

September 17

Scriptures: Read Judges 21

Key Verse: "... O Lord God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that today there should be one tribe missing in Israel?" (Judges 21:3)

Overview

After the great slaughter of Benjamites, the Israelites wept with the realization that one of their tribes might become extinct. The Lord had given the tribe of Benjamin an inheritance in the Promised Land; they therefore felt they had to find a way to secure the inheritance of Benjamin (v.17), but this posed a problem.

The Israelites' solemn vow about not giving any of their daughters in marriage to any of the remaining Benjamite men was sworn before the Lord any by his Name; there would be a curse on "the one who gave a wife to Benjamin" (v.18). If no wives were found for them, the extinction of the tribe would be inevitable. A second vow had also been taken out of anger because of the awful crime in Gibeah; any men who did not respond to the call of gathering at Mizpah were to be put to death. No wonder such a number had assembled. These vows were rash, and Israelites regretted having made them. It appears they also came to regret their excessive retribution on the tribe of Benjamin.

Upon careful investigation, the Israelites realized that no men had come up from Jabesh Gilead. It seems there were close ties between the tribe of Benjamin and the people of Jabesh Gilead (cf. 1 Sam.11) who came from the half tribe of Manasseh that had settled east of the Jordan. They were of the house of Joseph, and Benjamin and Joseph were full brothers by the same mother, Rachel. This might explain why the men of Jabesh Gilead refused to participate in the punishment. Under obligation to their oath, Israel had to destroy them for not helping, but in so doing they found a solution to the problem. By saying all the virgin young women, the men of Benjamin could be provided with wives (v.12), yet this did not totally solve the problem; they were still two hundred women short.

The fearful remnant of six hundred Benjamites were reassured of Israel's peaceful intentions by the offer of the women to be wives for four hundred, but another plan was devised to provide wives for the remainder. The elders of Israel thought of a way to get around the wording of the vow. By having the Benjamite men wait in ambush and 'catch' the women at the feast in Shiloh (v.20-21), no father would be breaking his vow by 'giving' his daughter in marriage to a Benjamite. In such a way, the tribe of Benjamin was on its way to restoration in the territory of their God-given inheritance. They later provided Israel with their first king, Saul.

In the final verse of the book of Judges, the inspired historian/writer explains the reasons for the many problems that arose in Israel during the period of judges: "there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (v.25). Without a strong leader to bring order, unity, and discipline, the Israelite society was in decline. God was supposed to be their King, but they did not honor Him. His Law was supposed to be their rule and guide for life, but they did

not heed it. Although the hand of God was seen at work occasionally during this period, graciously coming to their aid, the recurring theme that stands out is human failure.

Even in our day and age, human failure is prevalent among the people of God. Oh how we need to humble ourselves before God with repentant hearts, confessing our sin, recognizing our dependence upon Him, and keeping obedient to Him. Only then can we expect to experience victory from God.

Prayer

Oh God, You are all-powerful and Holy, and we, in our humanity, are so weak and sinful. Just as the Israelites had to admit their failures and humbly acknowledge dependence on You, help us to do the same and experience victory in our lives.