
Judges 21

Judges 21:1–25

The Re-Seeding of the Tribe of Benjamin

Outline of Chapter 21:

- Vv. 1–4 **The tribes of Israel are upset over decimating the tribe of Benjamin**
- Vv. 5–9 **The men of Jabesh-gilead did not participate in the war against Benjamin**
- Vv. 10–15 **The men of Jabesh-gilead were slaughtered and their 400 virgins given to Benjamin**
- Vv. 16–23 **The Jews get 200 women from Shiloh for Benjamin by circumventing their oath**
- Vv. 24–25 **Conclusion**

Introduction: Sometimes when people read God's Word, they assume that everything they read is a resounding approval of the activity recorded in any given chapter and many take their standards for practices and doctrine from historical narrative. Doctrinally, this is very dangerous, not to mention way stupid. The Bible accurately records the history of Israel in the Old Testament as well as the history of the new church in the New. Believe it or not, Israel, throughout her history, did some really bonehead things. This particular example is one where these men never thought things through. They just acted out of emotion and then did whatever they thought was appropriate. The result was that they did some pretty goofy things.

Let me explain how this applies. The Apostles voted for a new Apostle to take the place of Judas, who betrayed our Lord and who hanged himself. There was no reason for them to vote for a new Apostle and God never did recognize Matthias as the twelfth Apostle. I have discussed issues with others which, to me, seemed simple and straightforward. I am thinking of salvation and I visited with some who believed that you must be baptized in order to be saved. Obviously, they quoted primarily from the book of Acts of people who believed in Christ and then were baptized (which, even though legitimate, does not mean that baptism is a requirement for salvation). This was, for all intents and purposes, the sum total of their argument (apart from Mark 16:16, which is not even in the Bible). As I have said many times, the Bible should not be in the hands of amateurs—especially amateurs with web sites. You do not base your doctrines and mechanics upon historical narrative.

What Israel does in this chapter is pretty weird. On the one hand, they realize that they have almost wiped out the tribe of Benjamin (although they had good reason to do so). All that remained were 600 males and no females. The men of Israel had already sworn that their daughters would never marry a man from the tribe of Benjamin. Therefore, there is no way, at least at first, for the tribe of Benjamin to perpetuate itself. Then they Israelites take a family count and it turns out that one extended family did not participate at all in the punishment for the transgression of the Benjamites. Therefore, they wipe out that family, but preserve 400 of their virginal daughters and give them to the tribe of Benjamin. However, that is not enough, so they suggest for the remaining Benjamites set up in the vineyards during a festival to Jehovah, which featured the dancing of some of the local young ladies; and allow the Benjamites to spirit away 200 of the women who show up. Now, is this stuff goofy, or what? At the conclusion of this chapter, we have the familiar line: [In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes](#) (Judges 21:25). That line gives the divine viewpoint.

[Return to Chapter Outline](#)

[Return to the Chart Index](#)

The Tribes of Israel Are Upset over Decimating the Tribe of Benjamin

Slavishly literal:

Moderately literal:

And a man of Israel had sworn in Mizpah to say, “A man of us will not give his daughter to Benjamin for a wife.”

Judges
21:1

And [each] man of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, “[Each] man of us will not give his daughter to Benjamin to wife.”

And each man in Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, “None of us will give our daughters in marriage to anyone from the tribe of Benjamin.”

The first verb is the Niphal perfect of *shâ^bva^ʿ* (שָׁבַע) [pronounced *shaw^b-VAH*], which means *to swear, so seven oneself, to imprecate, to curse, to swear an oath, to take a solemn oath, and often to extract an oath (from someone else)*. It is usually found in the Niphal, or passive stem, although its meaning is active. It is very close to the word *seven* and could be translated to *seven oneself, to take an oath seven times, to bind oneself seven times (or, by seven things)*. Strong's #7650 BDB #989. This oath is not one which was made just then, but was made the other day when they were in Mizpah. It is pertinent now to the material in this chapter. Interestingly enough, this oath is not mentioned historically in the previous chapter. Apparently, to get themselves worked up, the men of Israel made several oaths concerning the Benjamites. I don't doubt that they just worked each other up, one trying to outdo the other. This was one of the several oaths which they made. This oath will be alluded to in v. 7 and its content in v. 18 (“**Cursed by the who gives a wife to Benjamin.**”). It appears as though these men had made four vows in total, all of which will be enumerated later.

And so came in the people [to] Bethel and so they sat there until the evening to a face of the God. And so they lifted up their voice and so they wept a weeping—great.

Judges
21:2

So the people came in to Bethel and sat there until evening before the face of God. And they lifted up their voice and wept a great weeping.

So the people went to Bethel and saw before God till evening, weeping loudly before God.

This verse tells us that the men of Israel are in Bethel, not Mizpah, which is just a few miles southwest of Bethel. They have returned to the Tent of Meeting, the House of God. If you will recall, in the previous chapter we discussed in full when we should render these words *House of God* (Judges 20:26) and when we should render them *Bethel*. It just so happens that the two coincide here—the *House of God* (i.e., the Tent of Meeting) was located in Bethel.

The men of Israel have always been a very demonstrative group. Throughout God's Word, we hear of them lifting up their voices to heaven and crying. In the book of the Judges, they would cry out to God when under an oppressor (e.g., Judges 3:9 4:3). They wept in the previous chapter because they had been beaten in battle (Judges 20:26). Now, these men are crying because they have almost completely wiped out the tribe of Benjamin. Right at this point you should realize that, despite their vigor at removing the evil from their midst, these men are also a bit off-kilter as well. You will note that even though God's name is mentioned several times in this chapter, they do not go to Him and ask what they should do. This is just like when they went to war against Benjamin—their only question before God then was which tribe should go to battle against the army of Benjamin. They do not ask of God nor do they ask of Phinehas, their High Priest, what should be done because of their vow. They simply go ahead and act. When they went through the territory of Benjamin and killed all of the women and children and burned all of their cities—they did not stop and ask God about this act. And now they are sitting around crying about it.

Here's an easy application—have you even known someone to screw up their own life completely and then sit around and cry to God “*Why did you let this happen to me?*” Thieme's illustration was always the young bride who, despite the warnings of her parents, friends and pastor, marries this wretch of a man, and then cries to her pastor a week later, “*Why did God let me marry this man?*” You just want to slap them and say, “*You did it to yourself, you looser.*” The idea that they could blame God for what they have done borders on being laughable, if it did not have such a tragic side to it.

Now, we do not have Urim and Thummim today. We have no way of going before God and asking Him directly should we do this or that. I realize that some people go to God in prayer and pray and pray and pray for guidance and then they go ahead and do what they were going to do anyway. Did you know that you are not guided by prayer,

generally speaking? Your guidance is from God's Word and God's Spirit. God is not going to strike you with lightning on the left side when He wants you to make a left turn. Although I have personally made hundreds of wrong decisions over the past several years, most of the time, with a little bit of thought, I could have determined these decisions to be wrong. However, for most of the wrong decisions I have made, I knew from God's Word that I was making the wrong decision.

Now, I will admit, when I was first saved, I occasionally wondered, *should I drive down Madison to Dewey, or should I go Palm Avenue instead?* Yeah, I realize, pretty goofy. However, once I grew a bit spiritually, I was able to recognize such things as over-thinking and goofy and was able to make normal decisions in my life. And let me repeat: most of the wrong decisions that I have made as a believer, I knew right then and then I was making a wrong decision. So you are wondering, *what about me? How can I know God's will?* It doesn't get much simpler. First of all, you don't sweat any of the inconsequential decisions like *should I turn left or right at the next intersection?* Concern over such things borders on being psychotic and when you share these thoughts with your unbelieving friends, this further convinces them to avoid Christianity. Secondly, if your understanding of God's Word is limited, either through lack of study or being new in the Word, then you do not make any major decisions but you remain in the state that you were called, whether slave or free or married or single (1 Cor. 7). Then you get yourself under a teaching ministry where you can be taught God's Word on a daily basis from someone who knows God's Word and teaches verse by verse (primarily). You will slowly begin to build from small decisions involving doctrine to major decisions involving doctrine. For me, early on in my Christian life, it was being in front of a tape recorder and listening to my right pastor for an hour a day. Later, it was being in church every single night and learning God's Word. Surprisingly enough, the major decisions became the easiest to make.

And so they said, "For why, O Y^ehowah, God of Israel, has this [happened] in Israel to lack the day from Israel a tribe one?"

