

# Adult Bible Class

## The Book of Judges

### Lesson 6 - April 10, 2022

#### The Epilogue to the Book of Judges

The last five chapters of the Book of Judges form an epilogue. Chapters 17 and 18 tell how Israelite worship became corrupted and pagan after the death of Joshua, and how the tribe of Dan adopted this corrupted worship when they migrated north. Chapters 19 - 21 describe how Israel became morally corrupt. All of this happened before the judges came on the scene. So, in a sense, these chapters are a sort of prequel to the chapters that we have already studied.

The time of the Book of Judges is a dark period in Israel's history. While there are times of light through the leadership of certain judges, as a whole, this was a period when the Law of God was ignored and forgotten. As we have read through the Book of Judges so far, we have seen little or no mention of the Law of God, the Tabernacle of God at Shiloh, or the Levitical priests who minister there. What we do read about is Israel's adoption of idols and false worship practices.

This statement, *"In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes,"* is repeated in whole or in part in each of the five chapters of the epilogue. It seems to be a theme of this dark time in the history of Israel. Though God had given them specific instructions in His Law concerning who He was, how He wanted to be worshiped, and how He wanted His people to live, the Israelites abandoned these words and did what was right in their own eyes.

Let's read what happened to God's Law after the death of Joshua.

#### Judges Chapter 17

**Judges 17:1 (NLT)** There was a man named Micah, who lived in the hill country of Ephraim. **2** One day he said to his mother, "I heard you place a curse on the person who stole 1,100 pieces of silver from you. Well, I have the money. I was the one who took it."

"The Lord bless you for admitting it," his mother replied. **3** He returned the money to her, and she said, "I now dedicate these silver coins to the Lord. In honor of my son, I will have an image carved and an idol cast."

**4** So when he returned the money to his mother, she took 200 silver coins and gave them to a silversmith, who made them into an image and an idol. And these were placed in Micah's house.

**5** Micah set up a shrine for the idol, and he made a sacred ephod and some household idols. Then he installed one of his sons as his personal priest.

**6** In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

In chapter 17 we are introduced to Micah, who seems to be from a very influential family. Eleven hundred shekels of silver were stolen from his mother. His mother placed a curse on the one who had stolen it, so Micah returned the money and confessed that he had stolen it - but only to avoid the curse, not in repentance before the Lord and his mother. The amount of money was huge - some say enough wages for one person for a lifetime! Micah's mother quickly cancels the curse when she realizes that it was her son who stole it. She even blesses him in the name of the Lord. She does not rebuke him or discipline him. The Old

Testament law required that a thief return the money plus 20% to make restitution for his crime (Numbers 5:6-7). However, we do not read that Micah did so.

Next, Micah's mom consecrated the stolen money to the God of Israel. She then ordered that an image and an idol be made by a silversmith with 200 silver coins (only a portion of what she had initially dedicated to the Lord). A carved image was made of wood and then plated with silver. A cast idol was made completely out of silver in a mold. Although the image and idol were made to be a part of the worship of Jehovah God, it was completely in violation of God's law.

**Exodus 20:4 (NLT)** "You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. 5 You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods.

Micah's house then became a place of worship, when not far away was the Tabernacle at Shiloh, where true worship of the God of Israel was supposed to take place. Micah made an ephod (a priestly garment) and some household idols. These were used for divination, or determining the will of God. However, the Law of Moses gave clear instructions concerning who was authorized to determine the will of God for the people and just how he should go about it.

**Numbers 27:21** When direction from the Lord is needed, Joshua will stand before Eleazar the priest, who will use the Urim—one of the sacred lots cast before the Lord—to determine his will. This is how Joshua and the rest of the community of Israel will determine everything they should do."

Micah also installed one of his sons as priest. However, the tribe of Levi was the priestly tribe of Israel, and of this tribe, only certain ones could actually act as priests in the Tabernacle at Shiloh (the descendants of Aaron).

**Exodus 28:1** "Call for your brother, Aaron, and his sons. . . Set them apart from the rest of the people of Israel so they may minister to me and be my priests.

**Exodus 29:4** "Present Aaron and his sons at the entrance of the Tabernacle, and wash them with water. 5 Dress Aaron in his priestly garments . . . 9 . . . Then the right to the priesthood will be theirs by law forever. In this way, you will ordain Aaron and his sons.

