

Biblical Pleas Against The Discrimination Of Homosexual People

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Appendix I**The Ruse of the Gibeonites****Thoughts on the Registered Partnership Act in Germany**

I wrote this Book in 2002, just about a year after the German "Registered Partnership Act" came into effect, which had led to loud criticism and discussions among evangelical media and Christian organizations active in sexual ethics even in the forerun. Their outraged criticism has not eased off – especially not after the Protestant church started contemplating the possibility of "blessing" such long-time relationships.

Bible-abiding Christians see such same-sex unions as an attack on God's unique principle of marriage between man and woman, whereas it is exactly the great analogy of the Registered Partnership Act to heterosexual marriage legislation that they consider the epitome of the perversion of divine standards. Indeed, the Registered Partnership Act does earmark almost identical rights and duties as known to common marriage partners. Thus also a separation can only take place via a proper divorce – with all the required bureaucratic, practical and emotional effort – and is actually only planned as the "emergency" of a union meant to last for a life.

For strategic reasons - in order not to fail due to the possible protest of the German Federal Council - several subitems were left out initially (especially as the constitutional court had not yet cleared up the legality of the registered partnership Act): In contrast to marriage, there is neither tax credit equivalents for registered partnerships nor the possibility of a joint adoption of a child.

The situation is odd: Homosexuals entering into a registered partnership submit to a higher idealistic requirements than in a marriage itself. They do not get tax relief although they have to take financial responsibility for each other (e.g. in the social welfare department). However, this did not prevent homosexuals – who are said to be only fixated on gaining pleasure – from concluding these registered partnerships and demonstrating that they are willing to assume such a degree of obligation. After eleven months there were an estimated 4000 couples – even before it had been lawfully secured by the constitutional court.

This corresponds to about 1 % of the civil marriages that is known from countries with already existing regulations for same-sex unions.

And yet, the purport coming from evangelical Christians stays the same: Such unions could never please God, and even introducing a church blessing ceremony for something that God would bless under no circumstances, is said to reveal the development of the Protestant Church toward the "Whore of Babylon" as portrayed in the Book of Revelation.

Numerous arguments are put forward against the Registered Partnership Act of which some totally lack objective foundation, often get tangled up in inner contradictions and are actually not supposed to be an issue here. In order to address one of those points of view, in particular the question if the great analogy to marriage

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really is a sign of particular godlessness, listening to another biblical narrative seems helpful to me. At first glance, it also has little to do with the topic of homosexuality or civil partnerships.

The event takes us back to the time of Israel's conquest of Canaan and is narrated in Joshua 9. Not only was the occupation and settlement of land by God's people the fulfilment of God's promise toward the progenitor of Israel, Abraham, but also served as the judgement over the inhabitants of Canaan (Deut 9,5f.). The latter had been upholding traditions and a way of life that were diametrically opposed to God's standards, especially everything connected with idolatry. Sexual excesses, human sacrifices (especially of children, Deut 12,31) or sorcery were only a few of the things given as a reason by the Bible for God's "being disgusted by them" (Lev 20,23) and for that "the land had spit out its inhabitants (Lev 18,25).

Shortly before the Israelites marched in to the promised land, God told Mose about seven nations that were expressly supposed to fall victim to judgement and destruction. Peace agreements with people outside of Canaan were allowed but fraternization of any kind with one of these seven nations was strictly prohibited (Deut 7,1-6; 20,10-18).

Such unexceptional condemnation and extinction orders for entire tribes surely are hard to understand for every contemporary reader. The holy and "dreadful God" (Deut 10,17) has become unfamiliar to us – though even the New Testament tells us that it can be awful to fall into His hands for judgement (Hebr 10,31).

Especially when looking at the events of 9/11 it is difficult for us to acquaint ourselves with the conditions of a "holy war" at that time. Additionally, this seems to contradict the principle that God shows no partiality in His judgement (Rom 2,11). Yet, the narrative found in Jos 9 also shows that God's condemnation did not turn out as blanket as the wording suggests, and lets a light beam of grace fall into this time which maybe appear so dark to us.

