

Judges 21

Verses 1 - 7

Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, “None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage.”² So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly.³ They said, “Why, O Lord, God of Israel, has this come about in Israel, so that one tribe should be *missing* today in Israel?”⁴ It came about the next day that the people arose early and built an altar there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.⁵ 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.”⁶ And the sons of Israel were sorry for their brother Benjamin and said, “One tribe is cut off from Israel today.⁷ What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the Lord not to give them any of our daughters in marriage?”

Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, “None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage.

Israel had sworn two oaths at Mizpah:

- (1) They would not give their daughters to Benjamin for wives.
- (2) Any part of Israel that had not responded to come to Mizpah would be destroyed.

² So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly.

As mentioned in the prior chapter the Ark was temporarily at Bethel.

All of Israel had no choice but to punish the tribe of Benjamin but none of them expected that Benjamin would be almost exterminated.

O Lord, why has this come to pass?

There were two reasons that this happened.

1. Because the tribe of Benjamin was unwilling to turn the criminals over to Israel that had raped and killed the Levites concubine.
2. Because the Israelites had made a rash oath to that they would not give any of their daughters to the tribe of Benjamin.

⁴ It came about the next day that the people arose early and built an altar there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

They made an altar because the bronze alter that resided at the tabernacle was not there. The Ark had been brought to Bethel, but not the tabernacle.

⁵ 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.

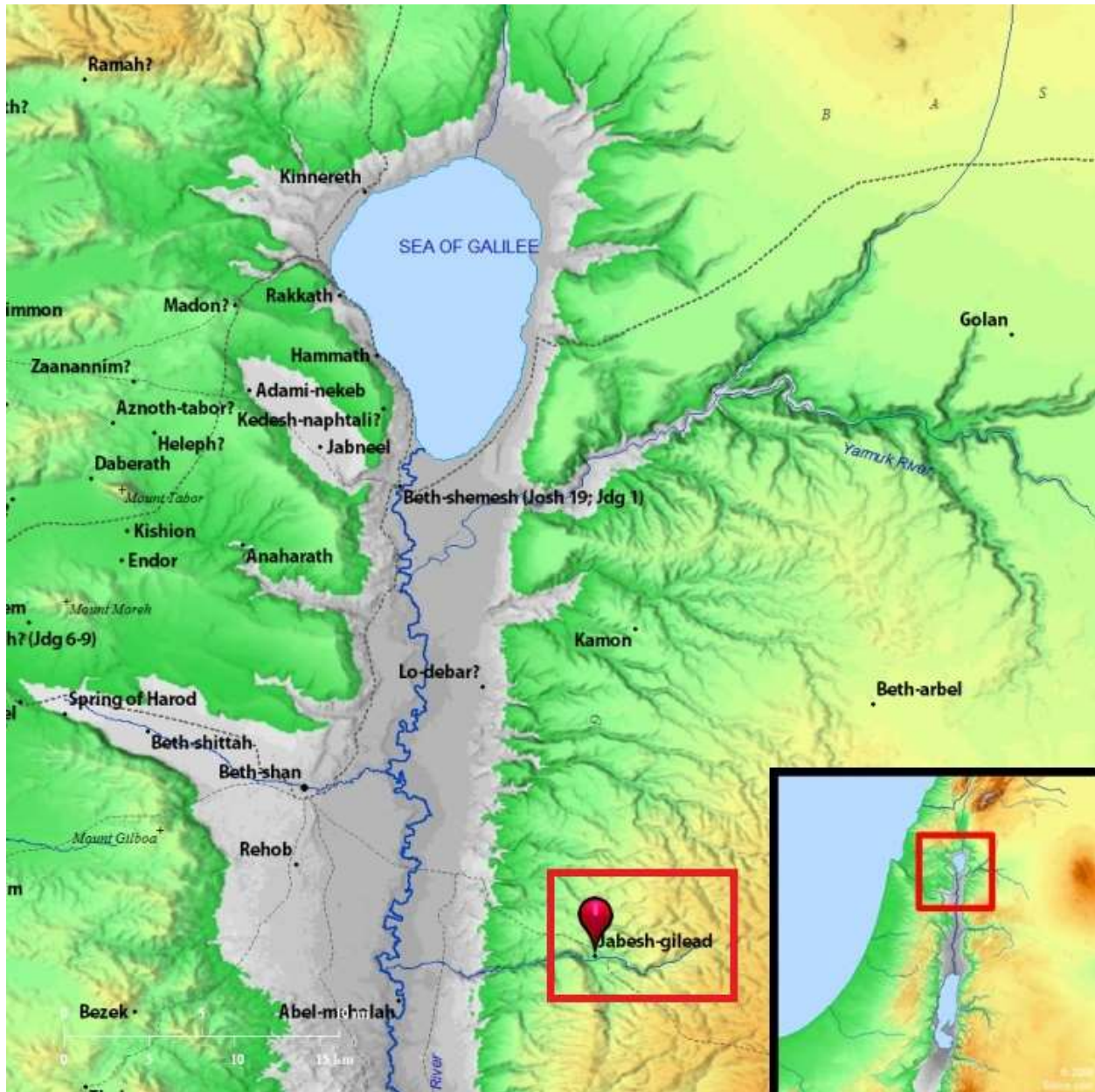
It is obvious that the Israelites, by this inquiry, were already on the way to what they hoped would be a means of getting wives for Benjamin.