Judges
21:3

And so they said, "Why, O Y^ehowah, God of Israel, has this—to lack today one tribe from Israel—occurred in Israel?"

Then they said, "Why, O Jehovah, God of Israel, has this come to pass that there is now one less tribe in Israel?"

You will note the repetition of the name *Israel*. This is not unintentional, particularly by God the Holy Spirit. God's promises are to all of Israel. His promises are not to just eleven of the tribes. The wiping out of any one tribe of Israel would simultaneously mean that God has reneged on His promises to Israel. As Barnes put it, *The very name "Israel" comprehended all the twelve tribes; with one of them blotted out, the remnant would not be Israel*¹.

These men have gone to war against the tribe of Benjamin. Terms of surrender were never offered as they put the army of Benjamin on the run. It is totally unbelievable for them to have done all this and then cry out, *how could You let this happen, God?* Scofield comments: *There are here no mourning for sin, no humbling because of national transgression, no return to the Lord. Accordingly no word from the Lord comes to them. They act wholly in self-will (v. 10).*² Scofield further commends to our reading Dan. 9:3–11: **So I gave my attention to Jehovah God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. And I prayed to Jehovah, my God, and confessed, and said, "Alas, O Jehovah, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly, and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. Furthermore, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all the people of the land. Righteousness belongs to You, O Jehovah, but to us open shame, as it is this day—to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near by and those who are afar off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithful deeds which they have committed against you. Open shame belongs to us, O Jehovah, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. To Jehovah our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him; nor have we obeyed the voice of Jehovah our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants and prophets.**

¹ Barnes' Notes, Volume 2, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 468.

² The New Scofield Reference Bible; Dr. C.I. Scofield; ©1967 New York-Oxford University Press; p. 315.

Indeed, all Israel has transgressed You law and has turned aside, not obeying Your voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him.”

And so he was from [the] morrow and so arose early the people and so they built there an altar and so they caused to ascend burnt offerings and peace offerings.

Judges
21:4

And so it was the next day the people arose early and built an altar there and caused burnt offerings and peace offerings to ascend.

So the people awoke early the next morning and they built an altar there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings upon it.

You will note that we have spent very little time with the Hebrew so far. The writer of the end of the previous chapter was rather difficult to comprehend at times; however, with this chapter, we are back to fairly simple, narrative Hebrew.

Here, the Israelites seem to start out right. It appears at first as though they have gone to the Tent of Meeting, the only proper place from which to make offerings for the nation Israel (Deut. 12:5). They offer to God burnt offerings and peace offerings, which is often the correct approach (see II Sam. 24:25). In the previous chapter, in vv. 26–27, we find them weeping before God, offering sacrifices, and asking guidance of Phinehas in Bethel. Here, they have returned to Bethel, but what we do not find here is the presence of Phinehas, the High Priest who represents man to God. Also, note what they have done. They *built* an altar there. The word is *bânâh* (בָּנָה) [pronounced *baw-NAWH*], which means *to build, to rebuild, to restore*. Strong's #1129 BDB #124. Now, if Phinehas is there with the Tent of Meeting and the brazen altar, then there is no need to build an altar. However, this is what they did. Barnes muses *where is the brazen altar?* That is, do we have Phinehas, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Tent of Meeting all in Bethel? Scripture does not specify. Therefore, we have two options: either the Ark of the Covenant and the Tent of Meeting are in Bethel or they are not. If they are still in Bethel, then, why do they build an altar? Has Phinehas shut them out? Do they not go the Tent of Meeting? Or, option number two, my preference: the Ark and the Tent of Meeting were both relocated, probably to the festival in Shiloh (which is where the Ark was most of the time—Judges 18:31). Interestingly enough, there is no mention in Scripture as to the *movement* of the Ark of God throughout the book of the Judges.³ In either case, God allows that they have appeared before Him, even apart from the Tent of Meeting (v. 2); but, what is very clear—the Israelites do not seek His guidance in this matter.

Let's stay with this train of thought for a bit. The nation Israel was not to just stop and offer sacrifices just anywhere. “You will seek at the place which Jehovah your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you will come. And there you will bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the first-born of your herd and of your flock. There you and your households will eat before Jehovah your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which Jehovah your God has blessed you. You will not do at all what we are doing here today, every man whatever is right in his own eyes.” (Deut. 12:5–8; see also Ex. 20:24 Deut. 12:11, 13–14).⁴ If the altar is not in Bethel, why do they not go to the altar of God in Shiloh? I can give you two reasons: they are about to attack and wipe out the men of Jabesh-gilead—some of them might have already gone to Shiloh for this festival. Therefore, their discussions cannot occur where anyone from Jabesh-gilead might hear them. Secondly, they will later hatch a plot to capture and spirit away some of the young women who attend the festival at Shiloh. They can't very well discuss this at Shiloh, where such an action would meet with resistance.

[Return to Chapter Outline](#)

[Return to the Chart Index](#)

³ However, it is apparent that the House of God was located for most of the period of the Judges up until the captivity, at Shiloh (Judges 18:31). This verse reference does not preclude the Ark of God being elsewhere prior to this time nor does it require Judges 19–21 to precede Judges 18 in time.

⁴ Don't forget that in Joshua 22, a cause of great strife was the building of an unauthorized altar by the Israelites of the east.

The Men of Jabesh-gilead Did Not Participate in the War Against Benjamin

And so said sons of Israel, “Who [is he] that did not come up in the assembly from all tribes of Israel unto Y^howah? For the oath the great was to [him] who did not come up unto Y^howah [to] the Mizpah to say, ‘Dying, he will be put to death.’ ”

Judges
21:5

Then the sons of Israel said, “Who from all the tribes of Israel did not come up to Y^howah to the assembly? For the great oath was concerning [him] who did not come up to Y^howah to Mizpah, saying, ‘He ought to be executed.’ ”

Then the sons of Israel asked, “Just who from all the families of Israel did not assemble before Jehovah? We all took this great oath concerning those who did not come up to Mizpah, saying, ‘Such a one will be executed.’ ”

Translating this was a bit tougher than the previous verses. Let’s see what others have done:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	And the sons of Israel said, Who was there that came not up in the convocation out of all the tribes of Israel unto Yahweh? For the great oath had been taken, as to any who came not up unto Yahweh at Mizpah saying— He shall be put to death.
NASB	Then the sons of Israel said, “Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up in the assembly to the LORD?” For they had taken a great oath concerning him who did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah, saying, “He shall surely be put to death.”
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	And the sons of Israel say, ‘Who is he that hath not come up inn the assembly out of all the tribes of Israel unto Jehovah?’ for the great oath hath been concerning him who hath not come up unto Jehovah to Mizpeh, saying, ‘He is surely put to death.’

What the sons of Israel said begins with the interrogative *mîy* (מִי) [pronounced *mee*], which is generally translated *who*. Strong’s #4310 BDB #566. With this is the relative pronoun *’ăsher* (אֲשֶׁר) [pronounced *ash-ER*], which generally means *that, which, when* or *who*. Strong’s #834 BDB #81. Together, they literally mean *who that* or *who whom*. Even Young wasn’t that literal. Although I could not find support for this in the Lexicons, I am thinking that this might be rendered *whoever* or, simply *who*. One of the Israelites has an idea, and it requires them to know who did not assemble with the rest of the Israelites.

Then we hear about the third oath which the Israelites took. This oath dealt with those who did not come to Mizpah to assemble. It begins with the Qal infinitive construct of *mûwth* (מוֹת) [pronounced *mooth*], which means *to die*. A Qal infinitive construct acts simply as a verbal noun, not unlike our infinitive or gerund. The Qal infinitive absolute is used to intensify the meaning of the main verb and is often translated *surely, certainly, indeed*; however, one of the functions of the Qal infinitive construct is that it behaves as a gerund, in the sense of *is to be, must be, ought to be*. This same verb also is in the Hophal imperfect—the Hophal is the passive of the Hiphil—therefore, it is the passive causative of the verb. The subject of the verb, the family who did not send representatives to the assembly, will receive the action of the verb—in other words, he will receive death; he will be caused to die. In other words, in the Hophal, *mûwth* means *to execute*. Strong’s #4191 BDB #559. However, note their thinking here. If someone did not attend this conference prior to the attack upon Benjamin, then they would have not taken part in any of the oaths, and therefore, not be bound by these oaths. Therefore, the women of the missing family could be given over to Benjamin without technically violating the oath.

