Gilead made Saul, who was a Benjamite, the more concerned for that place (<sup><010></sup>1 Samuel 11:4), though then inhabited by new families.

## <sup><0716></sup>JUDGES 21:16-25

### THE VIRGINS OF SHILOH SURPRISED

We have here the method that was taken to provide the 200 Benjamites that remained with wives. And, though the tribe was reduced to a small number, they were only in care to provide each man with one wife, not with more under pretence of multiplying them the faster. They may not bestow their daughters upon them, but to save their oath, and yet marry some of their daughters to them, they put them into a way of taking them by surprise, and marrying them, which should be ratified by their parents' consent, *ex post facto* — *afterwards*. The less consideration is used before the making of a vow, the more, commonly, there is need of afterwards for the keeping of it.

**I.** That which gave an opportunity for the doing of this was a public ball at Shiloh, in the fields, at which all the young ladies of that city and the parts adjacent that were so disposed met to dance, in honour of a *feast of the Lord* then observed, probably the feast of tabernacles (v. 19), for that feast (bishop Patrick says) was the only season wherein the Jewish virgins were allowed to dance, and that not so much for their own recreation as to express their holy joy, as David when he danced before the ark, otherwise the present melancholy posture of public affairs would have made dancing

unseasonable, as <sup><2212></sup>Isaiah 22:12, 13. The dancing was very modest and chaste. It was not mixed dancing; no men danced with these daughters of Shiloh, nor did any married women so far forget their gravity as to join with them. However their dancing thus in public made them an easy prey to those that had a design upon them, whence bishop Hall observes that the *ambushes of evil spirits carry away many souls from dancing to a fearful desolation.*

**II.** The elders of Israel gave authority to the Benjamites to do this, to *lie in wait in the vineyards* which surrounded the green they used to dance on, and, when they were in the midst of their sport, to come upon them, and catch every man a wife for himself, and carry them straight away to their own country, v. 20, 21. They knew that none of their own daughters would be there, so that the parents of these virgins could not be said to give them, for they knew nothing of the matter. A sorry *salvo* is better than none, to save the breaking of an oath: it were much better to be cautious in making vows, that there be not occasion afterwards, as there was here, *to say before the angel that it was an error.* Here was a very preposterous way of match-making, when both the mutual affection of the young people and the consent of the parents must be presumed to come after; the case was extraordinary, and may by no means be drawn into a precedent. Over hasty marriages often occasion a leisurely repentance; and what comfort can be expected from a match made either by force or fraud? The virgins of Jabesh-Gilead were taken out of the midst of blood and slaughter, but these of Shiloh out of the midst of mirth and joy; the former had reason to be thankful that they had their lives for a prey, and the latter, it is to be hoped, had no cause to complain, after a while, when they found themselves matched, not to men of broken and desperate fortunes, as they seemed to be, who were lately fetched out of a cave, but to men of the best and largest estates in the nation, as they must needs be when the lot of the whole tribe of Benjamin, which consisted of 45,600 men (<sup><0254></sup>Numbers 26:41), came to be divided again among 600, who had all by survivorship.

**III.** They undertook to pacify the fathers of these young women. As to the infringement of their paternal authority, they would easily forgive it when they considered to what fair estates their daughters were matched and what mothers in Israel they were likely to be; but the oath they were bound by, not to give their daughters to Benjamites, might perhaps stick with some of

them, whose consciences were tender, yet, as to that, this might satisfy them: —

**1.** That the necessity was urgent (v. 22): *We reserved not to each man his wife*, owning now that they did ill to destroy all the women, and desiring to atone for their too rigorous construction of their vow to destroy them by the most favourable construction of their vow not to match with them. “And therefore for our sakes, who were too severe, let them keep what they have got.” For,

**2.** In strictness it was not a breach of their vow; they had sworn not to give them their daughters, but they had not sworn to fetch them back if they were forcibly taken, so that if there was any fault the elders must be responsible, not the parents. And *Quod fieri non debuit, factum valet* — *That which ought not to have been done is yet valid when it is done*. The thing was done, and is ratified only by connivance, according to the law, ~~<ORDE>~~ Numbers 30:4.

*Lastly*, In the close of all we have,

**1.** The settling of the tribe of Benjamin again. The few that remained returned to the inheritance of that tribe, v. 23. And soon after from among them sprang Ehud, who was famous in his generation, the second judge of Israel, ~~<ORDE>~~ Judges 3:15.

**2.** The disbanding and dispersing of the army of Israel, v. 24. They did not set up for a standing army, nor pretend to make any alterations or establishments in the government; but when the affair was over for which they were called together, they quietly departed in God's peace, every man to his family. Public services must not make us think ourselves above our own private affairs and the duty of providing for our own house.

**3.** A repetition of the cause of these confusions, v. 25. Though God was their King, every man would be his own master, as if there was no king. Blessed be God for magistracy.