

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

5-29-24

Judges 21

A Foolish Oath – Verse 1

¹ The men of Israel had taken an oath at Mizpah: “Not one of us will give his daughter in marriage to a Benjamite.”

21:1 None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin: Considering their anger against Benjamin, this probably seemed like the right thing to do. But this foolish oath had unforeseen consequences. Justice not only brings punishment to evildoers, but it also guards against punishment that is too harsh.

Israel Realizes That A Whole Tribe Is In Danger Of Extinction – Verses 2-3

² The people went to Bethel, where they sat before God until evening, raising their voices and weeping bitterly. ³“LORD, God of Israel,” they cried, “why has this happened to Israel? Why should one tribe be missing from Israel today?”

21:2-3 Why has this come to pass in Israel, that today there should be one tribe missing in Israel: They cried out to God, almost as if it was His responsibility that the tribe of Benjamin was on the edge of extinction. The question, “Why has this come to pass?” was easily answered: Because of the excessive vengeance of the tribes of Israel against the tribe of Benjamin.

21:2-3 One tribe missing: Down to almost only 400 men - and those men unable to marry because of the curse pronounced in Judges 21:1 - the tribe of Benjamin was almost extinct.

Solutions To The Problem Of The Foolish Oath – Verses 4-5

⁴ Early the next day the people built an altar and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. ⁵ Then the Israelites asked, “Who from all the tribes of Israel has failed to assemble before the LORD?” For they had taken a solemn oath that anyone who failed to assemble before the LORD at Mizpah was to be put to death.

21:4-5 Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up with the assembly to the LORD... He shall surely be put to death: Here again Israel did something that seemed right at the time, but was actually a horror. They decided to slaughter a whole city of Israel, a city that refused to join with Israel in the fight against Benjamin.

21:4-5 This was doing one bad thing to make up for another. Israel instead should have repented of their foolish oath made at Mizpah, and they should have agreed to give their daughters as wives to the men of the tribe of Benjamin, renouncing the foolish vow of Judges 21:1.

Destroying The City Of Jabesh Gilead And Taking Their Young Women – Verses 6-14

⁶ Now the Israelites grieved for the tribe of Benjamin, their fellow Israelites. “Today one tribe is cut off from Israel,” they said. ⁷ “How can we provide wives for those who are left, since we have taken an oath by the LORD not to give them any of our daughters in marriage?” ⁸ Then they asked, “Which one of the tribes of Israel failed to assemble before the LORD at Mizpah?” They discovered that no one from Jabesh Gilead had come to the camp for the assembly. ⁹ For when they counted the people, they found that none of the people of Jabesh Gilead were there. ¹⁰ So the assembly sent twelve thousand fighting men with instructions to go to Jabesh Gilead and put to the sword those living there, including the women and children. ¹¹ “This is what you are to do,” they said. “Kill every male and every woman who is not a virgin.” ¹² They found among the people living in Jabesh Gilead four hundred young women who had never slept with a man, and they took them to the camp at Shiloh in Canaan. ¹³ Then the whole assembly sent an offer of peace to the Benjamites at the rock of Rimmon. ¹⁴ So the Benjamites returned at that time and were given the women of Jabesh Gilead who had been spared. But there were not enough for all of them.

21:8-12 The Israelites moved from one mess to another. Because of a rash vow made in the heat of emotion (21:5), here they destroyed another town. The Israelites probably justified their action with the following arguments: (1) An oath could not be broken, and they had vowed that anyone who did not help them fight the tribe of Benjamin would be killed. (2) Because all the women from Benjamin had been killed, the few remaining men needed wives to prevent the tribe from disappearing. To spare the unmarried women from Jabesh Gilead seemed the right solution. We do not know all the circumstances behind the brutal massacre at Jabesh Gilead, but it seems that the rest of Israel followed Benjamin’s pattern. They put tribal loyalties above God’s commands, and they justified wrong actions to correct past mistakes.

21:14 They found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young virgins: In the ungodly massacre at Jabesh Gilead, they killed all but 400 young virgins. Still, this was not enough: yet they had not found enough for them.

A Scheme To Give The Remaining Men Of Benjamin An Opportunity To Take Wives – Verses 15-24

¹⁵ The people grieved for Benjamin, because the LORD had made a gap in the tribes of Israel. ¹⁶ And the elders of the assembly said, “With the women of Benjamin destroyed, how shall we provide wives for the men who are left? ¹⁷ The Benjamite survivors must have heirs,” they said, “so that a tribe of Israel will not be wiped out. ¹⁸ We can’t give them our daughters as wives, since we Israelites have taken this oath: ‘Cursed be anyone who gives a wife to a Benjamite.’ ¹⁹ But look, there is the annual festival of the LORD in Shiloh, which lies north of Bethel, east of the road that goes from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah.” ²⁰ So they instructed the Benjamites, saying, “Go and hide in the vineyards ²¹ and watch. When the young women of Shiloh come out to join in the dancing, rush from the vineyards and each of you seize one of them to be your wife. Then return to the land of Benjamin. ²² When their fathers or brothers complain to us, we will say to them, ‘Do us the favor of helping them, because we did not get wives for them during the war. You will not be guilty of breaking your oath because you did not give your daughters to them.’” ²³ So that is what the Benjamites did. While the young women were dancing, each man caught one and carried her off to be his wife. Then they returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the towns and settled in them. ²⁴ At that time the Israelites left that place and went home to their tribes and clans, each to his own inheritance.

21:15-21 Every man catch a wife for himself from the daughters of Shiloh: They answered the problem of wives for the remaining Benjaminites by creating a little drama where the Benjaminites were allowed to “kidnap” women (who were no doubt willing), so that the marriages could be arranged without “official” approval. Rather than go through this charade, they should have simply confessed their sin of making a foolish oath and done the right thing instead of trying to make two wrongs equal a right.

21:24 Then they went and returned to their inheritance, and they rebuilt the cities and dwelt in them: In this, the tribe of Benjamin was sufficiently restored to provide Israel with its first king (Saul).

The Summary Observation Of The Times Of Israel – Verse 25

²⁵ In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.

21:25 During the time of the judges, the people of Israel experienced trouble because everyone became his own authority and acted on his own opinions of right and wrong. This produced horrendous results. Our world is similar. Individuals, groups, and societies have made themselves the final authorities without reference to God. When people selfishly satisfy their personal desires at all costs, everyone pays the price. It is the ultimate heroic act to submit all our plans, desires, and motives to God. Men like Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson are known for their heroism in battle. But their personal lives were far from heroic. To be truly heroic, we must go into battle each day in our home, job, church, and society to make God’s kingdom a reality. Our weapons are the standards, morals, truths, and convictions we receive from God’s Word. We will lose the battle if we gather the spoils of earthly treasures rather than seeking the treasures of heaven.