Obviously, these men had too much time on their hands. Because of this, they made a whole bunch of oaths. It was one man trying to out-holy another. One makes an oath that nobody returns home until the Benjamite thing has been settled. Another one stands up and says, “We will not give our daughters to the Benjamites.” Another one says, “Let’s destroy the Benjamites completely” (I am making an educated guess concerning that oath). And then someone makes the oath, to which they all agree, “We’ll put anyone to death who has not joined us.”

And so had compassion sons of Israel upon Benjamin their brother and so they said, “Has been cut off the day tribe one from Israel.”

Judges
21:6

Then the sons of Israel had compassion on their brother Benjamin and they said, “One tribe has been cut off today from Israel.”

Then the sons of Israel were moved with compassion concerning their brother tribe, Benjamin, and they said, “Today, one tribe has been cut off from Israel.”

The first verb is the Niphal imperfect of *nâcham* (נָחַם) [pronounced *naw-KHAHM*] and it means *to be sorry, to be moved to pity, to have compassion, to be sorry, to suffer grief*. The KJV often translates this word to *repent* (Gen. 6:7 Ex. 32:12 I Sam. 15:11), but the meaning gets lost with that completely misunderstood, Old English word. Strong’s #5162 BDB #636. What they said happened to a tribe of Israel is that they were *cut off*; the verb is Niphal perfect of *gâda* (גָּדַד) [pronounced *gaw-DAH*], which means *to cut down, to cut in two*. Strong’s #1438 BDB #154. It is obvious that they did not think any of this through. They are upset and concerned over what they themselves have done.

I ended this quote with a quote as the next line may have been said by the same person and it may have been said by a different person. There were those who took the floor and said a variety of things and the historian who recorded this kept tract of the various quotes, but not who said them.

“What do we do for them—for the remaining ones—for wives? And we—we have sworn in Y^ehowah to not give to them from our daughters for wives.”

Judges
21:7

“What can we do for them—for those remaining—for wives? We, [even] we have sworn by Y^ehowah not to give to them of our daughters for wives.”

“Is there anything that we can do on behalf of the men who are still alive? We have sworn by Jehovah that we would not give our daughters to them in marriage.”

They spent all of their free time thinking up oaths which would outdo the other oaths that had been made—and then they all gave assent to these oaths as they were suggested. We covered the **Doctrine of Vows and Oaths** back in Num. 30:15. In those days, they were more formal; and people stuck by their word. Today, people promise God anything to get them out of a jam, and then they think nothing of ignoring what they have said to God. We make our vows in marriage—often before God in church—and then act as though these vows mean nothing. When the people of Israel made these vows—all of their other faults aside—they made a real attempt to fulfill what they had vowed. The Law covered this in Num. 30 and Deut. 23:21–23. The Bible nowhere encourages us to make vows—it simply states that when we make a vow, that we need to follow through. Otherwise, we should not waste our breath. In connection with divorce, our Lord mentioned vows, in Matt. 5:33–37. Most separate the two passages even though they are adjacent. The idea of getting a divorce is closely tied to making vows and oaths—men made vows in those days and then, in divorcing the woman, they broke these vows. Jesus suggests that they not even make vows at all, which would have been good advice for this group.

And so they said, “What one from tribes of Israel who did not come up unto Y^ehowah [to] the Mizpah?” And, behold, did not come in a man unto the camp from Jabesh-gilead unto the assembly.

Judges
21:8

Then they said, “What one [tribe] out of the families of Israel did not come up unto Y^ehowah to the Mizpah?” And, observe, no man from [the tribe of] Jabesh-gilead came into the camp to the assembly.

They then said, “Was there any family from Israel that did not come up to Jehovah to the Mizpah?” Then they realized that no one from the tribe of Jabesh-gilead was at the camp; and they did not come to the assembly.

The reasoning that will follow is long-winded, but it brings together several of their vows. They had apparently vowed (or would vow) that anyone who did not come up to war against the tribe of Benjamin was worthy of death.

Then they would go and execute the men from that family, saving the virgin women alive for the remaining men of the tribe of Benjamin. Now, doesn't this seem like one of the goofiest things that you have ever heard of? It is vows like these which caused our Lord to suggest not making any vows at all in Matt. 5:33–37.

And so numbered themselves the people, and, behold, none there a man from those inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead.

Judges
21:9

And the people had numbered themselves and, observe, there [was] no man from the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead.

For the people had taken a quick census of the various families and found that there was not a single man from the city of Jabesh-gilead.

The first verb is the 3rd person masculine singular, Hithpael imperfect of *pāqad* (פָּקַד) [pronounced *paw-KAHD*], which means, in the Qal, *to go to a person, to visit a person, to commit, to charge to the care of, to fall upon, to attack*. The key to this verb is the concept of personal contact. The Hithpael is the Piel reflexive—this can mean *to compel [to go to war], to conscript, to enlist, to draft*. However, here, it simply means *to number, to take inventory, to take a census*.⁵ Strong's #6485 BDB #823. They did a quick inventory to find out which cities were represented and which were not. When we examine the records of the books of Joshua and I Chronicles, we notice that the Israelites kept very careful records of their cities and their genealogies. Although it is not specifically stated, obviously, these records were possibly with Israel at this time (or, those familiar with the geography of their area gave an accounting of it, and this was compared to those who had assembled at Mizpah).

This is the first mention of Jabesh-gilead, although we will find it mentioned prominently in connection with King Saul in the future. in I Sam. 11:1 31:1 II Sam. 2:4 21:12. Josephus will call it the metropolis of Gilead. This might cause you some distress, as in this chapter of Judges, Jabesh-gilead's population will be completely wiped out. However, there is no indication that the city was burned to the ground, and King Saul will come on the scene a couple of centuries later, allowing ample time for a repopulation of Jabesh-gilead. When the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh settled the east side of the Jordan, they took over the cities and renamed some of them (Num. 32:38); however, we do not have as careful a geographical recording of the east side of the Jordan as we do of the west (the west side is covered in great detail in the latter portion of the book of Joshua). This is one city that did not send any men to war against Benjamin.

[Return to Chapter Outline](#)

[Return to the Chart Index](#)

The Men of Jabesh-gilead Were Slaughtered and Their 400 Virgins Given to Benjamin

And so sent there the congregation 12,000 a man from sons of the valor and so command them, to say, "Go and you will strike down inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead to a mouth of a sword and the women and the infant.

Judges
21:10

Then the assembly sent there 12,000 men from the sons of valor. And the commanded them, saying, "Go and you will strike down those inhabiting Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword—and the women and the infants.

Then the assembly of Israelites sent 12,000 of their toughest soldiers, commanding them, "Go and strike down those living in Jabesh-gilead with your swords—kill the women and children as well.

⁵ One of the several reasons that I have spent time putting together a lexicon of sorts is that, although the BDB is invaluable in learning the definitions of words, it generally has the several meanings without having some point of commonality given so that, when one looks up a word, three or four seemingly completely different renderings are found, allowing the reader to insert any of these definitions willy nilly into any verse. When one sees the common thread of these definitions, the context then helps to select the most appropriate meaning.

The ones commanding this are the feminine singular of *ʿêdâh* (הַדָּבָר) [pronounced *gā-DAWH*], which can be translated *company, congregation, assembly*. Strong's #5712 BDB #417. The 12,000 were representative of 1000 men for each tribe of Israel—however, there would have been none from the Levite tribe or the tribe of Benjamin. They were probably following the precedent set in Num. 31:4; however, it is more as though someone opened their Bible and dropped their finger on their *life verse* rather than got this from any amount of study (recall that, although we do not have printed copies of the extent Scripture, it was chiseled into stones at Mount Ebal (Deut. 27:2–4)).