The Hivites were one of the seven mentioned tribes that were supposed to be left to destruction. One of the Hivitian cities was called Gibeon (not to be mistaken for the mentioned city of Gibeon from the Book of Judges chapter 19). To Gibeon belonged four villages, one of them called Kirjath-Jearim. The Israelites were getting threateningly close to Gibeon soon after crossing the Jordan. The Canaanite people had heard rumors about the miracles accompanying Israel's migration. Panic began to spread among the inhabitants of Canaan. Several military alliances were concluded in order to go into action against Israel out of well equipped cities having the greater strength.

Gibeon is described as a relatively big city with a strong military force (Joshua 10,2). As the Israelites were approaching Gibeon, they had already got over with three battles inside Canaan. Initially Jericho – one of the strongest fortresses – had fallen before them. The following attack on Ai ended with a defeat, however, only in the second run Ai could be overpowered. The Gibeonites, who are described as combat-tested, therefore could have sought refuge in a military action as well as all the other Canaanites did (Joshua 9,1-4).

Instead they resorted to a ruse. Obviously they were aware of the fact that Israel was not allowed to conclude any peace agreements with them but only with people from farther away. Thus, their negotiators fake coming from afar by means of torn clothes and rotten food and pretend to be emissaries of a faraway people that is seeking an

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alliance with Israel ("attracted by the Glory of your God"). Somewhat over-hasty and without consulting the Lord about it, Joshua and the other leaders conclude an alliance with them. But shortly after they must realize that this tribe from "far away" dwells in close proximity. Since the alliance has been concluded and confirmed by "the oath sworn by God", the Israelites are no longer allowed to attack the Gibeonites and therefore are not able to fulfill God's orders of judgement.

Rather these Hivites now are even under Israel's and thus under God's protection. This causes indignation among the Israelites.

Joshua angrily puts a curse on the Gibeonites - thus ironically testing their allegation of being attracted by God: They have to perform corvee labor in the service of the tabernacle, God's sanctuary – a result that they had probably been expecting in some way.

This newly concluded peace agreement is soon to have military repercussions for Israel. An alliance of several Canaanite kings at first tries to eliminate the Israelites' new allies. The attacked Gibeonites request help from Israel, who then carry out their alliance duty, too, which leads to the famous battle of the miraculously prolonged day in which God fulfills Joshua's plea: "Sun, stand still over Gibeon!"

It seems that the Gibeonites survived as a people of their own in the Israelites' midst (at least up until the age of kings, where they are mentioned for the last time). At the same time however, they were assigned to the people of Israel, as e.g. in David's census for the recording of all men of the country fit for military service (2 Sam 24,7).

During the age of kings, Saul tries to exterminate the Gibeonites in misconceived "zeal for the children of Israel" and persecutes them "in all parts of Israel". But God takes His assurance of peace and protection given in former times seriously - as seriously as to impose a famine over Israel. It only comes to an end after Saul's seven descendants have been turned over to the escapees as a compensation for the numerous victims so that the Gibeonites can carry out the required blood revenge (cf. Num 35,33), which they can then execute "before the Lord" (2 Sam 21,1-9).

Nowhere do we read that the Gibeonites started hostilities against the Israelites of their own accord. Also, there is no clue given that they have enticed the Israelites into idolatry – the essential explanation why God had prohibited alliance with Canaanites. The formulation "before God" (2 Sam 21,6.9) rather suggests that they have accepted the faith in the God of Israel. As a fact, the "height of Gibeon" is the site of the tent sanctuary for many years (1 Chron 21,29).

Whoever bothers to track the diverse history of the Ark of the covenant in the Books of Samuel until the Chronicles, will notice in amazement that the "Holy Ark", which represented God's presence for Israel, repeatedly stood in places that seemingly didn't really suit it at all.