Micah took the true worship of God and distorted it by changing God's Laws and making his own religion, mixing just enough of Jehovah God into it to make it seem acceptable. Micah was a thief and an idolater, and he dishonored his parent (who was also a thief and an idolater). Micah and his mom epitomize what happens when someone does what is right in his own eyes. They managed to break several of the Ten Commandments without even leaving their home!

Let's continue in Judges.

**Judges 17:7** One day a young Levite, who had been living in Bethlehem in Judah, arrived in that area. **8** He had left Bethlehem in search of another place to live. . . He happened to stop at Micah's house as he was traveling through. **9** "Where are you from?" Micah asked him. He replied, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am looking for a place to live." **10** "Stay here with me," Micah said, "and you can be a father and priest to me. I will give you ten pieces of silver a year, plus a change of clothes and your food." **11** The Levite agreed to this, and the young man became like one of Micah's sons.

**12** So Micah installed the Levite as his personal priest, and he lived in Micah's house. **13** "I know the Lord will bless me now," Micah said, "because I have a Levite serving as my priest."

Micah had his own place of worship at his house, his own image and idol, and his own priest (his son), but now he had a chance to upgrade. Here was a Levite, traveling through (his name is Jonathan, as we are told in Judges 18:30).

God did not give the tribe of Levi an inheritance of land. Instead, he gave them cities from each of the other tribes to live in and carry out their work. Forty-eight cities were given to them, but Bethlehem was not one of them. What was this Levite doing in Bethlehem? He had already made a pattern of living where he was not supposed to live. He agreed to be Micah's priest with his idols and distorted worship of the God of Israel.

Remember this saying: "All priests are Levites, but not all Levites are priests." This Levite was not a descendant of Aaron, so he had no right to be priest, and if he was a priest, his duty would have been in the Tabernacle of God, not in a homemade shrine in this city. Levites who were not priests were to assist the priests in the care of the Tabernacle and the people (they had certain assigned duties). Surely this Levite knew that. Instead of being obedient to his calling, he accepts a job that gives him comfort and security, but in the home of an idolater. If this Levite is typical of the spiritual condition of even some of the people of Israel during this time, then we can see why Israel turned away from the living God to idols in a cycle of disobedience in the Book of Judges.

Micah convinced himself that he was blessed by the Lord because of all that had happened so far. What irony! Micah now thinks he has God's favor because a genuine Levite is serving as his private priest. Micah practices a false religion, and all the while he rests on the false confidence that God is blessing him! Little does he know that the day would come when his priest and his gods will be taken from him and nothing will be left of his religion.

## Judges Chapter 18

**Judges 18:1 (NLT)** Now in those days Israel had no king. And the tribe of Dan was trying to find a place where they could settle, for they had not yet moved into the land assigned to them when the land was divided among the tribes of Israel. **2** So the men of Dan chose from their clans five capable warriors...to scout out a land for them to settle in.

When these warriors arrived in the hill country of Ephraim, they came to Micah's house and spent the night there. **3** While at Micah's house, they recognized the young Levite's accent, so they went over and asked him, "Who brought you here, and what are you doing in this place? Why are you here?"

**4** He told them about his agreement with Micah and that he had been hired as Micah's personal priest.

**5** Then they said, "Ask God whether or not our journey will be successful."

**6** "Go in peace," the priest replied. "For the Lord is watching over your journey."

The tribe of Dan hadn't moved into the land of their inheritance. They were assigned territory between Ephraim and Judah (Joshua 19:40-48) under the direction of Joshua (Joshua 19:51). God put each tribe just where He wanted it, but the people of Dan failed to possess their inheritance. The Amorites confined the Danites to the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the plain (Judges 1:34). They also faced opposition from the Philistines. Instead of fighting the fight



and doing the work to gain deliverance and freedom from the oppression of the Amorites, the Danites went looking for new territory - easier territory to conquer, but not what God had given them. This was completely in opposition to the divine will of God for the people of Dan. Instead of submitting to God's will, they set out to do their own will. Instead of fighting the hard fight, they did what they thought would be easier to do.

