

**Judges 20:1 ¶** Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beersheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the LORD in Mizpeh.

**Judges 20:2** And the chief of all the people, *even* of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword.

**Judges 20:3** (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpeh.) Then said the children of Israel, Tell *us*, how was this wickedness?

This chapter continues the narrative from the previous chapter.

Men of Israel from Dan to Beersheba (the whole land from north to south) and from Gilead (east of Jordan) met before the LORD in Mizpeh, a town close to Shiloh and Gibeah. The leaders from every tribe were there along with 400,000 footmen armed with swords. They asked for a personal testimony of what had happened.

It is noted that the people of Benjamin heard about the gathering at Mizpeh but chose not to participate.

**Judges 20:4** And the Levite, the husband of the woman that was slain, answered and said, I came into Gibeah that *belongeth* to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to lodge.

**Judges 20:5** And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and beset the house round about upon me by night, *and* thought to have slain me: and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead.

**Judges 20:6** And I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel: for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel.

**Judges 20:7** Behold, ye *are* all children of Israel; give here your advice and counsel.

The Levite, the “husband” of the victim was there to testify and gave the following summary. He declared that he and his concubine had come to Gibeah of Benjamin to seek lodging for the night. He related how the men of Gibeah came to the house of his host that night planning to kill him; instead they raped his concubine to the point of death. He then took the woman and cut her up into pieces to send to each of the tribes and make them aware of the heinous and vile crime done by the men of Benjamin. He then called for them to pass judgment.

Notice that he didn’t confuse the facts and include the shameful way that he and the old man had responded to the men. He didn’t include the fact that he had forced the woman out of the house and enjoyed a good nights rest while she was being so wickedly abused. He didn’t include the fact that he had shown no compassion toward her the next morning.

**Judges 20:8** And all the people arose as one man, saying, We will not any *of us* go to his tent, neither will we any *of us* turn into his house.

**Judges 20:9** But now this *shall be* the thing which we will do to Gibeah; *we will go up* by lot against it;

**Judges 20:10** And we will take ten men of an hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and an hundred of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand, to fetch victual for the people, that they may do, when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel.

**Judges 20:11** So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man.

The people responded with a unified voice that none would return home until Gibeah and the men of Benjamin had been judged. They cast lots to determine who would provide food and provision for the troops and who would fight to exact judgment.

**Judges 20:12** ¶ And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness *is* this that is done among you?

**Judges 20:13** Now therefore deliver *us* the men, the children of Belial, which *are* in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel:

The first thing they did was to send a note throughout the tribe of Benjamin asking for their cooperation in seeing that justice was done. They wanted them to deliver the guilty men over so that they could be put to death and rid Israel of their evil. The people of Benjamin refused.

Adam Clarke makes a good observation: “By not delivering up those bad men, they in effect said: ‘We will stand by them in what they have done, and would have acted the same part had we been present.’ This proves that the whole tribe was excessively depraved.”

**Judges 20:14** But the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel.

**Judges 20:15** And the children of Benjamin were numbered at that time out of the cities twenty and six thousand men that drew sword, beside the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered seven hundred chosen men.

**Judges 20:16** Among all this people *there were* seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair *breadth*, and not miss.

**Judges 20:17** And the men of Israel, beside Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these *were* men of war.

The men of Benjamin responded by gathering in force in Gibeah to meet the men of Israel in battle. They gathered an army of 26,000 swordsmen plus 700 chosen men of Gibeah that were lefthanded and could sling a stone with great accuracy.

JFB offers this insight: “The sling was one of the earliest weapons used in war. The Hebrew sling was probably similar to that of the Egyptian, consisting of a leather thong, broad in the middle, with a loop at one end, by which it was firmly held with the hand; the other end terminated in a lash, which was let slip

when the stone was thrown. Those skilled in the use of it, as the Benjamites were, could hit the mark with unerring certainty. A good sling could carry its full force to the distance of two hundred yards.”

The troops of Israel gathered against the men of Benjamin numbered 400,000 swordsmen that were experienced in war. The odds were heavily in their favor.

**Judges 20:18 ¶ And the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God, and said, Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up first.**

**Judges 20:19 And the children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah.**

**Judges 20:20 And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah.**

**Judges 20:21 And the children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah, and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites that day twenty and two thousand men.**

The men of Israel went to the house of God and asked who should lead the way into battle. The LORD answered, “Judah.”

It should be noted that though they sought the LORD’s direction, they did not ask the LORD if they were doing the right thing.

The men of Israel got up the next morning and positioned themselves outside Gibeah. They fought against Benjamin and ended up losing 22,000 men.

**Judges 20:22 And the people the men of Israel encouraged themselves, and set their battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day.**

**Judges 20:23 (And the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until even, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother? And the LORD said, Go up against him.)**

**Judges 20:24 And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day.**

**Judges 20:25 And Benjamin went forth against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again eighteen thousand men; all these drew the sword.**

Though they experienced a great setback, the men of Israel took heart and made ready for battle again. This time they went before the LORD to ask if they were doing the right thing to fight against Benjamin. The LORD answered that they should fight against them. When they met in battle the second day, the Israelites lost another 18,000 men—for a total of 40,000 lives lost in two days.

