

Judges 21:1-25 – Leadership: Keeping An Even Keel

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Is it not true that often people swing like pendulums (钟摆)? Instead of maintaining an even keel (船的龙骨) after seeing their errors, they tend to swing completely to the other side. They move from chewing only on lard (猪油) to chewing only on lettuce. They move from breaking the springs in their couch to breaking the 5 minute mile. The trouble is, the pendulum then swings the other way and they are back to their lard and their couch quickly. What God expects is that his people, especially his leaders, learn to have an even keel and keep balance in life. Today you will see the overreaction of the leaders of Israel after they finally moved to defeat the Benjamites.

Our headings are:

Rash Oaths

Rash Oaths led to Execution

Rash Oaths led to Contempt

Our goals are: **That you will learn to be led by those with a balance in life so that Christ's kingdom continue to grow.**

Rash Oaths

1 Now the men of Israel had sworn an oath at Mizpah, saying, "**None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife.**" 2 Then the **people came to the house of God**, and remained there before God till evening. They **lifted up their voices and wept bitterly**, 3 and said, "O LORD God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that today there should be one tribe missing in Israel?" 4 So it was, on the next morning, that the people **rose early and built an altar there**, and **offered burnt offerings and peace offerings**.

1. After crushing Benjamin militarily for not turning over the rapists and murderers for justice, Israel made an oath to have nothing to do with Benjamites. An oath is usually a legal promise made before God to perform a specific activity. Israel did not seem to leave any room for repentance (悔改) and restoration (重建) of Benjamin. **Zeal blinded their reason. Zeal blinded their knowledge.** Justice is necessary but mercy is necessary also.

2Corinthians 8:5 But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe. 6 This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, 7 so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, **lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow.** 8 ... reaffirm your love to him.

Israel even forgot the mercy that God showed to them when they strayed from him. They **slaughtered even women and children in their zeal** and they treated Benjamin like the people of Canaan.

2. And yet, even amidst the rash vow, was the sincere acknowledgment of all their sins. And to **show that their sincerity was more than talk, Israel supported it by actions.** They made an altar to the Lord. (So it wasn't all bad.) On it...

a. They made burnt offerings (燔祭). This showed their total dedication (奉献) to the Lord. The burnt offering was entirely consumed by fire. None of the meat was shared with the offerer. (This prefigured Christ that he had to go all the way to death.)

b. They made peace offerings (平安祭). This offering was made after the burnt offering was made. It was shared by the offerer who showed that his relationship was restored with God. This specific peace offering (there were different kinds) was made **when God delivered his people from trouble and an oath of service was made to God.** (This offering prefigured 预表 the peace that Jesus made for you and it is pictured in the Lord's Supper.)

5 The children of Israel said, "Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up with the assembly to the LORD?" For they had **made a great oath concerning** anyone who had not come up to the LORD at Mizpah, saying, "**He shall surely be put to death.**" 6 And the children of Israel grieved for Benjamin their brother, and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel today.

3. They also made an oath regarding those of Israel who did not join them in their fight for justice with Benjamin. What was that oath?

They would kill those who did not join them to destroy Benjamin. While it was true that anyone who does not support justice supports the criminal, this was another overreaction. **Israel did not remember that they were all recently estranged from God and without his Word.** They did not think that they themselves – were it not for the work of God in them – would have avoided justice also. **They exercised no patience.** There was no attempt to teach. **This was what the men of Jabesh Gilead needed.** Execution wasn't the answer. Further, Israel seemed little outraged that Jerusalem was under foreign control, and the Levite was forced to avoid in on this way back home.

4. Lessons:

a. Don't swing like the pendulum. Learn to be balanced in your life. Keep an even keel. Control your mouth. Don't be rash with your mouth or your hands, otherwise you might regret it.

b. Don't be upset when those from lesser churches don't get the doctrines of grace the first time you explain TULIP to them. Don't attack them if they don't join you in the pro-life movement... or if they don't join you in your condemnation homosexuality. Don't condemn them. Be patient. Pray for God's Spirit to work in them. You probably

took a long time to get it yourself. Don't get mad at your husband because he is not as godly as you and he doesn't read his Bible like you. Don't force your children to do 2 hours of Bible study after they didn't have any before.

Rash Oaths Led To Execution

7 "What shall we do for wives **for those who remain**, seeing we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them our daughters as wives?"

1. Because of the 1st rash oath to ban intermarriages with Benjamin, Israel was in a quandary (窘境, 进退两难). They saw the trouble the remaining men of Benjamin would face—they wouldn't be people enough to sustain the tribe. Only 600 men had escaped Israel's attacks.

8 And they said, "What one is there from the tribes of Israel who did not come up to Mizpah to the LORD?" And, in fact, **no one had come to the camp from Jabesh Gilead** to the assembly. 9 For when the people were counted, indeed, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead was there.

2. And because of the 2nd rash oath, they had to deal with Jabesh Gilead. Surely it was terrible that Jabesh Gilead did not send any soldiers, but we don't know why Jabesh Gilead did not send any soldiers. Maybe since they were on the east side of the Jordan they ignored the rest of their brothers as if it were not their business, but they faced regular threats from the Ammonites as well.

10 So the congregation sent out there twelve thousand of their most valiant men, and commanded them, saying, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead with the edge of the sword, including the women and children. 11 "And this is the thing that you shall do: You shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman who has known a man intimately." 12 So they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead **four hundred young virgins** who had not known a man intimately; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

3. Israel's response to Jabesh Gilead was unfounded and excessive. They ordered the killing of men, women, and children. But a child should not have been put to death for the sins of his parents. They literally treated them as the Muslims treat pigs – as "haram." (禁忌) The only ones spared were the young women who were not yet married. This is what zeal can do if it is not controlled. This gives you a little insight to what ISIS does. This was the eastern way of living. But "**the sword of justice must be bathed in the oil of mercy.**" (Trapp)

13 Then the whole congregation **sent word to the children of Benjamin** who were at the rock of Rimmon, and **announced peace to them.** 14 So Benjamin came back at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh Gilead; and yet they had not found enough for them. 15 And the **people grieved for Benjamin**, because the LORD had made a void in the tribes of Israel.