The spies sent out from the Danites came across Micah, his idols, and his personal priest. They asked Jonathan, "Who brought you here, and what are you doing in this place? Why are you here?" That was a good question! His reply was that he had been hired. How sad! God's appointed Levite became a hireling to do the exact opposite of God's will for his life. But the spies picked up on this. They also wanted Jonathan to do their will. The tribe of Dan had refused God's will by leaving their

assigned land. Now they were continuing to refuse God's will by asking counsel of a backslidden Levite! They should have sought counsel from the high priest at the Tabernacle in Shiloh.

Micah's priest told them that the Lord had approved of their journey, but we can have little confidence in the prophetic words of this priest-for-hire. His prophecy was safe and general in its content.

**Judges 18:7** So the five men went on to the town of Laish, where they noticed the people living carefree lives, like the Sidonians; they were peaceful and secure. The people were also wealthy because their land was very fertile. And they lived a great distance from Sidon and had no allies nearby.

**8** When the men returned..., their relatives asked them, "What did you find?"

**9** The men replied, "Come on, let's attack them! We have seen the land, and it is very good. What are you waiting for? Don't hesitate to go and take possession of it. **10** When you get there, you will find the people living carefree lives. God has given us a spacious and fertile land, lacking in nothing!"

The spies went out and found the town of Laish in the northern parts, a peaceful and prosperous community, but unfortunately for them, a community with no nearby neighbors. Since they were not strong enough to capture the land given to them by the Lord, the Danites decided to steal this land because it looked good and would be easy to take. They even said, "God has given us a spacious and fertile land." They called for the army of Dan to come.

**Judges 18:11** So 600 men from the tribe of Dan, armed with weapons of war, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol. . . **13** . . .they went on. . .into the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah.

**14** The five men who had scouted out the land around Laish explained to the others, "These buildings contain a sacred ephod, as well as some household idols, a carved image, and a cast idol. What do you think you should do?" **15** Then the five men turned off the road and went over to Micah's house, where the young Levite lived, and greeted him kindly. **16** As the 600 armed warriors from the tribe of Dan stood at the entrance of the gate, **17** the five scouts entered the shrine and removed the carved image, the sacred ephod, the household idols, and the cast idol. Meanwhile, the priest was standing at the gate with the 600 armed warriors.

**18** When the priest saw the men carrying all the sacred objects out of Micah's shrine, he said, "What are you doing?"

**19** "Be quiet and come with us," they said. "Be a father and priest to all of us. Isn't it better to be a priest for an entire tribe and clan of Israel than for the household of just one man?"

**20** The young priest was quite happy to go with them, so he took along the sacred ephod, the household idols, and the carved image. **21** They turned and started on their way again, placing their children, livestock, and possessions in front of them.

**22** When the people from the tribe of Dan were quite a distance from Micah's house, the people who lived near Micah came chasing after them. **23** They were shouting as they caught up with them. The men of Dan turned around and said to Micah, "What's the matter? Why have you called these men together and chased after us like this?"

**24** "What do you mean, 'What's the matter?'" Micah replied. "You've taken away all the gods I have made, and my priest, and I have nothing left!"

**25** The men of Dan said, "Watch what you say! There are some short-tempered men around here who might get angry and kill you and your family." **26** So the men of Dan continued on their way. When Micah saw that there were too many of them for him to attack, he turned around and went home.

The five spies decided to steal Micah's idol, image, ephod, and priest. After all, how much more successful in battle could they be if they had their own personal god and priest? They talked Jonathan into abandoning Micah and joining them as their priest by appealing to his ego, *"Isn't it better to be a priest for an entire tribe and clan of Israel than for the household of just one man?"* The priest was glad for the promotion, and the Danites left Micah's household to take the city of Laish.

When Micah learned that his gods and priest had been stolen, he set out in pursuit. What irony in this! A man is chasing after a god that was fashioned with stolen money and then stolen from him by thieves! But seriously, how powerful is a god that can be stolen so easily? When Micah realized that he did not have the power to take his idols back from the armed Danites, he returned home empty handed.

**27** Then, with Micah's idols and his priest, the men of Dan came to the town of Laish, whose people were peaceful and secure. They attacked with swords and burned the town to the ground. **28** There was no one to rescue the people, for they lived a great distance from Sidon and had no allies nearby. This happened in the valley near Beth-rehob.