One of the great sins of the Old Testament was the sin of pacifism. There are numerous instances throughout the Law where such a thing is condemned. When the tribes of Gad, Reuben and Manasseh decided that they wanted to be ranchers east of the Jordan, the key issue was would they continue to support their brothers in taking the remainder of the land. This discussion took place at least twice (once with Moses and once with Joshua), and Moses mentions it in the book of Deuteronomy as well. The famous Old Testament passage *and your sin will find you out* is a reference to the sin of pacifism. In Judges 5:23, the family of Meroz is cursed by the Angel of Jehovah for not joining Deborah and Barak (see also Judges 5:15–17). Furthermore, there is some precedence for the complete wiping out of a group of people (e.g., Num. 31:17–18). So, surprisingly enough, the choice of the men of Israel here is not way off mark. In fact, their decisions throughout this chapter, although not completely in line with God's Word, were not in complete disregard of His Word either. They had just enough truth to be dangerous and not enough to do that which was right. What they should have done is stayed with Phinehas and gotten their guidance through him. What they should have done was offer their offerings where it was designated that they should offer them—and not wherever they happened to be assembling. The key is that you get right with God first—then everything else will fall into place. When Jesus said, **“Seek first the kingdom of heaven, and then all things will be added to you.”** He was teaching just that (Matt. 6:33). Christianity is filled with believers who are miserable, who are off-kilter, who make a mockery of our Lord by their behavior and by their testimony. The average unbeliever observes the goofy things which goes on in a holy roller church and recognizes that whatever truth is, this isn't it—yet, a believer with a higher IQ can walk into that same church and get sucked into their evil program. Believers have to turn toward God first—and I don't mean that in some lame, devotional way—but we seek God by learning His Word; and we learn His Word through a pastor-teacher. If you have a desire to know God's Word, no matter where you are, God will provide the means. I lived in California and my right pastor was in Texas. There was a point in time when I decided that I really wanted to know what was in God's Word and God made all of that possible. Now, you might go to fifty churches and not one of them is teaching God's Word (I tried about a dozen or so different churches). Not being able to find a church which teaches God's Word is what you should expect—most believers do not have the slightest interest in knowing God's Word. A large majority don't know when they are in or out of fellowship; they don't know how to get back into fellowship when they are out; and many of them don't have even the most basic understanding of salvation. So, as you read through this chapter of Judges and you think to yourself *these guys are really screwed up—can't they make a correct decision?* God's Word is a mirror. If you look carefully at this chapter, this is you.

“And this the word which you will do: every male and every woman knowing a laying down of a male you will devote [to God].”

Judges
21:11

“Now, this is the thing which you will do: you will destroy every male and every woman who has known a laying with a male.”

“Now this is what you will do: you will destroy every male and every woman who is not a virgin.”

It is rather difficult to give a verbatim translation of this verse as we have the problem of the construct of *kôl* (כֹּל) [pronounced *kohl*], which means *all of*. With a plural noun, this is easy—however, with a singular noun, we have to bypass the normal translation of a construct (*of*) and render this noun as *every*. Strong's #3605 BDB #481.

We have interesting references to men and women here. For the man, we have the singular masculine adjective *zâkâr* (זָכָר) [pronounced *zaw-KAWR*] and it is the word for *male, male offspring (whether animal or people)*. This word does not reference age or position—it simply refers to *males*. Strong's #2145 BDB #271. There is a word which is generally used in contrast with this word: *n^oqê^hvâh* (נִקְהָוָה) [pronounced *n^o-kah^b-VAW*], which means *female* in contrast to *male*. These two words are found together in such passages as Gen. 1:27 5:2 Lev. 3:1. Strong's #5347 BDB #666. However, what we have here instead is the feminine singular noun *ʿîshshâh* (אִשְׁשָׁה)

[pronounced *eesh-SHAWH*], which means *woman, wife*. It is the name that Adam gave to the woman. This word is primarily translated *woman, wife* and is used of women bearing children (Num. 31:18); for a woman as belonging to a man (Gen. 2:24, 25 Deut. 20:7); for women conceiving (Ex. 2:2 Lev. 12:2); etc. Strong's #802 BDB #61. So we are not speaking of every male and every female—we are speaking of every male and every woman—specifically those who are married. This is further emphasized with the feminine construct, Qal active participle of *yâda* (יָדָעָה) [pronounced *yaw-DAHĠ*], which means, as a participle, *one knowing*. Strong's #3045 BDB #393. This is followed by the masculine singular construct of *mishkâv* (מִשְׁכָּב) [pronounced *mish-KAW^BV*], a word for *bed, couch, or the act of lying down*. Strong's #4904 (7901) BDB #1012. This is again followed by the word *male*.

What they were to do to the males and to the women is the 2nd person masculine plural, Hiphil imperfect of *châram* (חָרַם) [pronounced *khaw-RAM*], which means *completely devoted to, devoted to, or completely destroyed*. Strong's #2763 BDB #355 (& #356). I mean, *what the hell?*, they have already completely devoted or destroyed almost the entire tribe of Benjamin—why not do this to the men of Jabesh-gilead? Now, there were precedents for the devotion of an entire group of people to God. We have the Midianites of Num. 31, who were closely aligned with the heathen religions. God, through Moses, required the devotion of the various heathen groups of Canaan from Israel (something which Israel did not fulfill). These men of Israel had taken a few things which did have true application and applied them entirely incorrectly. Barnes comments: *Therefore the application of the word chêm to man is made exclusively in reference to one rightly doomed to death and, in that sense alone, given up to Jehovah. The man who, in a right spirit, either carries out a sentence of just doom on an offender, or who, with a single eye to duty, slays an enemy in battle, must regard himself as God's servant rendering up a life to the claim of the Divine justice (cp. Rom. xiii.4). It was in this way that Israel was required to destroy the Canaanites at Hormah (Num. xxi.2, 3; cp. Deut. Xiii. 12–18), and that Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord (I S. xv. 33). In all such instances, a moral obligation rests upon him whose office it is to take the life; he has to look upon the object of his stroke as under a ban to the Lord (cp. Deut. xx. 4; Gal. iii. 13) there can therefore be neither redemption nor commutation. It is evidence that the righteousness of this law is not involved in the sin of rash or foolish vows, such as Saul's (I S. xiv. 24) or Jephthah's (Judg. xi. 30).⁶* We could certainly add this incident to that list of foolish vows.

It is important to note that as these men of Israel inquire less and less from God, that they get further and further into a mess. Anytime you deviate from God's Word, you may think that everything is okay, but it simply gets worse and worse. There are churches and people in the tongues movement who appear to be fairly normal and whose church services, except for a few aberrations, appear to be normal and Christian as well. However, the direction that the tongues/second blessing movement has gone in over the past several decades is so far into demonism that it is scary.

The Greek adds a few words to this verse. In the Greek, this reads: *And this you will do: every male and every woman that has known the lying with a man, you will devote; but the virgins, you will save alive.” And they did so.* Whether or not this was in the original, we do not know; however, the next verse makes this additional explanation unnecessary.

And so they found from [the] inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 a young woman—virgins who had not known a man to a laying of a male and so they brought them unto the camp at Shiloh which [is] in a land of Canaan.

Judges
21:12

So from the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead, they found 400 young women—virgins—who had not known a man [or] the laying of a male; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which [is] in the land of Canaan.

So they found 400 female virgins in the city of Jabesh-gilead, and they brought these women to their camp in Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

⁶ Barnes' Notes, Volume 2, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 178.

What they find is 400 and then we have the feminine singular noun *na'ārâh* (נַעֲרָה) [pronounced *nah-ar-AWH*] means *girl, damsel, miss, young woman, woman of marriageable age, an unmarried woman*. Strong's #5291 BDB #655. This is further modified by the feminine plural noun *b'ethûwlâh* (בְּתוּלָה) [pronounced *beth-oo-LAWH*] which means *virgin*. Strong's #1330 BDB #143. Further they are described as those who have not known a man or the laying with a male. Jabesh-gilead is located on the other side of the Jordan from Bethel and Shiloh. This is a bit of a distance, which is why only a portion of the Israelites were sent.

There is something here in the Hebrew that you will not catch in the English. We have the Hiphil imperfect of *bôw'* (בּוֹא) [pronounced *boh*], which means, in the Hiphil, *to bring*. Strong's #935 BDB #97. Obviously, that is not unusual. However, the direct object of the verb has with it the 3rd person *masculine* plural suffix. Of my sources, only Keil and Delitzsch mention this at all, saying *the masculine being used as the more common genus in the place of the feminine*.⁷ My thinking is that this emphasizes the depersonalization of these women here. They are being transported as little more than slaves or as cattle, their volition not an issue.

Now, I want you to understand the geography of all of this. Phinehas and the Ark of God and the Tent of Meeting were found in Bethel, which is at the border of the territory of Benjamin and Ephraim. It is reasonable to suppose that they returned to Shiloh for the festival and because the armies of Israel did not have any real interest in consulting God.⁸ A few miles southwest of there is Mizpah, where they met after slaughtering the Benjamite women and children, and began to get upset over what had occurred. Now, they are going to meet up in Shiloh, which is in northern Ephraim, roughly 20 miles northeast of Bethel. They do not go to Phinehas and seek God's advice. They go off half-cocked in a variety of directions. They go to Phinehas one time and that one time, they are victorious over the tribe of Benjamin. Every other thing that they do is messed up. There is no indication that Phinehas was involved at all at this time, although they were in Bethel for awhile (Judges 21:2). Now, they have 600 remaining Benjamites and 400 virgin young ladies (say, about high school and college age) who have been brought to Shiloh. The men of Benjamin who are in hiding are on the border of Ephraim and Benjamin not too far from Bethel. My point in all of this geography is that the children of Israel are dancing around the truth, but they do not pursue the truth. From the first day, these Israelites went out on this great surge of self-righteousness and it was not until Benjamin defeated them twice in battle that they pursued God's direction in full. And, as soon as God bailed them out of that mess, then they again returned to skipping around the truth again. There is no doubt that many of these men are brave and sincere—but these things mean very little when there is no clear direction given by God.

