

## Part V -- Review

We come now to the conclusion of our study of the last five chapters of the Book of Judges. Remember that these chapters form a unit, telling four episodes in the history of Israel. These four sagas are bound together internally by the statement, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Each episode contains that statement in one form or another (it is abbreviated in the second and third stories). As we have seen, the origins of this statement refer not to moral anarchy, as is usually supposed, but to spiritual anarchy--the refusal to worship God in His prescribed way. However, spiritual declension and rebellion will inevitably lead to a decline in morals. Thus is the point of these final two chapters. A veritable Sodom has arisen within the borders of Israel, in the Tribe of Benjamin. Not only have the Benjamites refused to purge out the wickedness within its borders, it has gone to war against the rest of the nation in the defense of these Sodomites! At the end of our last study covering Chapter 20, we find the Tribe of Benjamin on the brink of extinction. Only six hundred men remain alive of the entire Tribe. Those men have fled to a defensible refuge on a rock in the wilderness of Rimmon. Given the facts of the situation, it's only a matter of time until they either surrender or die of starvation.

### The Shifting Tide

Sometimes chapter breaks occur in the Bible at the most inopportune times, breaking up in the reader's mind the flow intended by the writer. This is not the case, however, in the present matter. No better place can be imagined for a division than at the point Chapter 20 ends and Chapter 21 begins! All of us have witnessed football games where one team totally dominates the other for a half. Yet at the half-time break, the momentum switches to the other side, allowing the dominated team to be victorious. The winning team at the end looks nothing like the team which played so poorly in the first half! A similar situation is before us. Israel in Chapter 21 looks nothing like the Israel in Chapter 20!

### Poor Benjamin

Suddenly a mood swing occurs within the victorious army. They who had suffered so many losses themselves in the battle, and they who had sought so earnestly for God's direction and blessing in the battle, now appear before God mourning for what they have done. They bitterly weep over the fact that one of their tribes is well nigh extinct. A syrupy sweet sentimentality for Benjamin now sweeps over the army of Israel. I suppose that one might argue that pity and mercy is always to be exhibited, even in judgment. We do ask that God, in His wrath, remember mercy. I suppose it could be argued that Israel is acting quite properly in this matter. Three things convince me otherwise. First, there is the statement in Judges 21:6 that Israel "repented them for Benjamin." In modern words, they were sorry for what they had done to their brother tribe. Let's remember, that as harsh as the penalty upon Benjamin seems to us, it was, after all, God's honor at stake, God's Word which led them into battle, and God's grace which gave them victory. The sense of this verse indicates that they felt God was dealing much too harshly with Benjamin. Second, though God, in Chapter 20, had given them specific direction as to how the battle was to be fought, and they had made no move until having obtained such direction, from this point onward no Word of God is either sought or obtained. The people of Israel are being moved by their subjective feelings and sympathies, not by any objective Word from their God. Third, just look at the way they fulfill their desires. What they are going to do is a foregone conclusion. It only remains to discover how they can justify it! Now some might object to my conclusions on another ground. What would the annihilation of Benjamin, had it proceeded, have done to Israel's subsequent history and God's Sovereign purpose? There would have been no king name Saul. And, more importantly perhaps, no New Testament Saul of Tarsus to be converted to Paul, the Apostle, of the Tribe of Benjamin. The same type of reasoning could be used, I suppose, in the matter of capital punishment. How do we know that the man we are executing is not one of God's elect not yet come to salvation? If we were to execute

the man, how do we know we are not overthrowing God's purpose? The answer is twofold: Nothing, but nothing, can or will overthrow God's purpose -- He constantly overrules the evil and erroneous behavior of men to further His own design. Yet, it is never our duty to pry into the secret counsels of God for our direction, but, rather, to obey what He has objectively declared for us to do! How God will fulfill His Sovereign purpose is His business and His problem. What He has commanded us to do is our business and problem!

