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## Judges 20

(2020)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

## Judges 20

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All Israel assembles before the LORD at Mizpah.

The Levite tells Israel what happened to his abused murdered concubine.

26,700 men of Benjamin prepare to go to war against Israel.

400,000 men of Israel prepare to go to war against Benjamin.

Benjamin destroys 40,000 Israelites, Israel destroys 25,000 Benjamites.

600 Benjamites hide themselves at the rock of Rimmon for four months.

Israel destroys all Benjamites they found in their city and towns.

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### INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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The Israelites forgot the LORD, and worshipped false gods, so the LORD removed His protection and blessings from them, which resulted in them being oppressed by their enemies and crying to the LORD for deliverance. In answer to their prayer the LORD raised up twelve Judges to deliver them, but not Judges as we think of Judges today or preachers of righteousness, but rather military leaders and fighters, that led Israel to triumph over their enemies and delivered them from their wicked behaviour. Most suppose that Samuel (considered by some to be the last Judge) wrote some parts of the book, while other parts were written at a later time by someone of his generation or a later generation. The primary purpose of the Judges is best articulated in the following words, "The LORD raised up Judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. (Judges 2:16). For an overview of the entire book see the title:

- Overview of the Book of Judges (at the beginning of the index).

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### THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

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in the city Gibeah certain worthless Benjamites surrounded a house and beat on the door, demanding the owner of the house give them his guest, (a Levite man) that they may know him. The house owner refused to give him the man, so they took the Levite's concubine, and knew her, and abused her all night. In the morning the Levite finds his concubine dead, he takes her home, cuts her up into twelve pieces and sends a piece to each of the twelve tribes, to stir them up gather them together to bring justice and punishment upon the men who brutally and cruelly abused the Levite's concubine.

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### JUDGES 20:1-3

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- **Judges 20:1-3:** Then all the people of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, and the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah.  
<sup>2</sup> And the chiefs of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 men on foot that drew the sword. <sup>3</sup> (Now the people of Benjamin heard that the people of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the people of Israel said, "Tell us, how did this evil happen?"

This chapter picks up where the last chapter ended (see the title: Previous Chapter) (above). The words, the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah, does not mean that the tabernacle and the ark was taken to Mizpah, for the following verses show that the tabernacle was at

Bethel, which literally means House of God. Rather the words, "the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD," means that all the tribes came together in the name of the LORD, it could be likened to a group of people gathering in the open countryside to worship the LORD, being written, they came before the LORD. the tribes are not coming to the high priest etc., but to counsel together, especially the chiefs of all the tribe to discuss what action they should take. The following facts support this idea:

1. Bethel is 17km north of Jerusalem and Mizpah is about 12km north of Jerusalem, which means Bethel and Mizpah were very close to each other, so there would be no need to move the Tabernacle from Bethel to Mizpah as some believe they did.
2. God was not only present in the place where the ark and tabernacle were, but also in the following places:
  - In the assemblies of His people.
  - In all places where God's name is recorded. (Exodus 20:24).
  - Where two or three are gathered together in His name.
  - In the praises of His people.

**From Dan to Beersheba**, from the city Dan, which was in the most northern parts of the land of Canaan to Beersheba, a city in the most southern part, which included all the tribes in the land of Canaan, who all, excepting Benjamin, assembled.

**The land of Gilead:** located on the other side of the Jordan River, inhabited by the two tribes of Reuben and Dan, and the half tribe of Manasseh.

**The congregation was gathered together:** is an expression that embraces the whole community of the Israelite people. The expression was especially familiar to the Israelites in the desert.

**The congregation was gathered together as one man:** meaning they gathered together with one consent and with unanimity and peace, in one place, at the same time, as if only one man was standing and only one had been sent. They were all gathered together as one man, because of the immense impact upon their emotions and their hearts when they heard of the horror the Levites concubine had suffered. A sense disgust and abhorrence that such a wicked thing should be done in the land of Israel brought together a national assembly that was summoned by the chiefs of all the people from all parts of the land.

**Mizpah:** was probably chosen for the following reasons:

- It was a convenient location for all tribes on both sides of the River Jordan to meet.
- It was near the city where the Levites concubine was brutally raped and murdered, according to some only about eight miles from the city of Gibeah.

Messengers would have been sent to the chief men of each tribe to rally their tribes to gather and meet at Mizpah.