Then the people of the tribe of Dan rebuilt the town and lived there. **29** They renamed the town Dan after their ancestor, Israel's son, but it had originally been called Laish.

**30** Then they set up the carved image, and they appointed Jonathan son of Gershom, son of Moses, as their priest. This family continued as priests for the tribe of Dan until the Exile. **31** So Micah's carved image was worshiped by the tribe of Dan as long as the Tabernacle of God remained at Shiloh.

The people of Dan were successful in their plans. They attacked a peaceful and unsuspecting city that had no allies to rescue them and was easy to conquer. They burned down the city and then rebuilt it, renaming it Dan. They set up the

carved image they stole from Micah in the city to be their god. Now, they were far away from the Tabernacle in Shiloh - and they were doing their own spiritual thing.

Micah's personal priest, who had become the priest of the new city of Dan, is named here in this passage. Jonathan was none other than a grandson of Moses himself! Within two generations of Moses, the people had wandered far away from God's laws. They had totally failed to pass down the Law from generation to generation - or the next generation just did not listen!

Passing down the faith from generation to generation is no less critical today than it was 3400 years ago. When one generation fails to teach another generation about the ways of the Lord, the generations that follow are left to devise their own ideas about spiritual things. Man's ignorance or rebellion always leads to idols of his own making. Mankind's default position is idolatry.

While the tribe of Dan seemed to be successful in stealing the city of Laish, the future of Dan is not so bright. When the book of 1 Chronicles lists the tribes of Israel and their descendants, the tribe of Dan is the only tribe that is left out. The descendants of Judah, Simeon, Reuben, Gad, Levi, Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Asher are listed in detail, but there is no mention of the descendants of Dan (1 Chronicles 2:3 to 9:1). Dan failed to take what God had given to them, and they took what God had not given them. In the process, they lost everything.

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John was given a vision of the end of all things. In chapter 7, John saw a vision of 144,000 from all of the tribes of Israel in the last day. All of the tribes are listed by name, but there is no mention of Dan (Revelation 7:4-8). Dan refused to take the land given to them by God, and God refused to include them as a part of Israel.

We have seen that just two generations from Moses, serious backsliding took place among God's people. The people became spiritually weak and because of this they became morally weak. The leadership (the Levites) in Israel were not living up to their calling. They "*did what was right in their own eyes*" because they had no king. God was supposed to be their king at this point, but they refused Him.

**Proverbs 14:12 (KJV)** There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

## **Judges Chapter 19 - Continuing the "Prequel" to the Book of Judges**

The last three chapters of Judges are gruesome, revealing the depths of sin that the people of Israel had reached.

**Judges 19:1 (NKJV)** And it came to pass in those days, when *there was no king in Israel*, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote mountains of Ephraim. He took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. 2 But his concubine played the harlot against him . . .

Here we are introduced to another Levite. This Levite took a concubine - which is a wife who does not have the same rights as a wife who comes to the marriage with a dowry and engagement.

Bible scholars differ in opinion regarding the concubine. The wording in the original language leaves doubt whether the man's wife was unfaithful to him or just angry at him. The NLT states verse 2 like this: *But she became angry with him . . .* the way the next verses play out, it seems that this is the correct understanding.

. . . and went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there four whole months. **3** Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her *and* bring her back, having his servant and a couple of donkeys with him. So she brought him into her father's house; and when the father of the young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him. **4** Now his father-in-law. . .detained him; and he stayed with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there. **5** Then it came to pass on the fourth day that they arose early in the morning, and he stood to depart; but the young woman's father said to his son-in-law, "Refresh your heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way."  
**6** So they sat down, and the two of them ate and drank together. Then the young woman's father said to the man, "Please be content to stay all night, and let your heart be merry." **7** . . .so he lodged there again. **8** Then he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart, but the young woman's father said, "Please refresh your heart." So they delayed until afternoon; and both of them ate. **9** And when the man stood to depart. . .his father-in-law. . .said to him, "Look, the day is now drawing toward evening; please spend the night. . .Tomorrow go your way early, so that you may get home."

For some reason, the concubine's father was determined to have his son-in-law stay with him. Eventually, though, the Levite was ready to leave.

