

### Six Hundred Wives for the Tribe of Benjamin Judges 21

#### Introduction

The Book of Judges repeats two statements: *In those days there was no king in Israel and, everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* Israel was a nation with no king and everyone did whatever they wanted to do. This caused **anarchy**, violence, selfishness, and confusion about life. The cycle of sin, slavery, deliverance, and temporary freedom was repeated seven times in the book. Thankfully God did not allow the cycle to go on forever until it destroyed the nation. If it were not for God's grace, sin would have destroyed the tribe of Benjamin.

#### Outline of Judges Chapter 21

- I. Israel's Oath - Judges 21:1-7
- II. Jabesh-Gilead's Deadly Mistake - Judges 21:8-12
- III. Benjamin's Provision and Restoration - Judges 21:13-24
- IV. Summary of Judges - Judges 21:25

#### I. Israel's Oath - Judges 21:1-7

The tribes made a rash oath and said that they would not give their daughters as wives to men from the tribe of Benjamin. This put them in an impossible situation that they had not thought about. Under the Mosaic Law, Israelites were instructed to marry other Israelites. God's people were to be set apart from other people and called holy (Deuteronomy 7:1-4). Non-Israelites were unholy because they worshiped pagan gods.

The people wept **bitterly** at Bethel and stayed until evening crying, *O Lord God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that today there should be one tribe missing in Israel?* They realized that the twelve tribes were dangerously close to being eleven tribes and this was unacceptable. It is unfortunate

that the men of Benjamin did not surrender the offenders before the war had broken out.

The tribes went from wanting to **annihilate** the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 20:48) to wanting to help build Benjamin up again. But their oath would not allow them to give their daughters to them in marriage. They probably sat there struggling to come up with a way to fix the problem they had created. Then, they remembered another vow they had made. Anyone who did not go to Mizpeh and did not fight against Benjamin would be put to death (21:5). It was like saying, 'If you are not with us, then you are against us.' They discovered that no one had come to fight against Benjamin from Jabesh-Gilead. That is when the tribes began to make a bizarre plan to "fix" the problem.

#### II. Jabesh-Gilead's Deadly Mistake - Judges 21:10-12

Twelve thousand of Israel's strongest and bravest soldiers were sent to kill the men, women, and children of Jabesh-Gilead. The writer of the book of Judges does not tell us why the people of Jabesh-Gilead had not shown up to fight against Benjamin. Perhaps they thought they could avoid taking a side because they lived across the Jordan River. Still, they must have known about the meeting and the penalty for not coming to it. Four hundred unwed women were spared from the **slaughter** and taken to Shiloh.

#### III. Benjamin's Provision and Restoration - Judges 21:13-24

The nation sent a message of peace to the Benjamites at the rock of Rimmon. The people of Benjamin came back and were likely surprised when they were given the four hundred virgins. However, there were still two hundred men of Benjamin without

wives. The people still grieved for Benjamin because the tribe was so small. The elders felt responsible and said, *What shall we do for wives for those who remain, since the women of Benjamin have been destroyed?*

Whenever you are faced with a question such as, “What should I do about (fill in the blank)?” the answer is simple—pray. Sadly, that is not what the elders did. Instead, they came up with a terrible plan, proving again that *everyone did what was right in his own eyes*. The author does not tell us his opinion about what has happened. He gives the facts. The facts show that the people of Israel tried to look like they had faith. They tried to look righteous (sometimes), but their actions prove they lived according to their own will. Anyone can say words and call it a prayer, but one with true faith says a prayer with these words: *nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will* (Matthew 26:39). Christians know that God’s will is always best.

The elders decided to get the extra 200 wives for Benjamin by **manipulating**, or switching around, their words. Their vow had said they would not ‘give’ their women to the men of Benjamin. They reasoned that it would be okay for the Benjamin men to ‘take’ the girls for wives. The vow would not be broken because the girls were ‘taken’ not ‘given.’ Can you imagine eating a cookie that you promised your mom you would not take out of the cookie jar? Later, she sees you eating the cookie and asks what happened. You answer, “I said I would not take the cookie, and I did not. Grandma gave it to me.” Will your answer be acceptable to your mom? There are fancy names for this kind of trickery. However, it is simply the sin of deceit. It dates back to the Garden of Eden when the serpent deceived Eve saying, “*Did God really say, ‘you can’t eat from any tree in the garden?’*” (Genesis 3:1 HCSB). Be careful of the words you choose.