**The people of Benjamin heard that Israel had gone up to Mizpah:** (v3), the children of Benjamin heard of the call to gather with the other tribes, but did not send a party, perhaps because of pride, stubbornness and self-confidence, because they were loathed to give up any of their brethren to justice and punishment, even though it would have been the right thing to do, or they trusted in the strength of their own armies and presumed the other tribes would not attack them.

**The people of Israel ask, “how did this evil happen?”** (v3), meaning the chiefs of the tribes ask the Levite, his servant and the old man who he stayed with, to explain to them all the events that led up to the Levites concubines brutal and cruel death. This together could have been held in the following two ways:

1. Whoever knew anything concerning the shocking abuse and horrific death could stand up and share what they saw or knew and explain it to all gathered around them.
2. They focused solely on the Levite, his servant and the old man, and asked them to share all that took place.

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## THE LEVITES TESTIMONY

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### JUDGES 20:4-7

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- **Judges 20:4-7:** And the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, “I came to Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night. <sup>5</sup> And the leaders of Gibeah rose against me and surrounded the house against me by night. They meant to kill me, and they violated my concubine, and she is dead. <sup>6</sup> So I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel, for they have committed abomination and outrage in Israel. <sup>7</sup> Behold, you people of Israel, all of you, give your advice and counsel here.”

**The leaders of Gibeah:** (v5) literally, the lords/chiefs of Gibeah, it would be wrong of us to suppose that they were heathen inhabitants of the town, even though they behaved as if they were. One of the reasons the Benjamites did not gather with the rest of the tribes could very possibly be because it was their leaders that were at fault, supporting this idea is the fact the Levite says they were Leaders of Gibeah (v5), and if they were not the leaders that were at fault, it is hardly likely they would have been willing to stand against all eleven tribes, rather than give up a few lawless and wicked men to justice.

**They meant to kill me:** (v5) the Levite husband gives a brief description of the tragic barbaric abuse his concubine suffered; from his testimony we can conclude one or all of the following three things:

1. The Levite changed some of the detail of the assault, because the men wanted to rape him not kill him, (Judges 19:22-25), but, being a Levite, he may have felt confessing such a thing was too shameful to admit.
2. He leaves out the fact he handed her over to the men, so it maybe that he coloured the whole story in a way that presented himself in a better light.
3. The words, “they meant to kill me” (v5), means there first intention was to rape him and if he resisted kill him, had he not given them his concubine, so his only choices were to submit to their sexual lust, which he refused to do or deliver up his concubine which he was forced to do.

Whatever the case, it appears we must accept from his account that force was used against him which he could not resist, because his servant and the home owner (an old Ephraimite) were with him and would have supported his testimony.

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### JUDGES 20:8-10

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- **Judges 20:8-10:** And all the people arose as one man, saying, “None of us will go to his tent, and none of us will return to his house. <sup>9</sup> But now this is what we will do to Gibeah: we will go up against it by lot, <sup>10</sup> and we will take ten men of a hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred of a thousand, and a thousand of ten thousand, to bring provisions for the people, that when they come they may repay Gibeah of Benjamin, for all the outrage that they have committed in Israel.”

The Levites testimony (v5) stirs a common sentiment in all who hear it and produces in the emotions and feelings a sense of intense disgust abhorrence and vengeance.

**All the people arose as one man:** (v8) this extraordinary manifestation of agreement and unity shows, that though there may have been various disorders amongst the tribes the people, at a core level were bonded as one people and one nation. Added to this, they were all bound to their national covenant with God, for after hearing of such an abominable abuse of the Levites concubine they now felt the necessity of wiping out this enormous stain on their character as God's people. All tribes agreed that the people of Gibeah should be punished according to the punishment such a horrendous and cruel sin deserved.

But, under the law, before such hostility and vengeance was to be carried out, messengers were despatched throughout the whole territory of Benjamin, giving them the opportunity to immediately surrender the guilty offenders. Should such an offer be rejected, the Benjamites then made themselves an enemy of those offering the opportunity to hand over the guilty amongst them.

It should not be supposed that all the people of the tribe of Benjamin were indifferent to the atrocious of the crime that had been committed within their territory, for it is certain many would have been equally disgusted as we are, which makes a sane mind wonder, "why would they not rise up and hand over those that were guilty?" Following are two possible reasons:

1. Their sense of pride and patriotism for their tribe, was offended by the hostile protest of the other tribes rising up against them.
2. The guilty men were the leaders of the tribe (or at least some of them), and they are the ones who have the power and authority over the armies and make the decisions what the tribe was to do.