And so send all of the congregation and so they speak unto sons of Benjamin who [were] in a rock of Rimmon, and so proclaim unto them peace.

Judges
21:13

Then all of the congregation sent and spoke to the sons of Benjamin who [were] at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed to them peace.

Then the assembly of the people of Israel sent ambassadors to the remaining sons of Benjamin who were in hiding at the rock of Rimmon and they proclaimed peace to them.

Israel had wiped out almost all of the men of Benjamin. The only large group which remained were these 600 who had escaped in the final battle to the rock of Rimmon (Judges 20:47). Realizing that these are the only remaining people of the tribe of Benjamin, and that they are all males, the sons of Israel found females for them from Jabesh-gilead. Now they approach these men in peace. Because the things which have been done by Israel all have a slight grain of truth in them, my thinking is that there are some who have a tiny bit of knowledge of the Word of God—not enough to make a correct decision—just enough to quote a verse or two to get everyone off track (notice how things have not changed much since then). There are provisions in the Law for offering terms of peace (Deut. 20:10). This is called for here and probably should have been applied once most of the Benjamite males had been slaughtered.

⁷ Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 332.

⁸ Do not confuse their righteous indignation and their immediate action as an indication of their spirituality. For those who know anything about the cults, these things, in and of themselves, are meaningless.

And so returned Benjamin in the time the that and so they [the sons of Israel] gave to them [the sons of Benjamin] the women who they saved alive from [the] women of Jabesh-gilead and they did not find for them so.

Judges
21:14

So Benjamin returned in that time and they gave to them the women who they saved alive from the women of Jabesh-gilead, and they did not find for them [enough].

So the tribe of Benjamin returned to the tribes of Israel in that day, and the Israelites gave them the young women whom they had saved alive from their attack on Jabesh-gilead; however, there were not enough for all of the sons of Benjamin.

Because of the last couple of words in this verse, it might be a good idea to take a look at what others have done with it:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	So Benjamin returned at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh-gilead,— but they found not for them [to suffice] even so.
NASB	And Benjamin returned at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had kept alive from the women of Jabesh-gilead; yet they were not enough [lit., did not find so] for them.
NIV	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.
The Septuagint	And Benjamin returned to the children of Israel at that time, and the children of Israel gave them the women whom they <i>had</i> saved alive of the daughters of Jabis Galaad, and it pleased them thus.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	...and Benjamin turneth back at that time, and they give to them the women whom they have kept alive of the women of Jabesh-Gilead, and they have not found for <i>all of</i> them so.

As you can see from the difference in the Hebrew and the Greek renderings, as well as by the confusion of the last few words of this verse, that something was corrupted along the way. However, what is clear is that the tribe of Benjamin returned to the tribes of Israel, and they took to themselves the women of Jabesh Gilead. After that, it is unclear whether they were pleased or whether it was apparent that there were not enough women to go around.

And the people had compassion for Benjamin because had made Y^howah a breach in [the] tribes of Israel.

Judges
21:15

And the people had compassion for [the men of] Benjamin because Y^howah had made a rupture in the tribes of Israel.

And the people were moved to have compassion for the men of Benjamin because Jehovah had left a gap in the tribes of Israel.

What Jehovah had made was the masculine singular noun *perets* (פֶּרֶץ) [pronounced *PEH-rets*], which means *a bursting forth, a breach, a break, a rupture [in a wall]*. Because this is used in conjunction with breaking through the wall of an enemy, it figuratively means *a dispersal of [one's enemies], a slaughtering of [one's enemies], an invasion of, a doing of violence to*. Strong's #6556 BDB #829. What we have here is actually a fairly clever play on words. God did violence to the tribes of Israel as well as create a gap in the tribes of Israel by almost destroying the tribe of Benjamin entirely. To take this verse that way, would mean that v. 15 is somewhat of a connective and explanatory verse. It explains the actions of the sons of Israel from vv. 8–23. What these men first did was to secure 400 women of Jabesh Gilead; and then they got an additional 200, because God had made a gap in the tribes of Israel.

Now, some have interpreted this verse and the word *gap* as referring to the lack of 200 women for the remaining Benjamites and others interpret v. 15 as being separate from the issue of these additional women. I personally take this as a general statement concerning the entire tribe of Benjamin, which explains the actions of the Israelites in

the previous verses and leads into the next verse. In either case, the issue of the lack of 200 women is covered in v. 16.

What we should touch on is God's will. The NLT has the footnote *It was hardly the Lord who was responsible for their predicament!*⁹ Therefore, we need to clarify this. God has a will, which was revealed three times in these past three chapters (twice, God told the tribe of Judah to go up against the Benjamites; the third time, He told Israel that they would be victorious over Benjamin). However, all of this was within the context of what the tribes of Israel had already determined what they would do. God has a permissive will, and He allowed Israel to almost completely wipe out the tribe of Benjamin. We must recognize that it is Satan who would wipe out a tribe of Israel. If Satan can completely destroy any tribe of Israel, then he has shown that God has not the power to fulfill His promises to Israel. This is why throughout history we have periods of time when the Jews are under tremendous persecution and large numbers of them are killed. Historic incidents, such as the Crusades or the Germanic destruction of the Jews in the death camps in World War II, are strictly Satanically inspired. We could reasonably argue that Satan was the *brains* behind this operation, which God allowed to occur. In other words, much of what occurred in these three chapters fell within the permissive will of God, but not necessarily within His directive will. Separating one from the other is not always easy to do. It would be reasonable to assume that Israel's initial strike against the tribe of Benjamin and the defeat of the tribe of Benjamin was God's directive will. However, the vows about not giving a daughter to anyone from the tribe of Benjamin or the decision to go wipe out the family at Jabesh-gilead would likely fall under God's permissive will; as would the almost complete destruction of the women and children and cities of the tribe of Benjamin. Obviously, in application to more recent life, the death camps of Germany would certainly fall within God's permissive will, but not under His directive will. This leads us to the obvious question of *why? Why does God allow such suffering and misery to take place?* We are in the devil's world. Adam gave over rulership of this earth to Satan in the fall and we have, with almost every decision we make in our unregenerate lives, confirm Adam's choice. A great deal of our personal suffering is of our own design. We make hundreds of decisions which result in our own personal unhappiness and, often, misery. We know what is right and we choose what is wrong. However, there are great and horrible plans which are put into action apart from our own personal choices. Without wanting to sound glib concerning such tremendous pain and suffering, this is the only way God can reach some people. Evangelism often yields the greatest results in areas which have been decimated by war, famine or disease. Obviously, the next question would be *what about the United States?* That is, why should we enjoy such incredible luxuries and wealth and power? Aren't we incredibly degenerate? Obviously, we are becoming more and more heathenistic and moving further and further from God's truth. However, what we do have is a great deal of positive volition toward the gospel (we find much more pain and suffering in our lives due to personal tragedy and very limited regional tragedy as opposed to national tragedy); and we do have a very small number of believers who pursue God's will through His Word. Thieme referred to these persons as the spiritual Atlas's upon whose shoulders rests the fate of our nation. It is obvious that nation is falling further and further into spiritual and moral decay, with many believers falling prey to this degeneracy. However, our nation still has a lot further farther to fall. As I look back over my own lifetime and the tremendous degeneracy which has erupted with my generation—it is still obvious that we have not hit rock bottom yet.

[Return to Chapter Outline](#)

[Return to the Chart Index](#)

The Jews Get 200 Women from Shiloh for Benjamin by Circumventing their Oath

And so said elders of the congregation, "What will we do for the ones remaining for women because destroyed from Benjamin a woman?"

Judges
21:16

Then the elders of the congregation said, "What will we do for the ones remaining for wives, because the women from Benjamin were destroyed."

Then the elders of the congregation said, "What will we do for the ones who are still without wives, as the women of Benjamin were destroyed?"