The men of Benjamin were to attend the yearly feast held at Shiloh. There, they would

lie and wait in the vineyards and when the daughters of Shiloh danced, they could get a wife by running out and taking one. If anyone (including the fathers and brothers of these stolen women) didn’t like it, they would be told to *be kind* and remember that their oath was not really being broken because they didn’t give their daughters to the men, they were taken.

The men of Benjamin took enough wives, went home, and rebuilt houses to resume living. The tribes went home to enjoy their inheritance. If the book of Judges ended here, some may have said it had a ‘happy’ ending. But it does not end on this note.

#### IV. Judges’ Synopsis - Judges 21:25

The writer of the book returns to one simple and plain sentence: *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes*. This sentence reminds us of everything that we have already read in the book. It is also a reminder of what man’s end would be...total destruction. But God had a plan for His people. He was committed to them and to their salvation.

Proverbs 14:12 says, *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*. When we do what is right in our own eyes, we do not do what is right in God’s eyes. We fall into sin again and again, just as Israel did seven times. We must be delivered from ourselves and the harm we would cause ourselves. Jesus Christ is that Deliverer. Studying, memorizing, and obeying His word is our way of escape from the downward cycle of sin. †

#### Prayer

Thank God for His word and sending His Son to be your Deliverer from the penalty of sin!

#### Memory Verse

Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*

**Vocabulary**

**anarchy** - a state of lawlessness, confusion, or disorder

**bitterly** - feeling in an unpleasant way; painfully

**annihilate** - to destroy someone or something completely

**slaughter** - the violent killing of a large number of people

**manipulating** - to change something or someone to serve your own purpose

**QUESTIONS FOR JUDGES/RUTH LESSON 17**

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

**DAY ONE: Read all notes and references.**

1. Can you list the judges of Israel?

O\_\_\_\_\_ E\_\_\_\_\_ S\_\_\_\_\_ D\_\_\_\_\_

G\_\_\_\_\_ T\_\_\_\_\_ J\_\_\_\_\_ J\_\_\_\_\_

I\_\_\_\_\_ E\_\_\_\_\_ A\_\_\_\_\_ S\_\_\_\_\_

2. Which judge impressed you the most? Why?

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3. From Hebrews 11:32-24, what great deeds are credited to the judges?

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**DAY TWO: Read Ruth 1:1-5.**

4. a. During what time does the story of Ruth take place?

b. In what city does it begin?

c. Why did the family leave that city?

d. To what country did they go? Find it on your map of Judges.

e. How long did they live there?

5. a. Who were the family members who left Israel?

b. Who were the two people added to the family in their new country?

6. What happened to the three men of the family?

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**DAY THREE: Read Ruth 1:6-13.**

7. What made Naomi think about going home to Bethlehem in Judah? Put a check mark by the correct answer and give the verse where you found it.
- a. ☐ vs.\_\_\_\_\_ The people in Moab treated her badly.
  - b. ☐ vs.\_\_\_\_\_ She heard a rumor that the famine in Judah was over.
  - c. ☐ vs.\_\_\_\_\_ Her two daughters-in-law wanted her to leave.
  - d. ☐ vs.\_\_\_\_\_ She was old and sick and missed her homeland.
8. a. Who started out on the journey to Judah?
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- b. What did Naomi think her daughters-in-law should do? Give verse:\_\_\_\_\_
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- c. How did the daughters-in-law respond?
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9. What were the main points of Naomi's argument encouraging the young women to stay? Write T by each true statement and give the verse where the argument is found.
- a. T or F vs.\_\_\_\_\_ I am too old to have more children.
  - b. T or F vs.\_\_\_\_\_ Even if I had more sons, would you wait for them to grow up to marry them?
  - c. T or F vs.\_\_\_\_\_ You are young and attractive and many men here will want to marry you.
  - d. T or F vs.\_\_\_\_\_ You need to stay here and worship your pagan gods.
  - e. T or F vs.\_\_\_\_\_ I am too old to marry again.
  - f. T or F vs.\_\_\_\_\_ The hand of the Lord is against me.

**DAY FOUR: Read Ruth 1:11-13 and Deuteronomy 25:5-6.**

10. ? (Thought Question) Try to explain Naomi's argument in your own words.
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**DAY FIVE: Read Ruth 1:14-22.**

- 11.a. What choice did each daughter-in-law make?
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- b. From verses 15-16, give specific ways their two choices were different.
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c. From verses 16-17, give five vows Ruth made to Naomi.

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d. Which of these vows do you find most precious? Why?