Clearly the passions of both sides were inflamed, however, before the LORD there is no doubt the Benjamites would have been held guilty and brought upon themselves great judgment because of the resistance they assumed.

**Ten men of a hundred:** (v10) in order to make it possible for the armies of Israel to go to war and do to the men of Gibeah what their wickedness deserved, every tenth man throughout all the tribes of Israel from each tribe were appointed to provide provisions and food for the whole army (40,000 in all) except for the tribe of Benjamin that did not join with them. The provision of food was as follows:

- 10 men were to provide food for 90 men.
- 100 men were to provide food for 900 men.
- 1000 men were to provide food for 9000 men.

Which means 40,000 men were to provide food for 360,000 men, because all came up from their homes without any provisions, and they could not know how long they might be away, when they came to Gibeah of Benjamin, all who did go to battle would be provided for in this way. Since it seems it was the leaders of the Benjamites that were guilty of this crime, they of course are not going to hand themselves over to the other tribes to be judged and punished. Now here is the sadness of this, all the sorrows and deaths that follow in the remaining verses could have been avoided if the tribe of Benjamin had punished those who were involved in this abominable shameful sin.

- **Judges 20:11-13:** So all the men of Israel gathered against the city, united as one man.  
<sup>12</sup> And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, “What evil is this that has taken place among you? <sup>13</sup> Now therefore give up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and purge evil from Israel.” But the Benjaminites would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the people of Israel.

They were all gathered together as if they belonged to one body, their mind, heart and spirit were united in thought and attitude and all had the same mind to see justice done, or lose their lives in the cause.

**Now, therefore, give up the men:** (v13) that we may put them to death as they deserved, because they were guilty of adultery and murder. They gave them the opportunity to join the nation in condemning them and punishing them accordingly, so that evil would be put out of Israel, both the sin and the guilt, which all Israel would be involved in if they did not punish those who committed such an inhuman atrocity. It would be like a person seeing a friend rape and murder a woman, and do nothing at all to bring justice for the woman, in these types of cases both are held guilty in a court of law and punished accordingly. Besides bringing the guilty to justice and punishment being the right thing to do, following are some other reasons it was the duty of Israel to put away evil from Israel:

- To prevent the spread of such a sinful evil in the nation.
- To prevent punishment coming upon them from God, if they let such wickedness freely pass.
- To uphold God’s holy name and prevent outside nations from mocking the God of Israel, saying “their God approves of rape and murder.”

**The children of Benjamin would not hearken:** (v13) foolishly and wrongly the people of Benjamin did not hearken to the council of the other tribes, but instead refused to give up the loathsome and murderous men of Gibeah, that had been guilty of gross wickedness. It seems the Benjamin were motivated by the same tribal spirit of unity, as the other eleven tribes were, but the focus of the tribe of Benjamin was not what was best for all, but solely to defend members of their tribe, which would be a good thing, if the members they were defending were innocent, but these are not, they are loathsome murders of the worst kind (Scripture calls them worthless fellows) (v13). The tribe of Benjamin should have given them up to be judged and punished, even it meant a civil war amongst them. Their determination to hold out against united Israel was a manifestation of courage foolishly displayed for an extremely wrong and bad cause.

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## JUDGES 20:14-15

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- **Judges 20:14-15:** Then the people of Benjamin came together out of the cities to Gibeah to go out to battle against the people of Israel. <sup>15</sup> And the people of Benjamin mustered out of their cities on that day 26,000 men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who mustered 700 chosen men.

Twenty-six thousand men plus seven hundred, totals 26,700, which some say creates a degree of confusion for the following reasons, verse thirty-five states that Israel slew 25,100 Benjaminites and verse forty-seven states that 600 survived at the rock of Rimmon, which totals 25,700, which means there is 1000 men missing. However, the following gives us some answers, why this may be so:

It very likely that the other 1000 men were left in some of their cities, town or villages that were set on fire and not found (v48) or the other 1000 men were killed in the first two battles, since it is unreasonable to think that the Benjaminites had won the victory with no one killed, or to think that the 25,100 were all slain in the third battle. Added to this it’s unlikely the writer expects these figures to be taken as exact figures, especially since of the thousands that were killed there would always be a certain number not found and not counted.