**Judges 19:10** However, the man was not willing to spend that night; so he rose and departed, and came opposite Jebus (that *is*, Jerusalem). With him were the two saddled donkeys; his concubine was also with him. **11** They *were* near Jebus, and the day was far spent; and the servant said to his master, "Come, please, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and lodge in it."  
**12** But his master said to him, "We will not turn aside here into a city of foreigners, who *are* not of the children of Israel; we will go on to Gibeah." . . .

Jebus (later known as Jerusalem) was not an Israelite town at this time. It had been conquered earlier by Joshua, but it must have reverted back to the Jebusites. The Levite did not want to stay in a town that was not under the control of Israel.

**14** And they passed by and went their way; and the sun went down on them near Gibeah. . . **15** They turned aside there to go in to lodge in Gibeah. And when he went in, he sat down in the open square of the city, for no one would take them into *his* house to spend the night.  
**16** Just then an old man came in from his work in the field at evening, who also *was* from the mountains of Ephraim; he was staying in Gibeah, whereas the men of the place *were* Benjamites.  
**17** And when he raised his eyes, he saw the traveler in the open square of the city; and the old man said, "Where are you going, and where do you come from?"  
**18** So he said to him, "We *are* passing from Bethlehem in Judah toward the remote mountains of Ephraim; I *am* from there. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; *now* I am going to the house of the Lord. But there *is* no one who will take me into his house. . .  
**20** And the old man said, "Peace *be* with you! . . . *let* all your needs *be* my responsibility; only do not spend the night in the open square." **21** So he brought him into his house, and gave fodder to the donkeys. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

The old man is a good host to the Levite and his group. He insists upon feeding them and their animals. He also is quick to get them out of the open square of the city.

#### **Gibeah's Crime**

**22** As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house *and* beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him *carnally!*"

**Judges 19:23** But the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act so wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage. **24** Look, *here is* my virgin daughter and *the man's* concubine; let me bring them out now. Humble them, and do with them as you please; but to this man do not do such a vile thing!"

This Israelite town of Gibeah has men that are as wicked if not more wicked than the heathen peoples of the land! This story sounds very much like that of Lot's experience in Sodom (see Genesis 19:1-8)!

How heartbreaking that this city in Israel had mired itself in sin and wickedness to the point that it resembled the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. What had brought Israel to this? And why would a man be so insensitive to his daughter or his wife as to sacrifice them in this way? Instead of driving the Canaanites out of the land as God had commanded, Israel had become like the Canaanites.

**25** But the men would not heed him. So the man took his concubine and brought *her* out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until morning; and when the day began to break, they let her go.

**26** Then the woman came as the day was dawning, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master *was*, till it was light.

**27** When her master arose in the morning, and opened the doors of the house and went out to go his way, there was his concubine, fallen *at* the door of the house with her hands on the threshold. **28** And he said to her, "Get up and let us be going." But there was no answer. So the man lifted her onto the donkey; and the man got up and went to his place.

**29** When he entered his house he took a knife, laid hold of his concubine, and divided her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. **30** And so it was that all who saw it said, "No such deed has been done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it, confer, and speak up!"

The above Scriptures are some of the most horrible in all of the word of God. The Levite's insensitivity toward his wife caused her to be abused to the point that she died. Somehow, he was able to sleep during the night after delivering her to these wicked men. Then, when he saw her on the front porch of the house, he commanded her, "*Get up and let us be going.*" Then, instead of caring for the body of his wife, he took her dead body and cut it in pieces.

He did get the desired results from his fellow countrymen. There was outrage from those who saw the piece of the woman's body.

## Judges Chapter 20

**Judges 20:1 (NKJV)** So all the children of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, as well as from the land of Gilead, and the congregation gathered together as one man before the Lord at Mizpah.

Israel is unified, but their unity is for vengeance.

**2** And the leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand foot soldiers who drew the sword. **3** (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.)

Then the children of Israel said, "Tell *us*, how did this wicked deed happen?"

**4** So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "My concubine and I went into Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, to spend the night. **5** And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me, but instead they ravished my concubine so that she died.



The Levite did not tell the whole truth. He left out the part that he threw his wife out the door to these evil men.

**6** So I took hold of my concubine, cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of the inheritance of Israel, because they committed lewdness and outrage in Israel. **7** Look! All of you *are* children of Israel; give your advice and counsel here and now!"

