

Judges 21:1-25 - Wives for the Benjamites

Judges 21:1 - "Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpeh, saying, There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife."

But with only 600 men left from the whole tribe of Benjamin, they realized one whole tribe of Israel might disappear.

Judges 21:2-3 - "And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore; And said, O LORD God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to day one tribe lacking in Israel?"

"Why is this come to pass?" It should be apparent. This is another depiction of blindness to their own sin and complicity in disaster.

But they were blocked from a solution because of their vow.

The vow not to give their daughters to Benjamites is another of many bad vows in Judges, like the vow of Jephthah. Also, the rabbis insist they could have disavowed such a rash vow by appealing to the High Priest.

The whole account is highly ironic: the Israelites set out to avenge the rape of one woman, only to authorize the rapes of first four hundred, then 200 more women. They regret the results of one slaughter, so they commit another to repair it.

But how to fix this crisis?

Jabesh-Gilead

First, they find that the men of Jabesh-Gilead failed to volunteer for the war, and were therefore under a sentence of death. So the tribes kill everyone in Jabesh-Gilead except 400 virgins, which they offer to the remaining Benjamites holed up at Rock Rimmon. (This gets around the vow, because the Jabesh-gileadites didn't swear at Mizpeh, because they never showed up).

Jabesh-Gilead - Located in Gilead, east of the Jordan River in the territory of the Tribe of Gad.

Recall that King Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin and the city of Gibeah (where this whole terrible story began). A month after he is made king, in **1 Samuel 11**, Nahash of Ammon attacks Jabesh-Gilead, and Saul leads Israel to the defense of the city. Much later, when Saul dies in **1 Samuel 31**, it is not the tribe of Benjamin who retrieve his body from the Philistines, nor David, but men of Jabesh-gilead (giving honor to the rescuer of their city). Perhaps Saul acted with a remembrance of the 400 virgins who were taken and figured in the survival of his own tribe of Benjamin.

But now the Benjamites are still 200 wives short.

So they instruct the Benjamites themselves to lie in wait for the daughters of Shiloh, when they dance during "a feast of the LORD"

The Dancing Daughters of Shiloh

Judges 21:21 - "And see, and, behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin."

Abarbinel takes this to be the Feast of Tabernacles; which in Jewish writings is emphatically called "the feast"; and the time of year when that was kept was a time of great rejoicing, on account of the fruits of the earth being gathered in, and the reading of the law and especially at the time of drawing of water at this feast; insomuch that it is said that he who never saw the rejoicing at drawing of water never saw rejoicing in his life, which was attended with piping, and dancing, and singing. (Misn. Succah, c. 5. sect. 1, 4. Vid. Maimon. Hilchot Lulab, c. 8. sect. 13.) Leading up to the feast, and just after the end of Yom Kippur preceding Tabernacles, the daughters of Israel used to go out and dance in the vineyards, wearing white linen.

The purpose was for young men to choose brides for themselves, and to arrange marriages.

Mishnah Taanit 4:8 - The daughters of Jerusalem come out and dance in the vineyards. What would they say? Young man, lift up your eyes and see what you choose for yourself. Do not set your eyes on beauty but set your eyes on the family. "Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman that fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (**Proverbs 31:30**). And it further says, "Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her works praise her in the gates" (ibid, 31:31). Section three: Similarly it says, "O maidens of Zion, go forth and gaze upon King Solomon wearing the crown that his mother gave him on his wedding day, on the day of the gladness of his heart" (Song of Songs 3:11). "On his wedding day": this refers to Matan Torah (the Giving of the Torah). "And on the day of the gladness of his heart": this refers to the building of the Temple; may it be rebuilt speedily in our days, Amen.

Ultimately this refers to Messiah and his Bride, Christ and the church.

Going even deeper, even the rabbis link Yom Kippur to the Bride and Bridegroom:

R. Eleazar said: It is written, "on the full moon for our feast day" (Ps. 81:4) ...[*ba-keseh*] with [the letter] *he*, for the moon is concealed (*de-itkasya sihara*) ...Come and see: On that day the moon is hidden, and she does not shine until the tenth of the month when Israel all repent in a perfect repentance, and the supernal mother returns and illuminates her. On that day she takes the illumination of the mother, and joy is found in everything. Thus it is written, *yom ha-kippurim hu* ("This is the day of Yom Kippur" - Lev. 23:27). It should have been *yom kippur* [in the singular]. Why is it *yom ha-*

kippurim [in the plural]? To indicate that two lights are illumined as one, the upper radiance shining upon the lower radiance. On that day she shines from the supernal light and not from the light of the sun. Therefore it is written “on the full moon for our feast day.”

