

Judges 21 Complications of a Rash Vow

v1-7 Consequences of Israel's oaths

Israel gathers to mourn Benjamin's devastation by prayers and sacrifices [at Shiloh, at the *house of God* (Josh. 18:1; Judg. 18:31; 1 Sam. 1:3)]. It seems that they are seeking God's help, but we are not told that they asked for His counsel to the current problems, as they plainly did in 20:18.

What is the answer(s) to Israel's question in verse 3?

What two oaths did the people make when they originally assembled at Mizpah?

Verse 7 shows that they originally made this oath in anger and they now regret it. Have you ever made a promise while angry? Solomon warns about rash vows in Eccl. 5:1-2.

v8-15 Israel's plan to repopulate Benjamin is insufficient

Summarize their plan.

They amend their vow and decide to spare the young virgins (but not the women or children), as a solution to the problem caused by their other vow. They feel good about keeping their vow but are unjust in carrying out their vow—are they any better off by this? However, they are disappointed because there are not enough women for the men of Benjamin.

v13-15 They announce peace to Benjamin, and Benjamin responds.

We do not know whether Benjamin repents of the sin of defending Gibeah (20:14) or if they are simply admitting defeat. Should Israel have inquired into, or somehow identified, Benjamin's *reason* for accepting Israel's offer of peace? Why or why not?

What does verse 25 tell us about the spiritual condition of Israel (beside the problems of Benjamin)? Discuss how this affected their decisions in this chapter.

v16-24 Israel's next plan accomplishes what they want

If Benjamin had repented, then it would be admirable of Israel to help them with this problem. In reality, neither Israel, nor Benjamin is trying to please God in these decisions, per verse 25.

v18-22 The elders ask the people for a solution to this problem. Good leaders can glean ideas from those they lead, but ultimately good leaders must find a solution that is right. In this case, in order to satisfy their man-made vow they violate a God-given law (Ex. 21:16). In principle, their decision is like the decision of the host and Levite in Gibeah, who likely honored man's expectations of hospitality above God's expectations of leadership and family—though of course, they did not see the speck (or log) in their eye. In God's law both homosexuality and kidnapping were penalized by death.

Again, nothing is said about consulting God. Summarize their plan.

v23-24 In Israel “the ends justifies the means,” and in the short-term, they get what they wanted, so everyone goes home happy, except for the people of Shiloh who have no way of receiving justice. Consider and comment on the influence and effects of this decision on the people involved in and/or affected by this decision.

v25 God did not offer or approve of these decisions because Israel did not want His help. These were the social problems existing during the period of the judges.