4. Starting to feel regret at sad the state of things in Benjamin—that Benjamin would be wiped-off Israel, Israel reconciled with Benjamin and gave the 400 young women they had captured from Jabesh Gilead. They **rationalized** that they were not breaking their oath, as they were not giving their daughters to Benjamin. They acted as if God didn't know that they were breaking their oath. And Israel lived with the regret that God had to bring such severe punishment on one of their tribes.

5. Lessons:

a. Don't make rash vows. Think before you take an oath to serve in a leadership position. Pray before you decide to get married. If you do, you might regret it. Remember Jephthah. The consequences can be a life of regret. **Do you realize how many compromises (妥协) and foolish things take place because people call the wrong man to serve as minister or elders in the church?** Do you realize how many foolish things Christian spouses have had to do because **they deliberately chose to vow to marry non-believers?** These compromises weaken the family and the church and those people are then less effective to help build the kingdom.

b. When you do make a vow, don't play games. Take it seriously. God will help you. God is holy, and since oaths are made to him, he demands that you honor him. If you don't, you misuse his name, which is worse than murder.

Rash Oaths Led To Contempt

16 Then the elders of the congregation said, "**What shall we do for wives for those who remain, since the women of Benjamin** have been destroyed?" 17 And they said, "There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe may not be destroyed from Israel. 18 "However, we cannot give them wives from our daughters, for the children of Israel have sworn an oath, saying, 'Cursed be the one who gives a wife to Benjamin.'"

1. Israel had to face another quandary when they had to deal with the rash oath they made regarding Benjamin. They

realized they were punishing children and wives for the sins of their father and husbands. **This was forbidden by God's law.** Their rash oath was sinful. And Israel had been overzealous in their prosecution of the war. They were not supposed to attack women, but they did.

19 Then they said, "In fact, there is a yearly feast of the LORD in Shiloh, which is north of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah." 20 **Therefore they instructed the children of Benjamin, saying,** "Go, lie in wait in the vineyards, 21 "and watch; and just when the daughters of Shiloh come out to perform their dances, then come out from the vineyards, and **every man catch a wife for himself** from the daughters of Shiloh; then go to the land of Benjamin.

2. So to attempt to get around their oath, Israel instructed men from Benjamin to steal young women from Ephraim, their northern neighbors, for wives, while they were celebrating, probably the Feast of the Tabernacles. It was a fraudulent way around the oath, a serious sin. It was a poor way to treat girls. Thankfully, the girls would be close to home to visit their families, as they wouldn't be dragged far away. But this was no excuse to sin.

22 "Then it shall be, when their fathers or their brothers come to us to complain, that we will say to them, '**Be kind to them for our sakes,** because **we did not take a wife for any of them in the war;** for it is not as though you have given the women to them at this time, making yourselves guilty of your oath.'"

3. Further, they prepared an answer for when the girls' fathers and brothers would come to protest. They would assuage (平息) their anger by saying that it was okay for the girls to be married to the Benjamites without the fathers and brothers becoming guilty of breaking the oath they made against inter-marrying with Benjamin. IOW, the breaking of the oath was justified (被认为合理) because they said so.

23 And the **children of Benjamin did so; they took enough wives for their number** from those who danced, whom they caught. Then they went and **returned to their inheritance,** and they rebuilt the cities and dwelt in them. 24 So the children of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family; they went out from there, every man to his inheritance.

4. The Benjamites did as they were told. Israel felt like they did not break their oath. But they did. Earlier, Israel killed them, now Israel was encouraging them to kidnap (绑架)! Some leaders! Israel needed better ones.

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

5. And then Judges ended as it started: Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. A sad testimony! There were hints of restoration, but it never continued.

6. Lessons:

a. Do treat God with contempt by working around his law or misusing his name. Do not treat brothers with contempt by calling *right* wrong or *wrong* right.

b. Nothing was more evident than the fact that Israel then needed a true Savior. A true Prophet, a faithful Priest, and an honorable King.

Conclusion:

As Israel returned to God they **became overzealous** and **made rash oaths.** To keep those oaths, they **murdered innocent people,** they **condoned kidnapping,** and worst of all, **they played around with the name of God** by not honoring their oaths. Surely this weakened the nation even more than before. They lacked balance.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: **Consider what the unbalanced like looks like.** God work all the time when you are young and then wait for when you are old to serve him...or work 7 days a week and have no time for your wife or children...or becoming so attached to sports that you go in a fit if you can't find the score...or allowing your mind to become obsessed with lusts that you can't focus on your spiritual growth... **A balanced life starts with the knowledge that you were bought with a price – the blood of Jesus** – and that you must then live your life for the good of your neighbor and for the glory of God. So you will read you Bible for direction. You will pray for help. You will make time to teach your children...to spend time with your spouse...to plan for worship... to be present for the sacraments (圣礼) ...to be a witness of Christ to the world...to eat and drink in moderation...to relax. If your life is balanced, and you do what is right in God's eyes, then you will have fulfilled your duties as a redeemed child (被赎的子民) .

Finally: If you are not a Christian you need to make your life right with God first. How can you make your life right with God? You need blood...the blood of someone perfect-a perfect man-so that you can atone for your sins and get new life. Only Jesus' blood will suffice. So ask God to count Christ's blood as yours – his free blood.