R. Abba sent [a question] to R. Simeon: What is the [appropriate] time for the copulation of the Community of Israel and the holy king? He responded to him [with the words of Abraham]: “And besides, she is in truth my sister, my father’s daughter though not my mother’s daughter; and she became my wife” (Genesis 20:12) ...R. Hiyya said to R. Abba: What did he say in his response to you? He said that the coupling of the king and the queen is certainly only at the time that she is illumined from the supernal father, for when she is illumined from him they call her “holy” (*qodesh*), for she takes from the house of the father, and they are united as one, for the king is called “holy,” as it is written, “Israelis holy unto the Lord” (Jeremiah 2:3), for he takes from the place that is called “holy.”

Consequently, “she is my father’s daughter though not my mother’s daughter,” for this name [*qodesh*] is from the house of the father and not from the house of the mother. And thus “she became my wife,” to unite as one at that time and not another time, at the time she takes from the house of the father and not at the time she takes from the house of the mother. The day of Yom Kippur proves the point for sexual intercourse is forbidden, for the coupling does not take place since she takes from the house of the mother rather than from the house of the father.

i.e. after Yom Kippur, when sexual intercourse is forbidden, pointing to the feast of Tabernacles.

This may have provided some of the background to John’s vision of the Wedding Supper of the Lamb in **Revelation 16**.

- **Revelation 16:7-8** - “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.”

<https://www.academia.edu/3326549/>

Fore_giveness_On_the_Way_Nesting_in_the_Womb_of_Response

But this violent kidnapping of the daughters of Shiloh by the Benjamites stands as a contrast to the original purpose of the tradition.

How does this get around the restrictions of the Mizpeh vow? Because the men of Shiloh did not "give" their daughters, they were taken from them.

What of any value can we learn from this sad chapter in Israelite history? The rabbis

looked hard to find a redeeming message.

The Benjamites are told to “catch” = *ḥāṭa*” wives for themselves in verse 21. But later in verse 23, describing what actually happened, a different word is used.

Judges 21:21 - “catch” = *ḥāṭap̄* - to seize, to take with violence as an oppressor

Judges 21:23 - “took them wives” - “took” = *nāsā'* - to lift, hold up, exalt, to carry away, take.

...whom they “caught” = *gāzal* - to rob, take by force, still a violent word

But the word *nāsā'* can also indicate forgiveness, as in asking someone to carry, lift off or forgive one's sin.

See **Genesis 50:17** - "So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive (*nāsā'*) I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin..."

nāsā' can also mean simply to acquire a wife without force or violence:

- **Ruth 1:4** - “And they took (*nāsā'*) them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.”

Perhaps taking this as a cue, an alternate rabbinical view explains this incident was not actually rape, but rather was a step up spiritually for the Benjamites.

Since these women of Shiloh had grown up near the site of the Tabernacle they would have been inspired to righteousness. In turn, their positive influence would turn these Benjamite men back to God. Yet the men are instructed to ‘grab’ their wives from the group of dancing girls (ibid. 21:23). Aside from this rather unchivalrous behavior, the rabbis point out it is forbidden to force anyone into marriage unwillingly, so they still would have to woo and win them over.

In Jacob’s blessings to his sons, he blesses Benjamin as a זאב יטרף, ‘a wolf that grabs’ (**Genesis 49:27**). Rashi also links that phrase to this incident, but implying that it describes the positive change made in the tribe of Benjamin. They ‘grabbed’ the opportunity to marry righteous women and begin their journey of repentance.

Jacob in his **Genesis 49** prophecy continues, according to a midrash, "At a later date in the future, a descendant of Benjamin will fight his enemy like a wolf that grabs its prey away from its owners, 'grabbing' this unsavory form of conduct and appropriating it for holy purposes. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 25, pp. 275-281) In the morning, i.e., the early period of the Jewish people's monarchy, this descendant of Benjamin will devour the plunder." This prophecy was fulfilled in Benjamin's descendant, King Saul, Israel's first king, who fearlessly vanquished the fledgling kingdom's enemies. (**1 Samuel 14:47**) "In the evening, i.e., at the end of this period, another descendant will distribute the enemy's

spoils." This prophecy was fulfilled in Mordechai (a Benjamite and descendant of Saul) and Esther, who lived after the destruction of the first Temple, when they foiled Haman's plot and were given his estate. (Esther 8:7)

Also - "The altar of the Temple, which will be located in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin, will be like a wolf that mauls, consuming the sacrifices offered up on it: In the morning and evening, it will consume the daily sacrifices, (**Numbers 28:1-10**) and in the evening the priests will distribute their portions of the sacrificial food among themselves."

Perhaps a clearer explanation is that Benjamin experienced the consequences of the prophecy of Jacob, and had to repent in order to experience the later prophecy of Moses:

- **Deuteronomy 33:12** - "And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by him; and the LORD shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders."