- **Judges 20:16-17:** Among all these were 700 chosen men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. <sup>17</sup> And the men of Israel, apart from Benjamin, mustered 400,000 men who drew the sword; all these were men of war.

**The Hebrew and Egyptian 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.

**Everyone could sling stones at a hair breadth,** and not miss, this clearly is a hyperbolic (i.e., exaggeration) expression, signifying that they could sling a stone with great exactness. In these ancient days when no-one had guns, this skill was a great advantage in battle. Ponder for a moment, 700 highly skilful men rapidly firing stones at a charging army that could instantly kill a man. David had great confidence in his slingshot and, clearly was highly skilled with it, if David could take out a giant with a slingshot, we can only imagine how many common men could be taken out:

- David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. (1 Samuel 17:49).

Since stones were plentiful and free, the sling was a natural weapon for the poor, especially since they could not pay a blacksmith to shape them a sword or shield. Slingshot used for weapons of war, were so sophisticatedly made that the stone came with such force it had the power to kill a man and practice made those who used them so expert that the stones they aimed at would hit their target with great exactness.

**Seven hundred chosen lefthanded men:** (v16) the advantage of firing a slingshot with the left hand was that it enabled the slinger to strike his enemy on the right side, which was their undefended side. It is also not necessary to think that they were biologically left-handed, but were skilled with both their left hand and right hand, which made them great warriors, since they could skilfully wield a weapon in both hands. Having seven hundred men with this skill and courage, was most likely what gave the Benjamites the courage to go up against such a vast multitude and undertake a war against their brethren.

**NOTE:** it's interesting to notice the Benjamites warlike attitude was foretold by Jacob when he spoke of the character and fortune of each tribe, for he said of them, "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf" (Gen. 49:27), the wolf is an undeterred, fearless creature.

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## **ISRAEL WENT UP TO BETHEL AND INQUIRED OF GOD**

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### **JUDGES 20:18-20**

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- **Judges 20:18-20:** The people of Israel arose and went up to Bethel and inquired of God, "Who shall go up first for us to fight against the people of Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Judah shall go up first." <sup>19</sup> Then the people of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah. <sup>20</sup> And the men of Israel went out to fight against Benjamin, and the men of Israel drew up the battle line against them at Gibeah.

Having heard that the Benjaminite armies were gathered together to defend the men of Gibeah, the children of Israel arose and went up to Bethel, meaning they sent certain men of Israel in the name of all, from Mizpah to Bethel (which were relatively close to each other) to inquire of

the LORD. The children of Israel made the right and proper choice in deciding to go against the Benjamites to avenge the Levites wife and put evil out of Israel. They probably hoped the threat of the eleven tribes gathered together would have been enough to motivate the Benjamites into handing over the guilty murderous men, which would have been the right thing for them to do and would have also avoided thousands of lives been taken in the following war, but the Benjamites foolishly refused. Now that war was inevitable, Israel goes up to the Bethel to enquire of the LORD which tribe should go against the Benjamites first.

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## THE TABERNACLE AT BETHEL OR SHILOH

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Some feel the words, "The people of Israel arose and went up to Bethel and inquired of God" (v18), should be understood to refer to Shiloh rather than Bethel, and support this idea with the following two facts, Bethel means House of God, and the tabernacle was generally known to be at Shiloh. Perhaps the following will help clarify some of this confusion.

It is true Shiloh was the place where God first made his name dwell:

- Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first. (Jer. 7:12).

And in the book of Judges, we read:

- So they set up Micah's carved image that he made, as long as the house of God was at Shiloh. (Judges 18:31).
- So they said, "Behold, there is the yearly feast of the LORD at Shiloh, which is north of Bethel." (Judges 21:19).

However, the following verse shows that the tabernacle was at Bethel, at different times:

- Then you shall go on from there farther and come to the oak of Tabor. Three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you there, one carrying three young goats, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a skin of wine. (1 Sam. 10:3).

The expression, "going up to God," means going up to the tabernacle and Ark of God, or the House of God. Since the tabernacle was moveable, it is possible that at various times, as the occasion required, it was moved to where the Judge resided, or to where the congregation assembled, especially since we read in the book of Samuel that he judged Israel all his life going on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah (1 Sam. 7:15-16), which means that it is possible, they relocated the tabernacle and ark year by year to be where the Judge resided. At this present time the tabernacle was at Bethel, we know this because in the following verses we read:

- Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. <sup>27</sup> And the people of Israel inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days. (Judges 20:26-27).

