
JUDGES 21:1 Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, "There shall not any of us give his daughter to Benjamin as wife."

The Israelites mourn because of the desolation of Benjamin, and consult the Lord, Jdg 21:1-4. They inquire who of Israel had not come to this war, as they had vowed that those who would not make this a common cause should be put to death, Jdg 21:5, Jdg 21:6. They consult how they shall procure wives for the six hundred men who had fled to the rock Rimmon, Jdg 21:7. Finding that the men of Jabesh-gilead had not come to the war, they send twelve thousand men against them, smite them, and bring off four hundred virgins, which they give for wives to those who had taken refuge in Rimmon, Jdg 21:8-14. To provide for the two hundred which remained, they propose to carry off two hundred virgins of the daughters of Shiloh, who might come to the annual feast of the Lord, held at that place, Jdg 21:15-22. They take this counsel, and each carries away a virgin from the feast, Jdg 21:23-25.

Verse 1

Now the men of Israel had sworn - Of this oath we had not heard before; but it appears they had commenced this war with a determination to destroy the Benjamites utterly, and that if any of them escaped the sword no man should be permitted to give him his daughter to wife. By these means the remnant of the tribe must soon have been annihilated.

JUDGES 21:2 The people came to Bethel, and sat there until evening before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept severely.

Verse 2

The people came to the house of God - Literally, the people came בֵּית־אֵל to Bethel; this is considered as the name of a place by the Chaldee, Syriac, Arabic, and Septuagint.

And wept sore - Their revenge was satisfied, and now reflection brings them to contrition for what they had done.

JUDGES 21:3 They said, "The LORD, the God of Israel, why has this happened in Israel, that there should be today one tribe lacking in Israel?"

Verse 3

Why is this come to pass - This was a very impertinent question. They knew well enough how it came to pass. It was right that the men of Gibeah should be punished, and it was right that they who vindicated them should share in that punishment; but they carried their revenge too far, they endeavored to exterminate both man and beast, Jdg 20:48.

JUDGES 21:4 On the next day, the people rose early, and built there an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

Verse 4

Built there an altar - This affords some evidence that this was not a regular place of worship, else an altar would have been found in the place; and their act was not according to the law, as may be seen in several places of the Pentateuch. But there was neither king nor law among them, and they did whatever appeared right in their own eyes.

JUDGES 21:5 The children of Israel said, "Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who didn't come up in the assembly to the LORD?" For they had made a great oath concerning him who didn't come up to the LORD to Mizpah, saying, "He shall surely be put to death."

JUDGES 21:6 The children of Israel grieved for Benjamin their brother, and said, "There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day.

JUDGES 21:7 How shall we provide wives for those who remain, since we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them of our daughters to wives?"

Verse 7

How shall we do for wives for them - From this it appears that they had destroyed all the Benjamitish women and children! They had set out with the purpose of exterminating the whole tribe, and therefore they massacred the women, that if any of the men escaped, they might neither find wife nor daughter; and they bound themselves under an oath not to give any of their females to any of the remnant of this tribe, that thus the whole tribe might utterly perish.

JUDGES 21:8 They said, "What one is there of the tribes of Israel who didn't come up to the LORD to Mizpah?" Behold, no one came from Jabesh Gilead to the camp to the assembly.

Verse 8

There came none to the camp from Jabesh-gilead - As they had sworn to destroy those who would not assist in this war, Jdg 21:5, they determined to destroy the men of Jabesh, and to leave none alive except the virgins, and to give these to the six hundred Benjamites that had escaped to the rock Rimmon. So twelve thousand men went, smote the city, and killed all the males and all the married women. The whole account is dreadful; and none could have been guilty of all these enormities but those who were abandoned of God. The crime of the men of Gibeah was of the deepest die; the punishment, involving both the guilty and innocent, was extended to the most criminal excess; and their mode of redressing the evil which they had occasioned was equally abominable.

JUDGES 21:9 For when the people were numbered, behold, there were none of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead there.

JUDGES 21:10 The congregation sent there twelve thousand men of the most valiant, and commanded them, saying, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the little ones.

JUDGES 21:11 This is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman who has lain with a man."

JUDGES 21:12 They found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young virgins, who had not known man by lying with him; and they brought them to the camp to Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

JUDGES 21:13 The whole congregation sent and spoke to the children of Benjamin who were in the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them.

Verse 13

And to call peaceably unto them - To proclaim peace to them; to assure them that the enmity was all over, and that they might with safety leave their strong hold.

JUDGES 21:14 Benjamin returned at that time; and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh Gilead: and yet so they weren't enough for them.

Verse 14

Yet so they sufficed them not - There were six hundred men at Rimmon, and all the young women they saved from Jabesh were only four hundred; therefore, there were two hundred still wanting.

JUDGES 21:15 The people grieved for Benjamin, because that the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.

JUDGES 21:16 Then the elders of the congregation said, "How shall we provide wives for those who remain, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?"

JUDGES 21:17 They said, "There must be an inheritance for those who are escaped of Benjamin, that a tribe not be blotted out from Israel.

JUDGES 21:18 However we may not give them wives of our daughters, for the children of Israel had sworn, saying, 'Cursed is he who gives a wife to Benjamin.'"

JUDGES 21:19 They said, "Behold, there is a feast of the LORD from year to year in Shiloh, which is on the north of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah."

Verse 19

There is a feast of the Lord - What this feast was is not known: it might be either the passover, pentecost, or the feast of tabernacles, or indeed some other peculiar to this place. All the above feasts were celebrated at that time of the year when the vines were in full leaf; therefore the Benjamites might easily conceal themselves in the vineyards; and the circumstances will answer to any of those feasts.

