

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 20

- Vv. 1-11 *All Israel aroused.* The people were knit together as one man to punish the wicked men of Gibeah. A total of 400,000 men were in the armed force, and 40,000 were assigned to the task of supplying the army with victuals. All these Israelites demanded that the people of Benjamin either punish the men of Gibeah themselves or deliver them into their hands for judgment.
- Vv. 12-30 *Benjamin victorious in the first two battles.* The Israelites asked God who among them should go up first against Benjamin, and Judah was selected. The men of Benjamin destroyed 22,000 men of Israel. In the second battle 18,000 men of Israel were slain.
- Vv. 31-48 *Benjamin nearly annihilated.* All but 600 men of Benjamin fell in the final battle. The men of Israel set an ambush around Gibeah so that when the men of Benjamin came out to fight against Israel, the men of Israel fled before them as they had done in the first two battles. Then the men lying in wait went into the city of Gibeah and set it on fire. The site of the city burning so distracted the men of Benjamin that they began to flee before the armies of Israel. As a result, 25,000 men of Benjamin were killed. Only 600 men who fled to Rimmon were left of the fierce tribe.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *Sin is a reproach to a nation (Proverbs 14:34).* The men of Israel were of one mind and soul in the matter of punishing the criminals at Gibeah. There was no voice crying for allowing the men to go free. The popular conscience was aroused. The Israelites knew that the wickedness in their midst would destroy them all if allowed to continue.
2. *The Lord orders the battle.* Each time before Israel went up against the men of Benjamin, they inquired of the Lord. In the first battle God told Judah to lead. Even when they were beaten, the Israelites asked if they should go to battle again. When God told them to go against Benjamin even though they had been defeated, they again went to battle. Those nations who go to war should ask the Lord about their affairs before they take the field.
3. *Right will triumph in the end.* Israel lost 40,000 men and was humiliated in two stunning defeats. Led as they were by the Lord and unwavering as they were in their purpose, they were finally victorious. Law and order may be challenged in a nation, but society will perish unless those who are on the side of right remain steadfast in their purposes.

CHAPTER TWENTY

The War Against the Benjamites 20:1-14

Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, with the land of Gilead unto the Lord in Mizpeh.

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.

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?

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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

10 And we will take ten men of a hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel and a 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.

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

20:12-14 STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

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

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:

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.

1. *Where was Mizpeh? 20:1*

Mizpeh is known as *Neby Samuel*, not far from Ramah, and is visible from Jerusalem. It is a poor village seated on an elevated ridge. Gibeah would be plainly visible from Mizpeh, as it was the first high hill east of Mizpeh. As the men of Gibeah looked directly westward, they would see Mizpeh as the highest hill directly west of their situation. Thus the armies of Israel were in plain site of the men of Benjamin as they gathered to defend the men of Gibeah.

2. *Did all of Israel's army come out to battle? 20:2*

When the men of war were counted in Numbers, chapter one, there were 603,550 men twenty years of age and older. As they paused before crossing Jordan into Canaan, they were counted again. At that time Israel's men of war totaled 601,730 (Numbers 26) . On many occasions it was necessary for some of the men eligible for battle to stay behind to care for the women, children, flocks and fields. This must have been the case in this instance, since 400,000 would hardly be all of the men old enough to go to war.

3. *Did the Levite give a true account of the crime at Gibeah? 20:4, 5*

As the men of Israel came together to avenge the crime committed in Gibeah, they asked how the wickedness occurred. The Levite, the husband of the woman who was slain, told them how, when he came to Gibeah to find lodging, the men of Gibeah rose against him besetting the house round about by night. He also said that they intended to slay him. In the account of the events recorded in chapter 19, no mention is made of their intention of killing him; but their evil treatment of him might have resulted in this tragic end for the Levite. They did kill his concubine. All the other details fit, and the evidence was properly presented to the men of Israel for their judgment.

4. *Why did Israel decide to go against the men of Benjamin by lot? 20:9*

The men of Israel outnumbered the men of Benjamin many times. In the mustering of the troops there are 400,000 men of war listed in Israel. Only 26,000 armed men were found in Benjamin. The men of Israel must have felt it was unnecessary for all of the soldiers to go into this battle. Furthermore, they wanted the leading of the Lord and asked for Him to indicate which one of the tribes should take the lead in the battle.

5. *Why were so many needed to prepare victuals? 20:10*

Forty thousand men were assigned to the task of providing the necessary provisions for the rest of the fighting men. Such an arrangement is not at all uncommon. When David went to battle against the Amalekites, he took only two-thirds of his men into the actual battle. The rest of them were weary and were left behind to guard the baggage (I Samuel 30:10). On one occasion

Moses called for only 1,000 men from each of the tribes of Israel to go to war (Numbers 31:4). In hardly any situation would people be able to sustain an army in the field unless there were those who were assigned to the task of seeing that they had the necessary supplies. It would probably take a tenth of the able-bodied men to keep the rest of the men in fighting shape.