## The Fly in the Ointment

Notice the problem confronting Israel. They are attempting to preserve the Tribe of Benjamin when only 600 men remain alive of that Tribe, isolated on a rock in the wilderness. We are informed in Judges 21:1 that, before going into battle, Israel had made a solemn oath to the Lord. Israel had sworn that none of them would give their daughters unto a man of Benjamin in marriage. A knowledge of basic biology reveals a big problem here! Watch how they arrive at a solution. It seems that another oath had also been taken. They had made a "great oath" to put to death those of any city who refused to take part in this war with them (Judges 21:5). After a search was made, it was discovered that the city of Jabesh in the land of Gilead had contributed no men for the battle. They suddenly realized that a solution to the dilemma the first oath presented them was at hand in the second oath. The fact that men from Jabesh were not present meant that they had made no such oath concerning giving their daughters to the Benjamites. So, the army of Israel swooped down upon this disobedient city, killing them all except for 400 virgin girls of that city. These 400 young women were then duly presented to the Benjamites as wives in order to provide for the Tribe's preservation. Do you sense anything wrong here? Does it not strike you as odd that the nation so bent upon the destruction of Benjamin--so much so that they take such a prohibitive oath--now vents its fury upon one of its own cities in order to preserve the Tribe it previously sought to destroy?

## The Second Problem

Basic math shows another problem: 400 women will not suffice as wives for 600 men! Given the situation at hand, where will the other 200 women be found? Someone suddenly has a bright idea! Every year, it seems, the virgin daughters of Shiloh went out into the countryside dancing. The Benjamites were told exactly where this took place--on what highway, and on which side of it--and were directed where to hide themselves. As the young maidens of Shiloh came out to dance, the men were told to "catch you" a wife of these dancers, and to return to their own inheritance. Wait a minute, you say! What about the oath that the Israelites made about not giving their daughters to Benjamin in marriage? Oh, don't worry about that! We'll take care of it, the leaders explain. When the fathers of Shiloh complain to us that they are violating this oath, we'll soothe their worries and calm their fears. We'll tell them to just overlook the matter in this case because we made a mistake in the war with Benjamin. We forgot to preserve their wives alive at that time. And here is the real kicker! You fathers vowed not to give your daughters to Benjamin in marriage. Technically, you are not giving your daughters to these Benjamites--they are catching and taking them. So surely you'll not be held responsible by God for this matter, as it was beyond your control. All of this is said, of course, irrespective of the fact that they themselves have directed the Benjamites to the exact place they are to go and given them explicit instruction as to what they are to do! If this doesn't sound like some lawyer weaseling out of a contract by appealing to the letter of the agreement, notwithstanding the spirit of the agreement, I don't know what does!

## Conclusion

So, there we have it. A very insightful look into the state of the nation at this point in Israel's history. We've seen bizarre religious activity arise wholly in a man's mind, who sets up his own mode of worship contrary to what God had revealed. We've seen a Tribe (Dan) abdicate its allotted inheritance

to be taken by faith, and to journey instead to a place where the power of the flesh would prevail. We've seen the rise of unspeakable perversion within the very borders of Israel itself, and a Tribe which refuses to purge out such wickedness. Finally, we've seen sentimentality, as opposed to Divine revelation, become the guiding force in Israel's dealings with Benjamin. In each case, there is a common thread. Man thinks that he himself knows best how to worship and serve His God rather than depending upon what God Himself has revealed and spoken. It is the spirit behind every deviation from revealed truth, whether in faith or in practice. It is man's exaltation of his own ways and thinking above the authority of God. If you think such things only occurred in the past, think again. Every pastor has had incidences where people come to him for "counseling" with their minds already made up as to what they are going to do. Maybe they want to enter into a forbidden relationship; maybe it is to take part in a less than upright business dealing; maybe it is to shade the truth in a matter. Regardless of how strongly we plead from God's Word to the contrary, they leave our office just as determined as when entering as to their course of action. They really didn't want to hear what God said--they just wanted us to give them a justification for their already decided course of action! Just as dangerous, and, perhaps, more so, is the spirit which pervades American Christianity at the moment. It is driven by what men want rather than what God says. If a doctrine is offensive, men refuse to hear it and preachers refuse to preach it. If a practice is popular and appealing, we gladly admit it into the church, no matter how foreign it might be to New Testament practice. If a methodology "works", that is, attracts large numbers, then it is automatically judged correct. If the God of the Bible is deemed too harsh, too narrow, too demanding, we simply shop on down the road for another god in another location who is more in line with our own thoughts and ways. The spirit of Judges 21:25 is still alive and well at the close of the 20th century! It becomes very easy to detect this spirit in others around us, but it should behoove all of us who are serious about our walk with God to examine ourselves for symptoms of such thinking. In many ways, the best of us are infected by the self-seeking, self-exalting, self-glorifying spirit of our age. They had no human king and refused to acknowledge Jehovah as their rightful Sovereign. May we, on the other hand, bow both the knee and the mind to our King Jesus, and may we walk in the steps of He Who declared, "Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight."