

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

5-22-24

Judges 20

The Nation Gathers At The Levite's Request – Verses 1-2

¹ Then all Israel from Dan to Beersheba and from the land of Gilead came together as one and assembled before the LORD in Mizpah. ² The leaders of all the people of the tribes of Israel took their places in the assembly of God's people, four hundred thousand men armed with swords.

20:1 Dan was the northernmost city in Israel, and Beersheba, the southernmost. The two were often mentioned together as a reference to the entire region occupied by Israel. **So all the children of Israel came out:** It was a positive sign to see Israel gather for such a reason. This showed that they were willing to deal with the problem of sin in their midst. It seems that the crime of Gibeah shocked the conscience of Israel. Today it seems that the crime at Gibeah would be material for tabloid news, cable television, daytime talk shows, and talk radio – more than a national call to righteousness and repentance.

20:2 The leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves: Deuteronomy 13:12-18 instructed Israel how to deal with such abominations among them. It said they must first test the truth of the accusations. If the charges were true, they must then utterly destroy those who committed such an abomination.

The Levite Describes The Abuse And Murder Of His Concubine – Verses 3-7

³ (The Benjamites heard that the Israelites had gone up to Mizpah.) Then the Israelites said, "Tell us how this awful thing happened." ⁴ So the Levite, the husband of the murdered woman, said, "I and my concubine came to Gibeah in Benjamin to spend the night. ⁵ During the night the men of Gibeah came after me and surrounded the house, intending to kill me. They raped my concubine, and she died. ⁶ I took my concubine, cut her into pieces and sent one piece to each region of Israel's inheritance, because they committed this lewd and outrageous act in Israel. ⁷ Now, all you Israelites, speak up and tell me what you have decided to do."

20:3-7 In reporting the events in Gibeah, the man conveniently left out the fact that he had handed over his concubine to satisfy the mob's demands. He wanted justice for the threats made against himself rather than placing any value on the life of the woman or holding himself partly responsible for her death. How easy it is to give only partial facts or twist events to remove our own culpability when we are seeking to shift blame to someone else. This incident reveals the depths of perversion and violence that develop when a culture abandons God's ways.

Preparations For War Made – Verses 8-11

⁸ All the men rose up together as one, saying, "None of us will go home. No, not one of us will return to his house. ⁹ But now this is what we'll do to Gibeah: We'll go up against it in the order decided by casting lots. ¹⁰ We'll take ten men out of every hundred from all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred from a thousand, and a thousand from ten thousand, to get provisions

for the army. Then, when the army arrives at Gibeah in Benjamin, it can give them what they deserve for this outrageous act done in Israel.” ¹¹ So all the Israelites got together and united as one against the city.

20:8-11 So all the people arose as one man, that they may repay all the vileness that they have done in Israel. This was an encouraging response in a very dark time. They came together in unity and decided to bring justice to the people of Gibeah. This was extreme, but a valid and proper fulfillment of God’s command to Israel Deuteronomy 13:12:18.

Benjamin’s Help Sought And Not Given – Verses 12-17

¹² The tribes of Israel sent messengers throughout the tribe of Benjamin, saying, “What about this awful crime that was committed among you? ¹³ Now turn those wicked men of Gibeah over to us so that we may put them to death and purge the evil from Israel.” But the Benjamites would not listen to their fellow Israelites. ¹⁴ From their towns they came together at Gibeah to fight against the Israelites. ¹⁵ At once the Benjamites mobilized twenty-six thousand swordsmen from their towns, in addition to seven hundred able young men from those living in Gibeah. ¹⁶ Among all these soldiers there were seven hundred select troops who were left-handed, each of whom could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. ¹⁷ Israel, apart from Benjamin, mustered four hundred thousand swordsmen, all of them fit for battle.

20:13 Perhaps the Benjamite leaders had been given distorted facts about the serious crime in their territory, or perhaps they were too proud to admit that some of their people had stooped so low. In either case, they would not listen to the rest of Israel and hand over the accused criminals. They were more loyal to their own tribe than to God’s law. By covering for their relatives, the entire tribe of Benjamin sank to the level of immorality demonstrated by the criminals. Through this act, we get a glimpse of how thoroughly the nation’s moral fabric had unraveled. The time period of the judges ends in a bloody civil war that sets the stage for the spiritual renewal to come under Samuel.