6. Why would the men of Benjamin not surrender the men of Gibeah? 20:13

They let their love of their tribesmen overpower their sense of right and justice. Repeated mention is made of the men of Benjamin coming out of the cities" (vv. 14, 15). Some Bible students have gathered from this that the men of Benjamin were rulers who had settled in towns and subdued the Canaanites who settled as dependents in the villages. Still others believe that the Benjaminites formed military brotherhoods living unmarried in the towns. Those who take this position believe this accounts for the abominable crime to which the inhabitants were addicted. It is further held that the Benjaminites then defended these sinful unmarried brotherhoods of military men. Such inferences are extremely uncertain, but at any rate the men of Benjamin seemed fiercely determined to protect the criminals in Gibeah.

7. From what cities did the men of Gibeah gather? 20:14

When territory was assigned to the men of Benjamin, their land included such villages and cities as Luz, AtarothAddar, Beth-Horon the Upper and Beth-Horon the Lower, Kiriath-jearim, and Jebus or Jerusalem. Still others were Jericho, Beth-Hoglah, Emak-Keziz, Beth-Arbah, Zemarim, Geba, Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth, Mizpeh, Chepirah, Mozah, Rekem, Irpeel, Gibeath and Gibeah. In fact, twenty-six different cities are listed in Joshua, chapter 18.

Seven Hundred Left-handed Men Chosen 20:15, 16

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.

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

8. Did all the men of Benjamin go to battle? 20:15

When the men of Israel were counted before they crossed Jordan into Canaan, there were 45,600 men twenty years of age and over in Benjamin. Earlier there were 35,400 men able to go to war (Numbers, chapter one) . Since these men had been subject to attacks from the nations to the east, it is quite possible that their ranks were already reduced to near 27,000 by the time the civil war occurred. It would appear that nearly all their men of military age went out to fight this battle.

Israel Defeated in Two Battles 20:17-23

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

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.

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

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.

15:21-23 STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

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.

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.

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.)

9. *Why was Judah selected to lead in the battle? 20:18*

Judah had led in the exodus. Her standard went first whenever the armies of Israel marched. It was the tribe of Judah who led in the conquest and settlement of Canaan (Judges, chapters one and two). It would have been very unusual for another tribe to have taken the lead in this instance, since Judah had repeatedly been chosen for such responsibilities. The people of Israel asked God to indicate which tribe was to go first, and God again chose Judah.

10. *Why was Israel defeated when God approved? 20:21-25*

God was testing the devotion of the other tribes to their sense of duty. Furthermore, some significance is to be attached to the absence of any expression of genuine sorrow as they began such an unpleasant but necessary task as punishing the criminals at Gibeah. Before the first battle, they "asked counsel of God" (verse 18). Before the final battle "all the children of Israel, and all the people" (verse 26) went up and came to the house of God. On this occasion they wept, offering burnt-offerings and peace offerings. There must have been sin in the minds of the people of Israel therefore as they went into the first

two battles. They had gone in their own self confidence; but when they finally trusted the Lord completely, He gave them victory.

The Defeat of the Benjamites 20:24-48

24 And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day,

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.

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.

27 And the children of Israel inquired of the Lord, (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days,

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 tomorrow I will deliver them into thine hand.

29 And Israel set Tiers in wait round about Gibeah.

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.

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.

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.

33 And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baal-tamar: and the Tiers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, even out of the meadows of Gibeah.

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.

35 And the Lord smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and a hundred men: all these drew the sword.

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 Tiers in wait which they had set beside Gibeah.

37 And the Hers in wait hasted, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the Tiers in wait drew themselves along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword.

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

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.

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.

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

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.

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

44 And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these were men of valor.

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.

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 valor.

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

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.

11. Where was the house of God? 20:26

The house of God was established in Shiloh. Joshua made arrangements for its being there. Repeated reference is made to Israel assembling at Shiloh to worship. It was to Shiloh that Elkanah went up to worship (I Samuel 1:3). While

worshiping there, Hannah, Samuel's mother, prayed;

and Eli heard her petition (I Samuel 1:9-18). The Tabernacle remained at Shiloh until the time of the Philistines' capturing the Ark as recorded in I Samuel, chapter four. Shiloh lay several miles north of Gibeah and Mizpeh, and the assembling of the people at Shiloh indicates some must have left the battlefield at Gibeah.

12. At what period of time did this civil war occur?

20:28

Phinehas, son of Eleazar, was still alive. Eleazar, the son of Aaron, had succeeded Aaron as high priest when Aaron died in the fortieth year of the exodus (Numbers 20:24). Eleazar died soon after the death of Joshua as is recorded in Joshua, chapter twenty-four (verse 33). Since the events described in this second appendix to the book of Judges occurred within the lifetime of Phinehas, they must have transpired long before the era of Samson recorded in Judges, chapters 13-16. One might readily expect them to have occurred during the time of Othniel or Ehud, the first two judges of Israel.

13. Along what road did Israel flee? 20:31

The battle was pitched before Gibeah and the main body of the soldiers of Israel came from Mizpeh to the west. The forces of Israel appear to have been divided and some fled to the right and others to the left along the road which led from Gibeah to Shiloh. The main road of travel in Israel from ancient times until the present runs northwest from Jerusalem past Gibeah, Ramah, Bethel to Shechem between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. All along this road Israel's soldiers fell in the battle.

14. Where was Baal-Tamar? 20:33

The name in the Hebrew language signifies a place where there was a palm tree. Such a place existed in the days of Eusebius. It was a small place in the neighborhood of Gibeah still carrying the name of Bethamar. Of course, the word *Baal* denotes the pagan god by that name. Some

believe that the palm tree under which Deborah sat (Judges 4:5) came to be a place of false worship where people would honor Baal, hence the name was given Baal-Tamar. A site named Erhah some three miles northeast of Jerusalem is selected as a probable site.

15. Who were the 10,000 chosen men of Israel? 20:34

The ten thousand chosen men must have been the men lying in wait around Gibeah. As the battle transpired, the main body of Israel fled along the road; and then these men placed in ambush came out of hiding. By such a stratagem the children of Israel caught the men of Benjamin between two strong forces. The tide of battle turned, and Israel won in the final skirmish.

16. Does verse 35 describe a separate battle? 20:35

The result of the battle is summarized immediately. The author gives the result at once before entering more minutely into the actual account of the battle itself. The details are given in verses 36-46 in a series of explanations. Again in verse 46 the results are mentioned. Radical critics try to delete verse 35 and call it an interpolation. Some believe that it was written by a different author and inserted at this point; but such arguments overlook the normal Hebrew mode of writing history, which resulted in a summary being given as soon as possible with details following afterwards.

17. Which way did the men of Benjamin flee? 20:42

The men of Benjamin fled eastward "toward the sun-rising." This territory is described as wilderness (verse 42). The territory is mountainous and barren at the present time. It would be very difficult for an army to pitch a battle, and this explains why 18,000 men fell at one point, 5,000 at another, and 2,000 at still a later point. In this rugged terrain Joshua hid two ambushes of soldiers when Israel

fought and defeated the men of Bethel and Ai.

18. How are the numbers in verses 15 and 46 to be reconciled? 20:15, 46

In verse 15 it is said that there were 26,000 men of Benjamin who "drew sword." These were in addition to the inhabitants of Gibeah who were numbered at 700 chosen men. In addition there were 700 chosen men left-handed within this total who could sling a stone at an hair's breadth and never miss (verse 16). When the final count of casualties was made, a total of 25,000 men had fallen in Benjamin. Still only 600 remained (verse 47). Some Bible students seeing these numbers are puzzled to account for the additional men, since there were at least 26,700 to begin with and only 600 left when 25,000 casualties were mentioned. It is apparent, however, that some men from Benjamin must have fallen in the first two battles. It is hardly likely that 40,000 men in Israel would be killed without some casualties in Benjamin. These other men must have already fallen in battle.

19. Where was Rimmon? 20:47

The rock of Rimmon to which the Benjaminites fled was in the wilderness, the desert which rises from Jericho on the way to the mountains of Bethel (Joshua 16:1). An Arab village of Rammun still stands about fifteen miles north of Jerusalem. It is on a summit of conical limestone mountain and is visible in all directions. Such a high place would make it possible for a band of six hundred men to see the approach of an army from any direction. It was here that the few remaining soldiers of Benjamin fled for their last stand.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 20

1. Where did Israel assemble before going up to Gibeah?
2. How many soldiers were numbered in Israel?
3. How many armed men were in Benjamin?
4. How many chosen men were in Gibeah?

JUDGES

- 5, Who did God say should go up first out of Israel to fight Benjamin?
- 6, How many men were slain in the first battle?
7. How many were slain in the second battle?
8. Who was high priest in Israel in those days? 9. How many men of Benjamin were killed in the final battle?
- 10, How many escaped to rock Rimmon?