⁹ *The Open Bible*; the New Living Translation; Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN; ©1996, p. 353.

The word for *women* here again is ʾîshshâh (הַיִּשָּׁה) [pronounced *eesh-SHAWH*], which means *woman, wife*. This is why some translators render this word in two ways in this verse. Strong's #802 BDB #61. The second time ʾîshshâh is used, it is in the singular and it is the subject of the second clause, whose verb is the 3rd person feminine singular, Niphal perfect of shâmad (טָּמַא) [pronounced *shaw-MAHD*] means *to be exterminated, to be destroyed* in the Niphal. Strong's #8045 BDB #1029. Note the passive stem—the elders do not use the 1st person masculine plural Hiphil—they do not take any responsibility for what they have done. They phrase this as though they just came on the scene and the Benjamites are almost destroyed. They are moved with their emotions concerning the Benjamites, whom they themselves have destroyed. Recall that there were no orders from God to destroy the women, children or the cities of Benjamin. They just did it, and now speak of it without claiming any personal responsibility. Suddenly, the men of Israel are humanitarians. At various levels of degeneracy, we should expect this kind of disassociative behavior. I am reminded of the prominent animal rights activist who had two abortions (if memory serves).

And so they said, “An inheritance of a survivor to Benjamin and not blotted out a tribe from Israel.

Judges
21:17

And they also said, “[There should be] an inheritance for the survivor of Benjamin so that a family will not be blotted out from Israel.

And they also said, “There must be an inheritance for the survivors of the tribe of Benjamin—no remaining survivors should have their family name blotted out from Israel.

The first word of what they say is the feminine singular construct of y^orûshshâh (הַיִּרְשָׁה) [pronounced *y^oroosh-SHAW*], which means *possession, inheritance*. This word is used primarily of land (Deut. 2:5, 9, 12) and here refers to the territory of Benjamin. Strong's #3425 BDB #440. This is one of the very few correct statements that these men make. If the tribe of Benjamin does not have women, then they will not have children, which means that there will be no one from their tribe to inherit the land. The result would be that the tribe would be blotted out from Israel. The reasoning of the Israelites in this verse is not general but specific. The Hebrew word used here is shê^ovet (טַבַּעַת) [pronounced *SHAYB-veṭ*], which means *rod, staff, club, scepter* and figuratively for a *tribe, subdivision of a tribe or family*. Interestingly enough, there are two words which appear to be synonyms, the other which is found everywhere except in the book of Deuteronomy and Judges; shê^ovet is the word behind the English word *tribe* throughout the entire book of the Judges (and Deuteronomy) and it appears to be the word most favored in later Scripture (although it is not exclusively used). Strong's #7626 BDB #986. It is specific to the remaining 200 survivors of the tribe of Benjamin. Their concern now is that their family name and family inheritance not be blotted out rather than the tribe of Benjamin in general.

“And we are not able to give to them women from our daughters for have sworn, sons of Israel, to say, ‘Cursing one giving a woman to Benjamin.’ ”

Judges
21:18

“Furthermore, we are unable to give to them wives from our daughters because the sons of Israel swore, saying, ‘Cursed be the one giving a woman to Benjamin.’ ”

“And furthermore, we cannot give our daughters in marriage to them as we, along with all of the sons of Israel, took a vow, which was, ‘Cursed be those giving their daughter to the sons of Benjamin.’ ”

Again, you will note how these people do not even take responsibility for what they have done. The subject of the vow taking is *sons of Israel*. They say **“We cannot give our daughters in marriage because the sons of Israel swore [or took an oath] not to.”** Notice how their language is carefully couched in such a way as to not take responsibility for a thing. This refers back to the silly oath which they took in v. 1 of this chapter.

And so they said, “Behold, a feast of Y^ehowah¹⁰ in Shiloh from days to days which from northward to Bethel from a rising of the sun to the way the going up from Bethel Shechem-ward and from south to Lebonah.”

Judges
21:19

Then they said, “Listen, [there is] a feast of Y^ehowah in Shiloh from time to time which is north of Bethel from the rising of the sun to the highway [which] goes up from Bethel to Shechem and [is] south of Lebonah.”

Then they said, “Listen, there is a festival of Jehovah in Shiloh each year. This feast is held north of Bethel east of the highway that runs between Bethel and Shechem, south of Lebonah.”

You will note that these men think through all of the angles. Everything that they do has consequences worse than the problems these things were intending to solve. Therefore, they suggest another approach to the problem, which, of course, will not solve the problem, but make things even worse. When a believer is out of fellowship, this is how he takes care of things. A problem occurs which he attempts to solve in the power of the flesh, causing a greater problem to occur, which he attempts to solve again in the power of the flesh, causing a greater problem to occur. These are how our laws work in this land. Laws are passed, generally speaking, with the greatest and most sincere of intentions, and yet they bring with them a host of additional problems which we attempt to solve with more laws. These men of Israel are essentially no different than our state and national legislators. They take no responsibility for the trouble that they have caused, yet they keep trying to solve the problems which they caused with actions which will cause additional problems. Now, how simple would it be for them to go to Phinehas in Bethel (mentioned twice in this verse) and ask for spiritual guidance? Now, for you: how simple would it be for you to place yourself under the guidance of your right pastor teacher and function in that way? Instead, they have determined to solve this problem in the power of the flesh, because, after all, **Every man did what was right in his own eyes.**

There are several things which are rare to the book of the Judges. One is a mention of festivals to Jehovah. When we have a holiday, people gather in various places or celebrate this holiday at home. In Israel, there were certain holidays which required the gathering of the males to one particular place—that being wherever the Ark of God was. In this case, at this time, it was in Bethel (Judges 20:26–28). Now, apparently, it had been decided not to hold the festival in town but on the outskirts of Bethel.

Zodhiates gives this explanation: *The “feast” spoken of in verse nineteen probably refers to the Passover or one of the three great Jewish feasts (Ex. 23:14–17. In these unsettled times the men went up to Shiloh only once a year instead of three times (I Sam. 1:3). Only the males kept the feasts, therefore the virgins of Shiloh would naturally be the only maidens present. The public festival would be a likely occasion for their festive dances. It is possible that this was simply a local festival which was peculiar to Shiloh, like the yearly sacrifice of David’s family at Bethlehem (I Sam. 20:29).*¹¹

We do not know which feast this was, as there were three which required the assembling of the men of Israel. The first was Passover/Unleavened Bread; the second was Pentecost; and the third was the Feast of Tabernacles. Barnes, like Zodhiates, suggests that this is the Passover, then suggests maybe it is just a local feast. The Open Bible suggests that this was some sort of a fertility festival, an indication of how far Israel has fallen.¹² The NIV Study Bible suggests that this is the Feast of Tabernacles, because of the mention of the vineyards in the next verse.¹³ Keil and Delitzsch go with a seven-day feast, and therefore name the Passover or the Feast of Tabernacles. In any case, the interaction of the species has remained quite the same. There are a lot of young men who are coming up to Shiloh for the festival—in fact, the Law required *just* the men—which means a number

¹⁰ In two early printed editions of the Hebrew codices, this reads *a festival unto Y^ehowah*.

¹¹ *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*; Dr. S. Zodhiates; ©1994 AMG Publishers; p. 708.

¹² It might be best to take their notes and comments with a grain of salt.

¹³ However, there are times when their suggestions are suspect. In the same paragraph, they explain that the careful directions might be given because this was written long after the destruction of Shiloh, so these careful directions were written to describe where this is. The simpler and correct explanation is that when you invite someone to a party, it is always nice to give them directions to the party.

of young ladies from Shiloh will make their trek there as well, as the odds will be in their favor. Their dancing at this festival recalls the dancing of Miriam, the sister of Moses, and the women who followed her, after God had destroyed the Egyptian armies in the Sea of Reeds (Ex. 15:20).

You will note the names of the roads haven't changed much either. They are described in terms of the areas or cities which they connect. We have an Humble-Westfield Road here in Harris County, which connects the areas of Humble and Westfield. Also, the description of this road and what it connects allows the Benjamites a quick and easy escape with their maidens as booty from the inhabitants of Shiloh. They will head down this road straight south to Bethel, putting them inside the territory of Benjamin again.

And so they commanded the sons of Benjamin, to say, "Go and you have lain in wait in the vineyards."

Judges
21:20

So they commanded the sons of Benjamin, saying, "Go and hide in the vineyards."

Then they commanded the sons of Benjamin to hide in the vineyards near where the festival was going to be.