20:13-17 But the children of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brethren: The other tribes of Israel did the right thing in asking the tribe of Benjamin to deliver up the men who committed this crime. They sought to justly resolve the crisis without full war. But the tribe of Benjamin committed a great sin by putting loyalty to their tribe before obedience to God’s Law. Modern followers of God can make the same mistake today when they put the interests of their own nation before the interests of the Kingdom of God. It is important for Christians to remember that they are citizens of the Kingdom of God first (Philippians 3:20).

20:16 Seven hundred select men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair’s breadth and not miss: The tribe of Benjamin not only failed to support the just cause of the other tribes, they actively resisted the other tribes with an assembled army. The army included this division of seven hundred select men. And not miss: The Hebrew word translated miss is literally sin. This illustrates the principle that the word “sin” literally means to “miss the mark” – whether you are off by an inch or a yard.

The First Day Of Battle – Israel Is Defeated Before Benjamin – Verses 18-21

¹⁸ The Israelites went up to Bethel and inquired of God. They said, “Who of us is to go up first to fight against the Benjamites?” The LORD replied, “Judah shall go first.” ¹⁹ The next morning the Israelites got up and pitched camp near Gibeah. ²⁰ The Israelites went out to fight the Benjamites and took up battle positions against them at Gibeah. ²¹ The Benjamites came out of Gibeah and cut down twenty-two thousand Israelites on the battlefield that day.

20:18 Went up to the house of God to inquire of God: In the first battle, Israel sought the LORD – yet they were defeated. We can speculate that though they inquired of God, they still trusted in the might of their army and in the goodness of their cause, but not in the LORD. Perhaps there was something wrong in the way that Israel sought the Lord before this battle; or, it is also just as likely that this was simply part of God’s plan to discipline and correct His disobedient nation.

20:21 The children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, and on that day cut down to the ground twenty-two thousand men of the Israelites. This was a staggering, severe loss in the first battle of this small civil war. After this first day of battle it seemed that single tribe of Benjamin might successfully resist the other tribes of Israel.

Israel Seeks God After The First Defeat – Verses 22-23

22 But the Israelites encouraged one another and again took up their positions where they had stationed themselves the first day. 23 The Israelites went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and they inquired of the LORD. They said, “Shall we go up again to fight against the Benjamites, our fellow Israelites?” The LORD answered, “Go up against them.”

20:22 The men of Israel, encouraged themselves and again formed the battle line: This was a wonderful reaction in the midst of such a dark event. These soldiers did not lose hope; like David in 1 Samuel 30:6, they strengthened themselves in the LORD and moved forward.

20:23 Then the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening: To their credit, the children of Israel did not stop seeking the LORD after the first disaster in battle. They properly humbled themselves before God and sought Him regarding the next battle.

On The Second Day Of Battle Israel Is Defeated Before Benjamin Again – Verses 24-25

24 Then the Israelites drew near to Benjamin the second day. 25 This time, when the Benjamites came out from Gibeah to oppose them, they cut down another eighteen thousand Israelites, all of them armed with swords.

20:24-25 So the children of Israel approached the children of Benjamin on the second day: This would not be an easy or a quick war. After a first day of heavy losses, the children of Israel were willing to keep fighting. The loss on the second day of battle was also severe. This shows that even though the tribes of Israel sought the LORD and fought in a just cause, it was still a very difficult struggle. There was a great cost for them to pay in doing what was right.

Israel Repents Before God After The Second Defeat – Verses 26-28

26 Then all the Israelites, the whole army, went up to Bethel, and there they sat weeping before the LORD. They fasted that day until evening and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the LORD. 27 And the Israelites inquired of the LORD. (In those days the ark of the covenant of God was there, 28 with Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, ministering before it.) They asked, “Shall we go up again to fight against the Benjamites, our fellow Israelites, or not?” The LORD responded, “Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands.”

20:26 Went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening: God allowed the two days of defeat for the purpose of bringing Israel low. They needed to be humbled, and these days of defeat compelled them to humble themselves.