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12.a. What did Naomi say to the people in Bethlehem who remembered her?

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13.a. What had God said about the Moabites in Deuteronomy 23:3 and Nehemiah 13:1-2?

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b. Can you think of any problems this might cause?

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**VOCABULARY FOR JUDGES/RUTH LESSON 17**

***"The more words you know, the more clearly and powerfully you will think...  
and the more ideas you will invite into your mind."***

— Wilfred Funk

**DAY ONE: Write the definition of each vocabulary word.**

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**DAY TWO: Write three sentences using three different vocabulary words from this lesson.**

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**DAY THREE: Circle the word's synonym(s).** (Synonym is a word/phrase that means the same thing.)

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|------|---------------------|-------|------------|-------|-----------|-------|-------------|
| 1. . | <b>manipulating</b> | ..... | tricking   | ..... | quilting  | ..... | changing    |
| 2. . | <b>anarchy</b>      | ..... | no ruler   | ..... | kingdom   | ..... | lawlessness |
| 3. . | <b>bitterly</b>     | ..... | with grief | ..... | painfully | ..... | happily     |

**DAY FOUR: Match the word to its meaning.****Word****Definition****anarchy**

to destroy someone or something completely

**bitterly**

a state of lawlessness, confusion, or disorder

**manipulating**

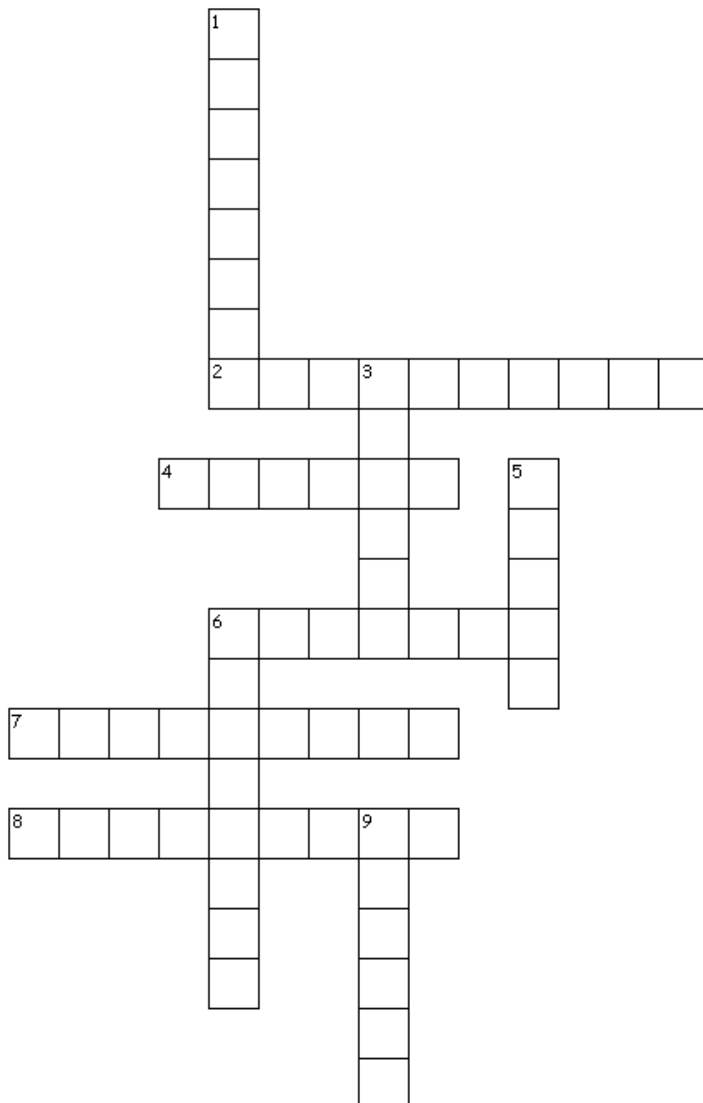
the violent killing of a large number of people

**annihilate**

feeling in an unpleasant way; painfully

**slaughter**

to change something or someone to serve your own purpose

**DAY FIVE: Review previous vocabulary words. Try to work from memory.****ACROSS**

2. something making it impossible to continue in the normal way
4. a surprise attack by people in hiding
6. words spoken or written near another word or group of words to give clearer meaning
7. rude, insulting
8. confidence, certainty

**DOWN**

1. marked by corruption or evil, perverted
3. to fight against or oppose
5. very angry, furious
6. to face a challenge
9. the most interesting and exciting part, the high point