It came to the people of Kirjath-Jearim – in the Gibeonite's territory – after the Levites, who were in charge of taking care of the sanctuary, had handled it improperly. There it stood on the height of Gibeon for many years before King David tried to take it back to Jerusalem while the sacrifice altar remained on the height of Gibeon. During its transport, an incident occurred whereupon David stored the Ark of Covenant away in a house that presumably belonged to an immigrated Philistine. The site in Jerusalem where after all the permanent sanctuary was constructed belonged to a Jebusite (another Canaanite tribe). Hence, the sanctuary of the Israelites' God looked for its place exactly among the outsiders – not different from God's living "representative" several thousand years later – Jesus Christ.

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Back to the events found in the Book of Joshua.

Was it right or wrong what the Hivites from Gibeon had done? Under false pretenses and on account of the Israelites' guilelessness, who had neglected to ask God's will, they had succeeded in obtaining an alliance – something that had initially been strongly prohibited.

The narrative of the Gibeonites is therefore often interpreted as an illustration for the demand to be awake and to pray in order to be able to repel the crafty attacks of the fiend, thus as a warning of spiritual superficiality and carelessness.

But isn't there something else revealing itself that hints at God's mercy lighting up amid the numerous tales of captures and killings (hard to digest for contemporary readers). Indeed, there is a note of criticism in the brief interjection found in the covenant narrative: "Yet, he mouth of the Lord they did not consult". This rebuke, however, is relatively lenient and indirect compared to God's hard words of reprimand after the theft from the war booty a few chapters before. Later on in the Book of Joshua, an interesting and groundbreaking evaluation can be found that probably has to be understood as a key verse (Joshua 11,19f.): Reportedly, none of the Canaanite cities tried to offer Israel peace – expect for Gibeon. "For God hardened all their hearts because he wanted to pass judgement on them". What can we conclude other than that God did **not** harden the Gibeonites' hearts?

Maybe there were people living in Gibeon who began to ask about the Israelites' God similar to Rahab the prostitute from Jericho.

And God, who "among every people welcomes anyone who is in awe of Him and does what is right" (Acts 10, 35), looked mercifully upon their aspiration. Maybe the Gibeonites' statement that God's glory attracted them was not just a mere flattery born out of fear but the expression of a true longing? But how else could they – the excluded and endangered ones – have reached the fulfilment of this yearning if not by cunning? And we should remember: during His negotiations with Abraham, God had been willing to spare Sodom, the symbol of godlessness, if among the citizens could be found only ten "righteous" ones (Gen 18,25.32).

Using the example of the Gibeonites, we also discover God's love principle of drawing exactly those to Himself or at least letting them approach who were actually excluded from His closeness by His own law or were even sentenced to death.

What do the Gibeonites have to do with the Civil Partnership Act for homosexuals? The Gibeonites belonged to a group of people, the Canaanite tribes, of which God had pronounced His condemnation because among them existed practices that were "an abomination" for God. Due to their cunning and the responsible ones' not "consulting the Lord's mouth", they got a status to which they were not entitled according to God's commandment, in spite of the Israelites' outrage. From then on, they were part of the covenant people via contract, even more than the Jebusites, for instance, against whom Israel had been simply too weak and therefore had to tolerate them in their midst.

The Civil Partnership Act causes something quite similar: Quite a few gays cultivate a lifestyle characterized by constant promiscuity that does not take its bearings on God's commandments. Yet, others from this generally "condemned" group of homosexuals can now obtain a status via the Civil Partnership Act that Christians of God's order regard as reserved for marriage. The ones who were responsible for the law – a party that is not very close to Christianity – did naturally not "consult the

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mouth of the Lord", too. They even used political gambits in order to help the law overcome parliamentary obstacles. Now, despite all the outrage it has caused, the act cannot be easily recalled (especially not after being approved by the Federal Constitutional Court). And what if God let them "get away with this" – analogous to the Gibeonites?

What if He did not want to prevent this "loophole" at all? Neither the Christian counter-campaign "No to say I do" succeeded nor the march of the German federal states led by the CDU/CSU (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union) to the constitutional court. Aren't there numerous people in the gay community who also ask for God respectively for a lifestyle that does meet Biblical rules for romantic relationships – love, faithfulness, responsibility? What if God looks at those people's honest wish mercifully now, and lets them participate in what originally seemed reserved for others – by means of sort of "bypass"?