A Further Hassidic Expansion on Benjamin:

Benjamin a Type of True Repentance

Benjamin, like his brothers, was a perfectly righteous saint. The Talmud counts him as one of the four guiltless persons who would have therefore lived forever were it not for Adam and Eve's sin of the Tree of Knowledge, because of which life cannot be eternal. (Shabbat, 55b.)

Benjamin is associated with penitence. After Joseph's steward finds the silver goblet planted in Benjamin's luggage, he and his brothers return to Joseph and confess, although they are innocent:

- **Genesis 44:16** - "And Judah said, What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord's servants, both we, and he also with whom the cup is found."

Silver represents our self-righteousness, and also the blood of Christ that atones for it. The boards of the Tabernacle were separated from the earth by resting on silver bases, i.e. Christ's blood. The cup in Benjamin's bag represents for humanity the right response to confronting our sin - confession of our need for forgiveness that stems from our original sin, the sin of Adam. Without self-justification or excuse.

Transforming evil into good

According to Zohar 2:67b when Rachel saw that Benjamin's birth would coincide with her death, she assumed that he stemmed from the "left side," the realm of evil, which is

characterized by lifelessness. She therefore called him, "son of my sorrow." (Genesis 35:18) Jacob, however, called him "son of the right," meaning that he would be of the right side (holiness) not the left (evil). Jacob saw that Benjamin would be able to transform "sorrow" into "right" through repentance.

Benjamin is thus the fulfillment of Rachel's prayer (after the birth of Joseph): "May God add another son for me," (Genesis 30:24) which, spiritually means "May God transform one who is considered 'another' — i.e., one who is estranged from God — into a 'son'." Benjamin, like the penitent, is the "another" who becomes a "son."

Thus, while Benjamin himself was a saint, his mode of spiritual worship paralleled that of the penitent, since, just as penitents struggle with human weakness and eventually transform their failings into catalysts for growth, so, too, Benjamin's focus was on refining and elevating the physical (as opposed to drawing holiness downward into the world, which was Joseph's focus).

Benjamin's association with penitence is likewise reflected in the stones of the high priest's breastplate, each of which was engraved with the name of one of the twelve tribes (Exodus 28:21): The name of Joseph, who personifies the saint, was engraved on the onyx a stone that is naturally brilliant; Benjamin, in contrast, was inscribed on the jasper, a stone that must be cleaned and polished before it can shine. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5661, p. 163)

Thus, Jacob's blessed Benjamin to be "like a wolf that grabs," i.e., to possess such intense soul-powers that even in the face of extreme decadence—like the incident at Gibeah—they will be able to "grab" hold of themselves and return to the path of holiness.

Jacob's prophecy uses a different word - grab or 'ravin' = *ṭāraḇ* - tear to pieces as prey, to eat

Similarly, through repentance Benjamin's tribe will "grab" the Divine sparks hidden in evil, since, as our sages teach, through repentance we transform sins into merits. (Yoma 86b) This power of Benjamin to transform darkness to light was demonstrated when Mordechai and Esther foiled Haman's plot and were given his estate: the very house that Ahasuerus had given to Haman, the embodiment of evil, was transferred to Esther, i.e., to the domain of holiness.

Thus, Benjamin is originally an innocent, but his tribe is destined to descend into sin and confront moral weakness (and almost total destruction) before becoming a picture of repentance in which God can finally reside "between his shoulders" - i.e. in the Temple, with the Ark and the Holy of Holies resting on Benjamite territory. In that sense, Benjamin is a type of the church, the new temple built with living stones.

The End of the Book of Judges

Still, the bottom line on the Book of Judges is that it ends in chaos and a general falling away from the truth, the Torah and dependence on God. Early in Judges, the enemy is external and can be defeated by a charismatic judge endowed with Spirit-inspired skill in battle, a savior. In the end, though, Israel's enemy is herself. This last incident recorded is a lesson in gruesome violence, rash vows, hair-splitting literalism, internecine violence and a pitiful attempt at self-justification.

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

Chronologically, the last judge in the Book of Judges was Samson. The Philistines are rising in importance as an enemy. The stage is set for Israel to plead for God to give them a king, something He says they don't need, because He is their king.

1 Samuel is our next book, and portrays the ministry of the prophet Samuel and the choosing of Saul as king and the emergence of David, a type of Messiah.

Resources:

See 'The Connection between the idol of Micah and the concubine at Gibeah'
https://jbqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/412/jbq_41_2_idolofmicah.pdf

<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/concubine-of-levite-midrash-and-aggadah>

<https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/26962/in-what-sense-is-the-word-%D7%96%D7%A0%D7%94-used-in-judges-192>

http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1010-99192020000300006&lng=en&nrm=iso

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/805772/jewish/Chassidic-Insights.htm