20:26-27 God used this to humble the whole nation. They had to understand that the horror of the crime at Gibeah was not merely the result of the sin of one group of men, or one city, or even one tribe. The whole nation had to be humbled because they first thought that the sin problem was only in Benjamin. Israel had to see that that nation as a whole had a sin problem. After the first failure, Israel was sorry and wept. But it was only after the second failure that they put their repentance into action by fasting and made a sacrifice for sins. This is the only place in Judges where the ark of the covenant is mentioned. This probably indicates how seldom the people consulted God: Sorrow and weeping are not enough if they are not matched by real repentance and taking care of the sin problem through sacrifice – the sacrifice of the cross.

20:28 Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand. God didn't want the two days of humbling to make Israel think that they could never win. They were encouraged to go out tomorrow and trust God's promise.

Third Day Of Battle – Victory For Israel Over Benjamin And Gibeah – Verses 29-39

29 Then Israel set an ambush around Gibeah. **30** They went up against the Benjamites on the third day and took up positions against Gibeah as they had done before. **31** The Benjamites came out to meet them and were drawn away from the city. They began to inflict casualties on the Israelites as before, so that about thirty men fell in the open field and on the roads—the one leading to Bethel and the other to Gibeah. **32** While the Benjamites were saying, “We are defeating them as before,” the Israelites were saying, “Let's retreat and draw them away from the city to the roads.” **33** All the men of Israel moved from their places and took up positions at Baal Tamar, and the Israelite ambush charged out of its place on the west of Gibeah. **34** Then ten thousand of Israel's able young men made a frontal attack on Gibeah. The fighting was so heavy that the Benjamites did not realize how near disaster was. **35** The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel, and on that day the Israelites struck down 25,100 Benjamites, all armed with swords. **36** Then the Benjamites saw that they were beaten. Now the men of Israel had given way before Benjamin, because they relied on the ambush they had set near Gibeah. **37** Those who had been in ambush made a sudden dash into Gibeah, spread out and put the whole city to the sword. **38** The Israelites had arranged with the ambush that they should send up a great cloud of smoke from the city, **39** and then the Israelites would counterattack. The Benjamites had begun to inflict casualties on the Israelites (about thirty), and they said, “We are defeating them as in the first battle.”

20:29-34 Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways: The strategy used by the tribes of Israel against Gibeah was remarkably similar to the strategy used at Ai (Joshua 8). Perhaps they got this strategy by reading the writings of Joshua and Moses; this may reflect that they returned to God's word in the course of their repentance.

20:35 The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel: “These words briefly recall the real meaning of the awful judgment that fell upon Benjamin. It was the stroke of God.”

Third Day Of Battle – Victory For Israel Over Benjamin And Gibeah – Verses 40-48

40 But when the column of smoke began to rise from the city, the Benjamites turned and saw the whole city going up in smoke. **41** Then the Israelites counterattacked, and the Benjamites were terrified, because they realized that disaster had come on them. **42** So they fled before the Israelites in the direction of the wilderness, but they could not escape the battle. And the Israelites who came out of the towns cut them down there. **43** They surrounded the Benjamites, chased them and easily overran them in the vicinity of Gibeah on the east. **44** Eighteen

thousand Benjamites fell, all of them valiant fighters. ⁴⁵ As they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, the Israelites cut down five thousand men along the roads. They kept pressing after the Benjamites as far as Gidom and struck down two thousand more. ⁴⁶ On that day twenty-five thousand Benjamite swordsmen fell, all of them valiant fighters. ⁴⁷ But six hundred of them turned and fled into the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, where they stayed four months. ⁴⁸ The men of Israel went back to Benjamin and put all the towns to the sword, including the animals and everything else they found. All the towns they came across they set on fire.

20:46-48 The effects of the horrible rape and murder should never have been felt outside the community where the crime happened. The local people should have brought the criminals to justice and corrected the laxness that originally permitted the crime. Instead, first the town and then the entire tribe defended this wickedness, even going to war over it. To prevent unresolved problems from turning into major conflicts, firm action must be taken quickly, wisely, and forcefully before the situation gets out of hand.

20:48 The tribe of Benjamin eventually recovered from this slaughter. Saul, Israel's first king, was from this tribe (1 Samuel 9: 21). So were Queen Esther (Esther 2: 5-7) and the apostle Paul (Romans 11:1). But the tribe was always known for being smaller than the rest (as in Psalm 68: 27).