Naturally the high priest with the ephod would move with the tabernacle and the Ark, and take with him the jewelled breastplate and the Urim and Thummim that was placed in it. Since Shiloh was never to be a permanent place for the tabernacle, it is easy to accept it being moved to Bethel at this time, especially since the name Bethel means, House of God, and it was a very convenient place for the tribes to gather together at this time.

**Bethel, Shiloh and Jerusalem:** were all sites for the Tabernacle, one following the other, after the Israelites entered the Holy Land to conquer it. It was the portable sanctuary that for 369 years was the epicentre of religious observance and sacrifices as the Jewish people travelled. The final place for the Tabernacle (actually, a replacement Tabernacle built by David) was in Jerusalem—where the Temple was later built by his son Solomon.



**The people of Israel went up to Bethel and inquired of God:** (v18)  
Now that the Benjamites have refused to hand over the murderous sexual abusers, Israel inquires of the LORD, which would have taken place before Phinehas the high priest (Judges 20:28), no doubt by the use of the Urim and Thummim.

**The Urim, Thummin:** it is important to note, the Urim and Thummim were not the jewelled breastplate of judgment, but something that was placed into it as the following verse shows:

- And in the breastpiece of judgment you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart, when he goes in before the LORD. Thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the LORD regularly. (Exodus 28:30).

It is not known exactly what the Urim and Thummin were, which means the following notes are not dogmatic, but simply present the most common thoughts amongst commentators concerning the Urim and Thummin.

**How the Urim and Thummim functioned:** following are the two most common ways various commentators suspect the Urim and Thummin may have been used:

1. Some suppose, they were placed in the breastplate, so that whenever the high priests entered the presence of the LORD they would be over his heart. In this way the high priest would always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the LORD."
2. Others suspect the high priest carried in his breastplate the Urim and Thummin perhaps two sticks or two stones, one white and the other black. When Israel was preparing for battle, and desired to know God's will, they would place the sticks or stones in a sacred box or bag, then draw one out, if it was black, they would not go to battle, likewise, if it was white, they would proceed into battle believing they were in the will of God.

However, the following verse:

- And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets. (1 Sam. 1 28:6).

Makes it clear that a definite answer was not always obtainable, so it may not have been as simple as drawing out a black or white stone, and Moses never used the Urim and Thummim, which would indicate that they were given for a certain time in Israel's history for the high priest to aid those who could not find God's will and guidance any other way.

**The Urim and Thummim faded from use:** The Old Testament indicates that the Urim and Thummin faded from use during the early days of Israel's monarchy, this may be due to the following fact: During the monarchy God installed prophets to communicate God's messages to the courts in Jerusalem and Samaria. It seems that prophets who revealed God's word to the king replaced the Urim and Thummin, by which God previously revealed His mind to the priest. The only mention of the Urim and Thummin after the Babylonian exile is the following verse showing that Ezra was still using the Urim and Thummin to determine the ancestry of the priests who returned from the exile:

- The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until there should be a priest to consult Urim and Thummim. (Ezra 2:63).

After this the Bible never mentions the Urim and Thummin again, they were a gift from God to assist His people during a certain time in their history.

**Which of us shall go up first to the battle?** (v18) They ask which tribe should be first to go against the Benamites, perhaps to prevent any contentions. Notice they do not ask God for His help, most likely because they were confident of success, because they trusted in their vast numbers. Judah was the first tribe that pitched their standard around the tabernacle, and the first to march in their journeys in the wilderness, and being a powerful and warlike tribe were the first to go up and fight the Canaanites,

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## THE FIRST BATTLE

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### JUDGES 20:21-23

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- **Judges 20:21-23:** The people of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and destroyed on that day 22,000 men of the Israelites. <sup>22</sup> But the people, the men of Israel, took courage, and again formed the battle line in the same place where they had formed it on the first day. <sup>23</sup> And the people of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until the evening. And they inquired of the LORD, "Shall we again draw near to fight against our brothers, the people of Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Go up against them."

The entire armed force of Benjamin assembled to save their wicked town from assault and destroyed twenty-two thousand men (v21) this immense slaughter shows the extraordinary fierceness of the battle. Following are some possible reasons that the Benjaminites had such a great victory:

- Like many of the towns of Palestine the city of Gibeah was built on a hill, which not only made Gibeah difficult for an attacking army to gain entry, but also gave great advantage to the defenders, who fought from much higher ground.
- The fact they had 700 highly skilled men with slingshots would have given them a great advantage, especially since they could slay many from the walls of the city with their very powerful slingstones.
- Israel trusted in their own strength and vast numbers rather than in God.