Verses 8 - 12

⁸ And they said, “What one is there of the tribes of Israel who did not come up to the Lord at Mizpah?” And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly. ⁹ For when the people were numbered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there. ¹⁰ And the congregation sent 12,000 of the valiant warriors there, and commanded them, saying, “Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the little ones. ¹¹ This is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every man and every woman who has lain with a man.” ¹² And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly.

See map 2105



Jabesh-Gilead was a city in Gad (east side of Jordan)

And the congregation sent 12,000 of the valiant warriors there

Israel had made an oath to kill anyone who did not respond to the call of war against the tribe of Benjamin. Those in the town of Jabesh-Gilead had made a very costly mistake by not responding.

Since there were 400 virgin girls the city must have been fairly large. Maybe around 7 to 8,000 people in all.

¹² And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

This was part of Israel's plan to get wives for the 600 men that were still alive in the tribe of Benjamin.

The Israelite army went to Shiloh where the Tabernacle was located. By now the ark was probably back from Bethel.

Verses 13 - 15

¹³ Then the whole congregation sent *word* and spoke to the sons of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them. ¹⁴ 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 for them. ¹⁵ And the people were sorry for Benjamin because the Lord had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.

¹³ Then the whole congregation sent *word* and spoke to the sons of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them.

The war was over and Israel wanted the tribe of Benjamin to survive.

They gave them the women whom they had saved alive from the women of Jabesh-Gilead

There were 600 men and 400 women.

¹⁴ 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 for them.

No details are given but it makes one wonder if they used a lottery system of some kind in order to decide which men received a wife.

However it was accomplished there were still two hundred men without a wife.

One has to wonder if they ever thought about saving the lives of any young widows.

Verses 16 - 21

Then the elders of the congregation said, “What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?” ¹⁷ They said, “*There must be* an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, so that a tribe will not be blotted out from Israel. ¹⁸ But we cannot give them wives of our daughters.” For the sons of Israel had sworn, saying, “Cursed is he who gives a wife to Benjamin.” ¹⁹ So they said, “Behold, there is a feast of the Lord from year to year in Shiloh, which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south side of Lebonah.” ²⁰ And they commanded the sons of Benjamin, saying, “Go and lie in wait in the vineyards, ²¹ and watch; and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to take part in the dances, then you shall come out of the vineyards and each of you shall catch his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.

There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, so that a tribe will not be blotted out from Israel.

The territory allotted to Benjamin could not revert to the other tribes so it was very important that all of the men of Benjamin be married and have children.

¹⁹ So they said, “Behold, there is a feast of the Lord from year to year in Shiloh...

²⁰ And they commanded the sons of Benjamin, saying, “Go and lie in wait in the vineyards, ²¹ and watch; and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to take part in the dances, then you shall come out of the vineyards and each of you shall catch his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.

According to the law, Israel was to meet in Shiloh each year for The Passover, The feast of weeks (Pentecost), and The Feast of the Tabernacles.

The Benjamites were allowed to steal away and marry any women they could catch.

It was at the Feast of Tabernacles that the grape harvest was celebrated in the vineyards with dancing and feasting.

If you were a young lady looking for a husband with a large inheritance this would have been a great opportunity. Not that this is an issue for most women. 😊

The land for the tribe of Benjamin was now divided among 600 men instead of 27,000.

Verses 22 - 24

²² 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 *them* to them, else you would now be guilty.’” ²³ The sons of Benjamin did so, and took wives according to their number from those who danced, whom they carried away. And they went and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the cities and lived in them. ²⁴ The sons of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and each one of them went out from there to his inheritance.

²³ The sons of Benjamin did so, and took wives according to their number from those who danced, whom they carried away. And they went and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the cities and lived in them.

Their plan worked and the tribe of Benjamin survived.

For the fathers and brothers of the other tribes who were not happy with the deal that had been struck the leaders said....too bad, so sad.

Verse 25

²⁵ In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Many commentators assume that chapters 17 thru 21 were put at the end of the Book of Judges because the author wanted to make the point that Israel needed a king.

However, chapters 19 thru 21 seem to convey a much different message.

11 tribes went to war against one tribe that was not willing to punish some evil men. 11 out of 12 tribes showed a strong belief in social justice. We also learn that they were keeping the feasts at Shiloh as God had commanded.

The author also said that a new generation had grown up that didn't know God or what He had done for Israel but they seem to have a good sense of morality and were trying to keep part of the law (the feasts at Shiloh).

Perhaps the commentators have missed the mark on this interpretation.

For now we see in a mirror dimly. 1 Corinthians 13:12