The first verb is the Qal imperative of *hālak* (הָלַךְ) [pronounced *haw-LAHK*], which means *to go, to come, to depart, to walk*. Strong's #1980 (and #3212) BDB #229. This is followed by the Qal perfect of *ʾāraḅ* (אַרַב) [pronounced *aw-RA^BV*], which means *to ambush, to lay in wait, to hide*. Strong's #693 BDB #70. The Qal perfect, following the imperative, takes on the characteristics of an imperative in this verse. Keep in mind that, for any of these problems which have occurred, the sons of Israel could have gone to God at any time, and He had a perfect solution for them, despite their screwed up actions. However, instead, the men of Israel kept improvising and riffing from their previous bad choices. This is exactly like those legislators who are filled with human good, thinking that the passing of just another law or two would solve many of our problems—and for every problem a law solves, it causes a half-dozen more problems.

"And you have seen and, behold, if come out, daughters of Shiloh to dance in the dances and you will come out from the vineyards and you have seized for yourselves a man his woman from daughters of Shiloh. And you have gone [to] a land of Benjamin.

Judges
21:21

"And you will see, and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances, you will then come out from the vineyards and you will seize for yourselves a woman from the daughters of Shiloh for each man. Then you will go to the land of Benjamin.

"And you will observe the daughters of Shiloh who will come out to dance in the dances. At that point, you will come quickly out of the vineyards and you will seize one daughter each from these women and take them with you to your territory in Benjamin.

Apparently, taking this verse and the next one into account, the plan is to have the Benjamites steal away some young Jewish women. The idea is that (1) there were not enough women for the Benjamites to begin with; and, (2) since this is done apart from the volition of the fathers and brothers of Shiloh, it does not technically violate the curse.

Having been sheltered in the church where I was spiritually raised, I did not realize what occurred in the outside world (of other churches). A friend of mine recently pointed out that in some churches and some religious establishments which she has attended, dancing was one of the things the believer was not allowed to do. Here, the verb is the Qal infinitive construct of *chûl* (חָוַל) [pronounced *khood*], which means, in general, *to turn, to turn around, to be twisted*. It is often used to mean *to dance [in a circle]*. Strong's #2342 BDB #296. With this word we have one of its substantive cognates *m^chōwāh* (מְחוּוָה) [pronounced *m^ckhood-LAW*], which means *dances, dancing*. Strong's #4246 BDB #298. Dancing, albeit alone, is also mentioned in Judges 11:34, indicating that it was ingrained in their culture. There is nothing in the Bible which indicates that there is anything wrong with it (we also have it mentioned in Ex. 15:20, where we essentially have one-sex line dancing; and in I Sam. 18:6, where the

women are all dancing and singing). One could infer—and I grimace when I say this—that the dancing spoken of in Scripture could all be a group dance (as on a stage) or without the opposite sex. And, apart from being with one’s spouse, there are obviously some kinds of dancing which are immoral and would fall under I Cor. 7:1. However, there is nothing in Scripture which I am aware of which mandates against dancing.

“And she has been will come their fathers or their brothers to complain unto us and we have said unto them, ‘Show us grace [giving] them because we did not take a man his woman in the battle for you [all], [even] you, have not given to them, as the time you are guilty.’ ”

Judges
21:22

“And it will be [when] their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, we will say to them, ‘Graciously give us them because we did not take in battle [for] each [man] a wife. Since [it is] not [as though] you, even you, gave to them [the Benjamites], as this time [that] you would be guilty [of breaking your oath].’ ”

“And, when their fathers or brothers come to us complaining, we will simply say to them, “Give these women graciously to us, for we did not capture enough women in battle for the Benjamites. Furthermore, since you did not originally choose to do this, you are not guilty of breaking your oath.’ ”

You will notice that in my second literal version, I have over a half dozen inserted words. This means that this will not be an easy verse to translate and then explain. This verse is going to take a little work. Let’s first see what others have done with it:

CEV	If the fathers or brothers or these women complain about this, we’ll say, “Be kind enough to let those men keep your daughter. After all, we couldn’t get enough wives for all the men of Benjamin in the battle at Jabesh. And because you didn’t give them permission to marry your daughters, you won’t be under the curse we earlier agreed on.”
<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	And it shall be when their fathers or their brethren come in to complain to us that we will say unto them— As a favour to us grant them, because we took not for each man his wife in the battle, —for ye yourselves gave them not unto them, so as now to be guilty.
KJV	And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, Be favorable unto them for our sakes, because w reserve not to each man his wife in the war; for ye did not give unto them at this time, <i>that</i> ye should be guilty.
NASB	“And it shall come about, when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, that we shall say to them, ‘Give them to us voluntarily, because we did not take for each man of Benjamin a wife in battle, nor did you give <i>them</i> to them, <i>else</i> you would now be guilty.’ ”
NIV	“When their fathers or brothers complain to us, we will say to them, ‘Do us a kindness by helping them, because we did not get wives for them during the war, and you are innocent, since you did not give your daughters to them.’ ”
NKJV	“Then is shall be, when their fathers or their brothers come to us to complain, that we will say to them, ‘Be kind to them for our sakes, because we did not take a wife for any of them in the war; for <i>it is not as though</i> you have given the women to them at this time, making yourselves guilty of your oath.’ ”
The Septuagint	And it will be, when their fathers or their brothers come to dispute with us, that we will say to them, “Grant them freely to us, for we have not taken every man his wife in the battle, because you did not give to them according to the occasion, ye transgressed.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	‘...and it hath been, when their fathers or their brethren come in to plead unto us, that we have said unto them, Favour us <i>by</i> them, for we have not taken <i>to</i> teach his wife in battle, for ye—ye have not given to them at this time <i>that</i> ye are guilty.’

What they would say to the fathers or brothers would be 2nd person masculine plural, 1st person plural suffix, Qal imperative of *chânan* (חָנַן) [pronounced *chaw-NAHN*], which means *to show favor, to be gracious, to show mercy*. Strong's #2589 & 2603 BDB #335. This would be rendered *you, give us grace* or *you, show us grace*. However, what causes the problem in translation is the untranslated indicator of a direct object with a 3rd person **masculine** plural suffix (in the Greek and in the Hebrew), which, at first, we might think refers to the Benjamites. However, they are speaking in place of the Benjamites, meaning *us* refers to the Benjamites. Therefore, we would render this *graciously give us them, give us grace [unto] them, show us grace [to] them*. Therefore, the fathers and brothers of the women who are taken are to show graciousness toward the ones who are speaking, those standing in the place of the Benjamites, who have taken their daughters. Many of the translators render this in such a way as to make you think *them* refers to the women taken, as we do not distinguish between masculine and feminine nouns and suffixes. The NASB does just this by implication, rendering this *Give them to us voluntarily*. The KJV does a very good job with *Be favorable unto them for our sakes* and the NKJV renders this *Be kind to them for our sakes*. Now, all this being said, I still should go back and point out that *their* at the beginning of this verse, in the Hebrew, is also a masculine plural. Furthermore, back in v. 12, we have the virgins being referred to with the masculine plural pronoun. Our only other obstacle here is *can we reasonably render chânan as "graciously give"?* Although it is generally not used in this way, the first time in Scripture that we find this word, it is used in this way (Gen. 33:5).

Unfortunately, there is another portion of this verse which is equally difficult to get through. Bear with me, now. We have a repeat of the explanatory conjunction and the negative followed by the 2nd person masculine singular, personal pronoun and the 2nd person masculine singular, Qal perfect of *to give* followed by *to them* (*them* is masculine). Literally, this is *for not [that] you, [even] you gave to them*. This is followed by the kaph prefixed preposition, which means *like, as, according to*; and then the definite article and the feminine noun *êth* (אֵת) [pronounced *gayth*], and it means *time, the right time, the proper time*. Strong's #6256 BDB #773.

We complete this verse with the 2nd person masculine plural, Qal imperfect of *âsham* (אָשַׁם) [pronounced *aw-SHAM*], which means *to be guilty, to offend, to be ceremonially unclean*. Here we are not speaking of a great criminal act or some horrible act of immorality; someone has inadvertently (or possibly on purpose) come in contact with that which is ceremonially unclean. This is a weak verb, minimizing the offense which is committed. Strong's #816 BDB #79. Now, quite obviously, the fathers or brothers of these women would demand justice of some sort, if not attempt to take matters into their own hands (see Gen. 34:7–31 || Sam. 13:20–38). They would probably go to the leaders of this movement and they would minimize what had happened in two ways—by the use of the word *âsham* and by the fact that the volition of the fathers and brothers was not involved. The men present at the original meeting place at Mizpah originally took an oath not to give any of their daughters to a man from the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 21:1, 18); however, their oath said nothing about, *what would you do if the men of Benjamin came and forcibly took your daughter or sister?* Essentially, what they are pledging to the Benjamites is that they, as a fighting force, would not take any aggressive action against the Benjamites and they would attempt to calm those whose women were taken.