On the east side of the highway, etc. - I can see no reason for this minute description, unless it intimates that this feast was to be held this year in rather a different place to that which was usual: and, as the Benjamites had been shut up in their strong hold in Rimmon, they might not have heard of this alteration; and it was necessary, in such a case, to give them the most circumstantial information, that they might succeed in their enterprise without being discovered.

JUDGES 21:20 They commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards,

JUDGES 21:21 and see, and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances, then come out of the vineyards, and each man catch his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.

Verse 21

And catch you every man his wife - That is, Let each man of the two hundred Benjamites seize and carry off a woman, whom he is, from that hour, to consider as his wife.

JUDGES 21:22 It shall be, when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, that we will say to them, 'Grant them graciously to us, because we didn't take for each man his wife in battle, neither did you give them to them, otherwise you would now be guilty.'

Verse 22

Be favorable unto them - They promise to use their influence with the men of Shiloh to induce them to consent to a connection thus fraudulently obtained, and which the necessity of the case appeared to them to justify.

We reserved not to each man his wife in the war - The reading of the Vulgate is very remarkable: *Miseremini eorum, non enim rapuerunt eas jure bellantium atque victorum, sed rogantibus ut acciperent non dedistis, et a vestra parte peccatum est.* - "Pardon them, for they have not taken them as victors take captives in war; but when they requested you to give them you did not; therefore the fault is your own." Here it is intimated that application had been made to the people of Shiloh to furnish these two hundred Benjamites with wives, and that they had refused; and it was this refusal that induced the Benjamites to seize and carry them off. Does not St. Jerome, the translator, refer to the history of the rape of the Sabine virgins? See below. Houbigant translates the Hebrew thus: *Veniam quaeso illis date; non enim ad bellum duxerant suam quisque uxorem; et nisi eas illis nunc concedetis, delicti rei eritis.* - "Pardon them, I beseech you, for they have not each taken his wife to the war; and unless you now give these to them, you will sin." This intimates that,

as the Benjamites had not taken their wives with them to the war, where some, if not all, of them might have escaped; and the Israelites found them in the cities, and put them all to the sword; therefore the people of Shiloh should give up those two hundred young women to them for wives; and if they did not, it would be a sin, the circumstances of the case being considered.

Our translation seems to give as a reason to the men of Shiloh why they should pardon this rape, that as they had not permitted the women to live in their war with Benjamin, therefore these men are now destitute; and the concession which they wish them to make may be considered as more of an obligation to the Israelites than to the Benjamites. It is an obscure sentence; and the reader, if not pleased with what is laid down, may endeavor to satisfy himself with others which he may find in different versions and commentators. The Vulgate gives a good sense to the passage; but probably Houbigant comes nearest to the meaning.

JUDGES 21:23 The children of Benjamin did so, and took them wives, according to their number, of those who danced, whom they carried off. They went and returned to their inheritance, built the cities, and lived in them.

Verse 23

They went and returned unto their inheritance - It appears that the Benjamites acted in the most honorable way by the women whom they had thus violently carried off; and we may rest assured they took them to an inheritance at least equal to their own, for it does not appear that any part of the lands of the Benjamites was alienated from them, and the six hundred men in question shared, for the present, the inheritance of many thousands.

JUDGES 21:24 The children of Israel departed there at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family, and they went out from there every man to his inheritance.

Verse 24

Every man to his tribe - Though this must have been four months after the war with Benjamin, Jdg 20:47; yet it appears the armies did not disband till they had got the remnant of Benjamin settled, as is here related.

JUDGES 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Verse 25

In those days there was no king in Israel - Let no one suppose that the sacred writer, by relating the atrocities in this and the preceding chapters, justifies the actions themselves; by no means. Indeed, they cannot be justified; and the writer by relating them gives the strongest proof of the authenticity of the whole, by such an impartial relation of facts that were highly to be discredit of his country.

I Have already referred to the rape of the Sabine virgins. The story is told by Livy, Hist. lib. i., cap. 9, the substance of which is as follows: Romulus having opened an asylum at his new-built city of Rome for all kinds of persons, the number of men who flocked to his standard was soon very considerable; but as they had few women, or, as Livy says, penuria mulierum, a dearth of women, he sent to all the neighboring states to invite them to make inter-marriages with his people. Not one of the tribes around him received the proposal; and some of them insulted his ambassador, and said, Ecquod feminis quoque asylum aperuissent? Id enim demum compar connubium fore? "Why have you not also opened an asylum for Women, which would have afforded you suitable matches?" This exasperated Romulus, but he concealed his resentment, and, having published that he intended a great feast to Neptune Equester, invited all the neighboring tribes to come to it: they did so, and were received by the Romans with the greatest cordiality and friendship. The Sabines, with their wives and children, came in great numbers, and each Roman citizen entertained a stranger. When the games began, and each was intent on the spectacle before them, at a signal given, the young Romans rushed in among the Sabine women, and each carried off one, whom however they used in the kindest manner, marrying them according to their own rites with due solemnity, and admitting them to all the rights and privileges of the new commonwealth. The number carried off on this occasion amounted to near seven hundred; but this act of violence produced disastrous wars between the Romans and the Sabines, which were at last happily terminated by the mediation of the very women whose rape had been the cause of their commencement. The story may be seen at large in Livy, Plutarch, and others.

Thus ends the book of Judges; a work which, while it introduces the history of Samuel and that of the kings of Judah and Israel, forms in some sort a supplement to the book of Joshua, and furnishes the only account we have of those times of anarchy and confusion, which extended nearly from the times of the elders who survived Joshua, to the establishment of the Jewish monarchy under Saul, David, and their successors. For other uses of this book, see the preface.

Masoretic Notes on the Book of Judges

The number of verses in this book is six hundred and eighteen.

Its Masoretic chapters are fourteen.

And its middle verse is Jdg 10:8 : And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel, etc.

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