**Destroyed twenty and two thousand:** (v21) Israel was fighting for a good cause, and God bid them go, it may seem strange that they received such a great defeat, but it should be noted, He did not promise them success. Perhaps because they did not inquire of Him from the very beginning, especially since it was their brothers that they were going to war against, but determined themselves to go, however, this is only speculation. There is no doubt the Benjaminites deserved punishment, but it is possible had Israel inquired of God from the very beginning, He may have given them other options, similar to what he did with Gideon, or sent messengers to the Benjaminites in His Name, which may have convicted them to give up the murderous men, without shedding the blood of their brethren and their own tribe.

**Possible reasons for Israel's great defeat:** we would be safe to suppose that Israel, having such a vast army did not expect such an enormous defeat. Following is what some Jewish writers think maybe possible reasons for their defeat:

- It was on account of their idolatry, that though they were zealous to revenge the Levite's concubine, and remove such iniquity from Israel, they did not have the same zeal to put away their own idolatry. consider the following case of the Danites, who had set up the images of Micah and by doing so spread idolatry throughout Israel.

**The story of Micah, his idols and the tribe of Dan:** a Levite from Bethlehem came to the house of Micah in the hill country of Ephraim. Micah invited him to stay and be his priest, he accepted the invitation and Micah ordained him, believing the LORD would prosper him if he had a

Levite as priest. (Judges 17:7-13). Later, the people of Dan came to Micah's house, they took his priest, his ephod, Micah's household gods, a carved image, and a metal image? (Judges 18:13-18). They then took possession of the city of Laish, and renamed it the city of Dan. Here they set up Micah's gods and made Jonathan and his sons' priests to the tribe of Dan in the city of Dan. (Judges 18:30-18).

**The men of Israel again formed the battle line:** (v22), meaning they regathered their armies in the same place as they had for the first battle, ready for a second attack. But before attacking they again go up to the House of the LORD where they weep before Him (v23), not that the whole army went, for they are formed together ready for the second battle, but a deputation of them. One reason for their massive defeat, maybe that they wept not so much for their own sins and the national idolatry and sins of the tribes, but rather for their defeat and loss of so many lives, which is natural and good, however, they should also have repented and lamented for their sins and the national idolatry amongst the tribes.

**Shall we go again to fight against Benjamin?** (v23) because of the massive loss they suffered they naturally seemed to have some doubt as to whether they should go again to war against the tribe of Benjamin, especially as they were their brothers they were going against, so they ask the LORD, not who should go up first, as they had done previously, but whether they should go at all, and again they do not ask for His assistance or success, however, He does answer their question with a "yes go again," because Benjamin was clearly in the wrong, but there is no promise victory.

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## THE SECOND BATTLE

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### JUDGES 20:24-25

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- **Judges 20:24-25:** So the people of Israel came near against the people of Benjamin the second day. <sup>25</sup> And Benjamin went against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed 18,000 men of the people of Israel. All these were men who drew the sword.

**The statement, "Israel came against Benjamin the second day,"** (v24) does not mean the day after the first battle, because they had spent at least one full day weeping and inquiring of the LORD (v23) between the two battles, which means the words, "the second day," refers to the second time they went to battle.

Since the Benjamites had slain 22,000 men of Israel in the first battle plus another 18,000 here making a total of 40,000 it is almost certain they were confident of another great victory. Israel's second defeat, like the first may have been due, to overweening confidence in their vast numbers and carelessness in planning their attack, because in these two battles the eleven tribes lost 40,000 men, which was 13,300 more than the entire Benjamite army for it was only 26,700. Following are four possible and practical reasons for Israel's enormous defeat and massacre:

1. The eleven tribes were so confident of victory they went into battle without any strategic planning.
2. The 700 skilful men with slingshots having the advantage of being on higher ground were able to take down many of the men of Israel, before they even got within fighting distance.
3. Gibeah, being on a hill, was difficult of access to an attacking army, and gave great advantage to the Benjamites, who fought from higher ground.
4. Champions on the city walls with their slingstones were able to take down great numbers of those attacking.

This battle is thought by some to be the battle Deborah refers to in the following verse:

- When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates. Was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel? (Judges 5:8).