**Judges 20:26 ¶ Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and**

fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

**Judges 20:27** And the children of Israel enquired of the LORD, (for the ark of the covenant of God *was* there in those days,

**Judges 20:28** And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the LORD said, Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand.

Amazingly, though they were quite discouraged, they once again presented themselves in tears before the LORD at the house of God. It seems that the ark and the tabernacle were at Mizpeh or that they had gone to Shiloh. Some translations even identify the “house of God” as Bethel. They fasted and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. It seems that this time they showed repentance and humility as well as grief as evidenced by their fasting and offerings.

It is noted that Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, was still the high priest at that time. Once again the men of Israel asked the LORD if they should fight Benjamin or not. The LORD answered that they should fight and that he would give them the victory the next day.

This represents a principle repeated in the New Testament. Doing what is right before the LORD often involves struggle and perseverance through hard times.

*John 16:33 “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”*

*Romans 8:35–37 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”*

*1 Corinthians 15:57–58 “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”*

**Judges 20:29** And Israel set liers in wait round about Gibeah.

**Judges 20:30** And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times.

**Judges 20:31** And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, *and* were drawn away from the city; and they began to smite of the people, *and* kill, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to the house of God, and the other to Gibeah in the field, about thirty men of Israel.

**Judges 20:32** And the children of Benjamin said, They *are* smitten down before us, as at the first. But the children of Israel said, Let us flee, and draw them from the city unto the highways.

**Judges 20:33** And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baaltamar: and the liers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, *even* out of the meadows of Gibeah.

This time the men of Israel prepared to ambush the men of Gibeah. They attacked for the third time drawing the men of Benjamin out of the city. The men of Benjamin killed about 30 men and gained more confidence thinking that they would gain another victory. The men of Israel appeared to be retreating, and the men of Benjamin pursued them. Once they reached Baaltamar, a second group waiting in ambush in this area jumped out to attack the men of Benjamin.

**Judges 20:34** And there came against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was sore: but they knew not that evil *was* near them.

**Judges 20:35** And the LORD smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and an hundred men: all these drew the sword.

**Judges 20:36** So the children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten: for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they trusted unto the liers in wait which they had set beside Gibeah.

**Judges 20:37** And the liers in wait hasted, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the liers in wait drew *themselves* along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword.

The ambush troops consisted of 10,000 chosen men and fighting was fierce. The men of Benjamin had no idea of the evil in their future. The LORD killed 25,100 swordsmen of Benjamin that day. When they saw that they were beaten, they turned back to Gibeah. The ambush troops finished them off and killed everyone in Gibeah.

**Judges 20:38** Now there was an appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liers in wait, that they should make a great flame with smoke rise up out of the city.

**Judges 20:39** And when the men of Israel retired in the battle, Benjamin began to smite *and* kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons: for they said, Surely they are smitten down before us, as *in* the first battle.

**Judges 20:40** But when the flame began to arise up out of the city with a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and, behold, the flame of the city ascended up to heaven.

**Judges 20:41** And when the men of Israel turned again, the men of Benjamin were amazed: for they saw that evil was come upon them.

These verses add a bit of information. The men of Israel had arranged a signal between the main forces and the ambush troops. When they saw smoke rising up from the city, they were to reverse their retreat and charge into battle. Once the men of Gibeah looked back and saw the smoke of the burning city, they knew they had no chance.

**Judges 20:42** Therefore they turned *their backs* before the men of Israel unto the way of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them; and them which *came*

out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them.

**Judges 20:43** Thus they inclosed the Benjamites round about, *and* chased them, *and* trode them down with ease over against Gibeah toward the sunrising.

**Judges 20:44** And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these *were* men of valour.

**Judges 20:45** And they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon: and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men; and pursued hard after them unto Gidom, and slew two thousand men of them.

**Judges 20:46** So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword; all these *were* men of valour.

In light of their certain defeat, the men of Benjamin ran east into the wilderness, but the Israelites pursued them and killed them. Benjamin lost 18,000 of their best warriors. The rest headed toward Rimmon and another 5,000 were killed by their pursuers. They continued chasing the remaining Benjaminites to Gidom and killed another 2,000. Benjamin lost 25,000 men that day.

The NIV Commentary explains the number discrepancies as follows: "The total slain, given more exactly as 25,100 in v. 35, still does not seem to account for the 26,700 mentioned in v. 15. If only 600 survived (v. 47), 26,100 must have been killed. The other 1,000 men apparently died during the first two days of fighting, where the author of Judges only supplies the number of Israelites who were killed. The last 600 men of Benjamin found refuge at the rock of Rimmon, a conical limestone hill surrounded by wadis and located about four miles east of Bethel."

**Judges 20:47** But six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months.

**Judges 20:48** And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of *every* city, as the beast, and all that came to hand: also they set on fire all the cities that they came to.

There were 600 men that escaped to the rock Rimmon in the desert, and they stayed there for four months. The men of Israel then turned back to attack the other cities of Benjamin and killed all the people and animals they encountered. They set fire to all the cities.

Because the people of Benjamin had chosen to fight their kinsman rather than hand over those guilty of such evil, the whole tribe was held accountable and deserving of judgment. Sadly, this almost resulted in the elimination of that tribe.