The final interpretation of this verse is not near as difficult as determining its translation. Here we have one of the early situations where these men have given an oath to God and then they think that they have found a way around that oath. The men of Israel use such verbiage as to minimize the offense committed. Finally, this will be the *modus operandi* for Israel in reversionism—they will circumvent the Law in any way possible. *Zodhiates* again: *The men of Israel had made a hasty oath in the heat of anger (Judg. 21:1). Later, when they saw the plight of Benjamin, that without wives the tribe would soon cease to exist, they felt compassion for them (Judg. 21:13, 14). However, the terms of their oath stood; though they would not give their daughters as wives to the Benjamites, they instructed them in detail how to go up to Shiloh and carry off the girls at the festival. In their minds, they would not be guilty of breaking the oath, and the Benjamites would have wives and be preserved as a tribe even though the women were gained by violent means.*¹⁴

Do you follow the circle that these men have traveled? What set off this civil war was the fact that the men of Benjamin gang raped a woman, and then the tribe leaders would not give up the guilty parties. This act resulted in the slaughtering of thousands of Judahites, as well as the entire tribe of Benjamin, including all of their women

¹⁴ *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*; Dr. S. Zodhiates; ©1994 AMG Publishers; p. 708.

and children. Later, we have the slaughter of the men, women and children of Jabesh-gilead, with the saving alive of 400 virgins who were given over to the Benjamites (apart from their volition). Now here, 200 of these women will be given over to the Benjamites apart from their volition as well. This began with the violation of one woman's volition and ends with the violation of the volition of 600 women.

And so did [the] sons of Benjamin, and so they took women to their number from the dancers whom they stole. And so they went and so they returned unto their inheritance and so they rebuilt the towns and so they dwelt in them.

Judges
21:23

And the sons of Benjamin did [this], and, according to their number, they took the women, whom they removed [using violence], from the dancers. Then they went and returned to their [land] inheritance and rebuilt the towns and lived in them.

And the men of Benjamin followed their directions and took these women who came to the dance violently away, returning to their land and inheritance. After that, they rebuilt their cities and lived in them.

The act of carrying off the women is the Qal perfect of *gâzal* (גָּזַל) [pronounced *gaw-ZAHL*], which means *to take, to steal, to rob, to remove from*. Violence is sometimes involved, but it is not a necessary element to the use of this word. Strong's #1497 BDB #159. The cities of the Benjamites had been burned to the ground, as per Judges 20:48, and their women and children and cattle all destroyed as well. These few that remained were given permission to take these women, apart from their volition, and take them off to their burned down villages to begin again.

This is a rather ironic ending to this book. At the end of the book of Joshua, the men of Israel are also dismissed to their inheritance, having heard a tremendous message from Joshua (Joshua 24:1–28). Here, these Benjamites are also dismissed to their inheritance, after hearing that they could take away these women, apart from their consent, without fear of reprisal, as no oaths had been technically violated. Both books are filled with war and strife; both books conclude with a message and an oath; and both books end with men being dismissed to their inheritance.

[Return to Chapter Outline](#)

[Return to the Chart Index](#)

Conclusion

And so departed from there sons of Israel in the time that a man to his tribe and to his family. And so they went out from there a man to his inheritance.

Judges
21:24

And the sons of Israel departed from there at that time, each one to his tribe and to his family; so they went out from there, each one to his inheritance.

So the sons of Israel departed from there, each one returning to his tribe, his family and his inheritance.

We have two words for *depart* here. The first is the very common Hithpael imperfect of *hâlak* (הָלַךְ) [pronounced *haw-LAHK*], which means *to go, to come, to depart, to walk*. In the Hithpael, it means *to go for oneself, to walk up and down* (which explains Young's rendering, for those who use that translation). Strong's #1980 (and #3212) BDB #229. This is a picture of the various men of Israel leaving Shiloh (or leaving Mizpah) and going in different directions, some going down, some up. The second is the Qal imperfect of *yâtsâ* (יָצָא) [pronounced *yaw-TZAWH*], which means *to go out, to come out, to come forth*. Strong's #3318 BDB #422.

It is interesting that these final few chapters of the book of Judges were placed at the end rather than at the beginning of this book. As we have studied, these incidents occurred at the beginning of the time, shortly after the death of Joshua. However, what they do is give us great insight into the degeneracy of the people of Israel. Furthermore, the ending parallels the ending of the book of Joshua, which gives us a unified whole for a book.

In the days the those no king in Israel. A man the right in his eyes he did.

Judges
21:25

In those days, [there was] no king in Israel. [Each] man does [what was] right in his [own] eyes.

In those days, there was no king in Israel. Each man did what he thought was right.

We end this book with an early incident, but also with the theme of the book of Judges. Every man did what was right in his own eyes. We should visit on this king thing here. One might read this verse and then go over to I Sam. 8:10–18 where the prophet Samuel warns the people about being desirous of a king and think that we have a problem. When Samuel approach God in prayer, God explains the true nature of the problem in I Sam. 8:7: “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you [they wanted a king over them]. For they have not reject you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.” The true King over Israel was always Jehovah God, Who was, on a few occasions, represented properly by certain kings (e.g., David, Solomon, Saul—on a good day, Josiah, etc.). However, it is obvious that the Israelites rejected their spiritual authority. During the period of history covered by the Judges, the Ark of God is mentioned but one time (Judges 20:27). Joshua has died (Judges 2:8). Phinehas, the great spiritual leader of Israel early on during the time period of the Judges, is consulted but one time (Judges 20:28). What God did was allow the Jew full reign of his volition. He did not have to do that which was right because there was a king over him which would force him to do so—the Israelite was free to choose. He could go to Phinehas to guidance or he could rely upon his own norms and standards. What we have throughout most of this book is Israel rejecting, from her own volition, God and God’s guidance. A general plan was given to Israel (to subdue the land and to destroy the pagan peoples in the land), and Israel, apart from Judah and Simeon, rejected this plan. Feasts and sacrifices were given to Israel to guide her spiritually, but you will note that we find little of that in the book of Judges. They rejected the Lord Who bought them; they had no king—including Jehovah God—over them; and they did that which was right in their own eyes. These factors help to explain why the book of Judges was filled with the degeneracy and moral degradation that we have found.

Scofield explains: *The final clause of Judges does not necessarily mean that conditions were totally bad under the judges, for the beautiful story of Ruth is set in this historical context. Nor does v. 25 teach that all the evil of the times was caused by the lack of a king; later, under some of the kings, conditions were no better. The verse does raise the perennial problem of striking a proper balance between strong central government and personal liberty. Cp. 17:6, 18:1; 19:1¹⁵.*

There are too many who read some sort of causal relationship here, e.g., *In those days, every man did what was right in his own eyes because there was no king in Israel.*¹⁶ Whereas, this is not out of the question, there is no reason that we interpret it that way. We may take this as two independent thoughts. We find this line *In those days, there was no king in Israel* in Judges 17:6 18:1 19:1 and 21:25. These lines were likely added several centuries later by a scribe or an editor to simply drop these chapters into a chronological time slot. We have already discussed back in Judges 19:1, that the first line of this section and the last line of this section were probably added by an editor or a scribe during the reign of King Saul. This does not mean that these chapters were was written during that time. That these three chapters in particular occurred when there was no king in Israel is not some pronouncement of judgement; it simply indicates the time slot for this book. Because of Judges 19:1 and 21:25, the scroll with these chapters were always placed with the history of the Judges; and therefore, were eventually put together as one book.

Now, that *Every man did what was right in his own eyes* (Judges 17:6 21:25) is, on the other hand, an indictment against Israel during this time period. This is a general violation of the Law, where right and wrong were clearly defined. This is a specific violation of the words of Moses, when he said, “*You will not do at all what your are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes.*” (Deut. 12:8).

¹⁵ *The New Scofield Reference Bible*; Dr. C.I. Scofield; ©1967 New York-Oxford University Press; p. 316.

¹⁶ For instance, Keil & Delitzsch’s *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, pp. 334–335.

[Return to Outline](#)

[Return to the Chart Index](#)