The Gibeonites did not become part of God's people at His explicit command. Hardly any conservative Christian could imagine the Church commanding a civil partnership act for homosexuals. But what if God protected those partnerships, anyway, just like He protected the Gibeonites although they were Canaanites for the reason that God is no respecter of persons but welcomes everyone from every people who does right (cf. Acts 10, 34 f.) – even if they are homosexual? If this were the case, Christians should abandon the plan to proceed against the civil partnership in Saul-like zeal. After all, the noisy and very aggressive criticism on the Christian side of the debate could need some of Gamaliel's serenity, who was able to say: "Pay close attention to what you are about to do [...]. If this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail, but if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them, or you may even be found fighting against God" (Acts 5, 35.38f.).

Of necessity, a great deal of "Jebusites" are tolerated in Christian communities because the Church is too weak to clarify all sorts of ambiguity and misconduct.

Why do they not accept the "Gibeonites" i.e. homosexuals asking after the standards for a partnership as set by Christianity and seeking admission to an "alliance"? They do that even though they have to put up with inferior rights compared to conventional marriages (like the Gibeonites, by the way, who did not have the same rights as native-born Israelites.) Isn't the Gibeonites' pursuit of coming closer and assimilating into Israel presumably the reason why they were spared among all Canaanites and were allowed to remain in the midst of the heart of Israel? Why is the high similarity to marriage seen as the particular piece of evidence for godlessness?

Wouldn't it have been more appropriate for a government that is explicitly not obligated to Christian rules to follow the French example and to design a new, modern relationship model as the French "pacte civile" in which commitment can be lived more easily and temporarily limitable but under certain advantages – corresponding the trend of our time?

But oh no – the "old" model of marriage, which is orientated towards the Christian example, is nominated the measure of all things instead! Neither is it expanded to all possible population groups who want to live in a closer relationship for a certain amount of time or for a certain reason but instead it stays restricted to people who want to be one body, one spirit, one soul for their lives – or at least want to try that.

However the Civil Partnership Act did not only come under fire from Christians. Criticism also arose from some homosexual organizations. The course of time has

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naturally entailed that lots of homosexuals unavoidably lead their lives outside conservative conventions. They already considered the construct of marriage bourgeois and outdated and it was no good to them. All the more, its equivalent – Civil Partnership – is no good in their eyes. Rather they fear that it will become the foundation for a classification of "better" and "worse" gays.

Will Christians elevate registered partnerships to be the only "acceptable" homosexual lifestyle one day? I believe that this question might actually stir certain people's emotions in the future. Surely the civil partnerships are much too "young" at this point in time and the acceptance of homosexuals in conservative congregations is too low in order to make more than speculations. I personally have no need nor right to stipulate a certain lifestyle to anyone.

For homosexual Christians who approve of marriage because of their faith, I consider the Registered Partnership a good possibility to perceive an institution that corresponds to their orientation and that they – like heterosexual Christians – understand as concluded not only before worldly offices and the public but also before God.

This being the case, the Registered Partnership Act is not bound to blaze the way for Sodom and Gomorrha just as little as the Gibeonites spread idolatry in Israel. The Registered Partnership Act does not expose traditional marriage to some kind of randomness. From my own experience, many non-Christians thus don't view the conclusion of same-sex unions as a disparagement of marriage at all.

Quite the opposite: They regard it rather as a complete affirmation of the model "long-lasting relationship" therefore even as an encouragement to dare such a relationship within marriage. As a Christian you can reject civil partnerships for reasons of conscience. The usual socio-cultural, politico-economic and moral counterarguments that are put forward will, however, turn out to be wrong in my opinion. In this mostly very emotionally-led debate, Christians who reject the Civil Partnership Act have to put up with the question whether God is in their corner that naturally at all. After all, He is the god who mercifully tolerated the Gibeonites' move into God's people and who put up His sanctuary on the Gibeonites' land of all places. And this God is the same yesterday and today.