This unrighteous Levite is looking to Israel for a righteous judgment!

**8 (NLT)** And all the people rose to their feet in unison and declared, "None of us will return home! No, not even one of us! **9** Instead, this is what we will do to Gibeah; we will draw lots to decide who will attack it. **10** One-tenth of the men from each tribe will be chosen to supply the warriors with food, and the rest of us will take revenge on Gibeah of Benjamin for this shameful thing they have done in Israel." **11** So all the Israelites were completely united, and they gathered together to attack the town.

**12** The Israelites sent messengers to the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What a terrible thing has been done among you! **13** Give up those evil men, those troublemakers from Gibeah, so we can execute them and purge Israel of this evil."

But the people of Benjamin would not listen. **14** Instead, they came from their towns and gathered at Gibeah to fight the Israelites. **15** In all, 26,000 of their warriors armed with swords arrived in Gibeah to join the 700 elite troops who lived there.

How sad that Israelite must fight Israelite. Benjamin was determined to protect these evil and lewd men. And the fight was not fair - 26,000 Benjamites against 400,000 Israelites!

**Judges 20:16** Among Benjamin's elite troops, 700 were left-handed, and each of them could sling a rock and hit a target within a hairsbreadth without missing. **17** Israel had 400,000 experienced soldiers armed with swords, not counting Benjamin's warriors.

**18** Before the battle the Israelites went to Bethel and asked God, "Which tribe should go first to attack the people of Benjamin?"

The Lord answered, "Judah is to go first."

Now we are seeing some obedience in Israel. They went to the house of God to get instructions for battle from the High Priest. The Word of the Lord came - Judah is to go first. This command had been given before. Judah, meaning "praise", was to go first in the battle.

**19** So the Israelites left early the next morning and camped near Gibeah. **20** Then they advanced toward Gibeah to attack the men of Benjamin. **21** But Benjamin's warriors, who were defending the town, came out and killed 22,000 Israelites on the battlefield that day.

**22** But the Israelites encouraged each other and took their positions again at the same place they had fought the previous day. **23** For they had gone up to Bethel and wept in the presence of the Lord until evening. They had asked the Lord, "Should we fight against our relatives from Benjamin again?"

And the Lord had said, "Go out and fight against them."

Although the Lord had given instruction that Judah was to go first, He did not promise them victory. After 22,000 men were cut down, they wept before the Lord and inquired of Him again.

**24** So the next day they went out again to fight against the men of Benjamin, **25** but the men of Benjamin killed another 18,000 Israelites, all of whom were experienced with the sword.

**26** Then all the Israelites went up to Bethel and wept in the presence of the Lord and fasted until evening. They also brought burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. **27** The Israelites went up seeking direction from the Lord. (In those days the Ark of the Covenant of God was in Bethel, **28** and Phinehas son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron was the priest.) The Israelites asked the Lord, "Should we fight against our relatives from Benjamin again, or should we stop?"

The Lord said, "Go! Tomorrow I will hand them over to you."

This time, the Lord promised them victory. It was not easy to win the victory over such sin and wickedness in Israel. However, this time they could go knowing that they would win.

**29** So the Israelites set an ambush all around Gibeah. **30** They went out on the third day and took their positions at the same place as before. **31** When the men of Benjamin came out to attack, they were drawn away from the town. And as they had done before, they began to kill the Israelites. About thirty Israelites died in the open fields and along the roads, one leading to Bethel and the other leading back to Gibeah.

**32** Then the warriors of Benjamin shouted, "We're defeating them as we did before!" But the Israelites had planned in advance to run away so that the men of Benjamin would chase them along the roads and be drawn away from the town.

**33** When the main group of Israelite warriors reached Baal-tamar, they turned and took up their positions. Meanwhile, the Israelites hiding in ambush to the west of Gibeah jumped up to fight.

**34** There were 10,000 elite Israelite troops who advanced against Gibeah. The fighting was so heavy that Benjamin didn't realize the impending disaster. **35** So the Lord helped Israel defeat Benjamin. . .

It was a sad day for the tribe of Benjamin. They were almost completely destroyed. Only a small number remained.

**36** Then the men of Benjamin saw that they were beaten. . .

**46** So that day the tribe of Benjamin lost 25,000 strong warriors armed with swords, **47** leaving only 600 men who escaped to the rock of Rimmon, where they lived for four months. **48** And the Israelites returned and slaughtered every living thing in all the towns—the people, the livestock, and everything they found. They also burned down all the towns they came to.

## Judges Chapter 21

### Wives Provided for the Benjamites

**Judges 21:1 (NLT)** The Israelites had vowed at Mizpah, "We will never give our daughters in marriage to a man from the tribe of Benjamin." **2** Now the people went to Bethel and sat in the presence of God until evening, weeping loudly and bitterly. **3** "O Lord, God of Israel," they cried out, "why has this happened in Israel? Now one of our tribes is missing from Israel!"

Israel was weeping over the fact that one tribe of Israel was almost completely destroyed. The 600 men that were left were going to need wives to establish families and rebuild the tribe.

**4** Early the next morning the people built an altar and presented their burnt offerings and peace offerings on it. **5** Then they said, "Who among the tribes of Israel did not join us at Mizpah when we held our assembly in the presence of the Lord?" At that time they had taken a solemn oath in the Lord's presence, vowing that anyone who refused to come would be put to death.

**6** The Israelites felt sorry for their brother Benjamin and said, "Today one of the tribes of Israel has been cut off. **7** How can we find wives for the few who remain, since we have sworn by the Lord not to give them our daughters in marriage?"

**8** So they asked, "Who among the tribes of Israel did not join us at Mizpah when we assembled in the presence of the Lord?" And they discovered that no one from Jabesh-gilead had attended the assembly. **9** For after they counted all the people, no one from Jabesh-gilead was present.

**Judges 21: 10** So the assembly sent 12,000 of their best warriors to Jabesh-gilead with orders to kill everyone there, including women and children. **11** "This is what you are to do," they said. "Completely destroy all the males and every woman who is not a virgin." **12** Among the residents of Jabesh-gilead they found 400 young virgins who had never slept with a man, and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh in the land of Canaan.

What a terrible way to solve a problem! Yes, the 600 remaining Benjamites needed wives, but Israel's method of providing them was severe! No one from Jabesh Gilead had come to battle. This meant that they did not make an oath, and they said they needed to be punished for not coming out to battle. They killed everyone but kept 400 women to be wives for the Benjamites. This left 200 men who still needed wives.

**13** The Israelite assembly sent a peace delegation to the remaining people of Benjamin who were living at the rock of Rimmon. **14** Then the men of Benjamin returned to their homes, and the 400 women of Jabesh-gilead who had been spared were given to them as wives. But there were not enough women for all of them.

**15** The people felt sorry for Benjamin because the Lord had made this gap among the tribes of Israel. **16** So the elders of the assembly asked, "How can we find wives for the few who remain, since the women of the tribe of Benjamin are dead? **17** There must be heirs for the survivors so that an entire tribe of Israel is not wiped out. **18** But we cannot give them our own daughters in marriage because we have sworn with a solemn oath that anyone who does this will fall under God's curse."

**19** Then they thought of the annual festival of the Lord held in Shiloh, south of Lebonah and north of Bethel, along the east side of the road that goes from Bethel to Shechem. **20** They told the men of Benjamin who still needed wives, "Go and hide in the vineyards. **21** When you see the young women of Shiloh come out for their dances, rush out from the vineyards, and each of you can take one of them home to the land of Benjamin to be your wife! **22** And when their fathers and brothers come to us in protest, we will tell them, 'Please be sympathetic. Let them have your daughters, for we didn't find wives for all of them when we destroyed Jabesh-gilead. And you are not guilty of breaking the vow since you did not actually give your daughters to them in marriage.'"

Well, they technically didn't *give* their women as wives.

**23** So the men of Benjamin did as they were told. Each man caught one of the women as she danced in the celebration and carried her off to be his wife. They returned to their own land, and they rebuilt their towns and lived in them.

**24** Then the people of Israel departed by tribes and families, and they returned to their own homes.

**25** In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

Think about all the trouble, sorrow, death, bloodshed, sin, and wretchedness that came about because one Levite did not treat his wife in an honorable way.

This completes the Book of Judges.