And is what is certainly intended in:

- From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. Shall not the war against the unjust overtake them in Gibeah? (Hosea 10:9).

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## ALL ISRAEL GOES UP TO BETHEL

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### JUDGES 20:26-28

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- **Judges 20:26-28:** Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. <sup>27</sup> And the people of Israel inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, <sup>28</sup> and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days), saying, "Shall we go out once more to battle against our brothers, the people of Benjamin, or shall we cease?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand."

This time the entire army with all other people, go up to the tabernacle of God in Bethel (v26) and sat before the Ark, the symbol of the LORD'S presence; which shows that the high priest was there, because no one else could appear before the Ark for it was in the Most Holy Place.

**Wept before the LORD:** (v26) afflicting their bodies by fasting all day was a demonstration of humbleness and repentance. The following verses show that these types of national fasts were called in times of great affliction and that sunset was the regular time for ending them:

- The men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening (i.e., sunset) and I am avenged on my enemies." So none of the people had tasted food. (1 Samuel 14:24).
- They mourned and wept and fasted until evening (i.e., sunset) for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. (2 Samuel 1:12).

It appears that Israel has now become aware that when they do come before the LORD they should always repent of their individual and national sins throughout the land and not just ask for what they want. For now, they offer burnt-offerings, symbolising absolute self-dedication, to make atonement to God for their own sins, and national sins, and offer Him sincere prayers for His forgiveness and peace-offerings, symbolising worship and thanksgiving.

**Shall we go out once more to battle against Benjamin:** (v28), this inquiry is far humbler than the previous two for the following reasons:

1. At the first inquiry they only asked what tribe should go up first, presuming that they should go to war and that they would have success, probably because of their vast numbers.
2. The second time, they only inquired if it was God's will to have them go again and fight, again presuming they would have victory.
3. The third time they ask whether they should continue in the war or stop altogether, they left the whole matter in God's hands and truly humbled themselves, which no doubt is why God gave them a promise of victory.

**Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron:** (v28) Phinehas's standing before the ark was what the high priests would do when they inquired of

the LORD for anything by the Urim and Thummim. For the ark was a symbol of the Shechinah glory, and presence of the divine Majesty. For further information concerning the Urim and Thummin see the title:

- The Urim and Thummin, following (Judges 20:18-20) (above).

The presence and services of Phinehas the high priest gives us some insight into the time that these events took place in history, which is not in the order that they are recorded here (i.e., after the death of Samson), for the mention of Phinehas shows that the date of the concubine's murder and this war took place long before his Samsons death, probably not long after the death of Joshua. If this was not the case it would mean Phinehas must have been more than three hundred years of age, which is not likely (though some say, the Jews write that he lived three hundred years). For further information concerning the tabernacle see the title:

- The Tabernacle at Bethel or Shiloh, following (v18-20) (above).

After having humbled themselves by prayer and fasting and offering sacrifices, asking the LORD, "Shall we go out once more to battle against our brothers, the people of Benjamin, or shall we cease?" The LORD assures them of victory.

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## THE THIRD BATTLE

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### JUDGES 20:29-31

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- **Judges 20:29-32:** So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah. <sup>30</sup> And the people of Israel went up against the people of Benjamin on the third day and set themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times. <sup>31</sup> And the people of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city. And as at other times they began to strike and kill some of the people in the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, and in the open country, about thirty men of Israel. <sup>32</sup> And the people of Benjamin said, "They are routed before us, as at the first." But the people of Israel said, "Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways."

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**Gibeah in the open field:** (v31) distinguishes it from the city of Gibeah situated on the hillside.

**Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah:** (v29) and others to draw the men out from the city of Gibeah. After two defeats, Israel now plans a strategy (similar to that employed in the capture of Ai. Josh. 8:9) in this third battle. Had they taken more care and planned their battles from the beginning it is very likely they would have not lost such a vast number of armed men. The Israelites pretended to flee in fear from the Benjamites to draw them out of the city. This strategy would have the double effect of allowing the ambush to cut off the Benjamites retreat, and of dividing their army at the point where the roads branched off. Pretending to be afraid of them, Israel fled, this inspired the Benjaminites to pursue after them, which was Israel's plan, since it drew them out from the city to the dividing highways, so that one part of Israel's army could take one road, and the other part the other road the plan worked for they divided the army of the Benjaminites that pursued after them, and once they were a great distance from the city of Gibeah, the fleeing men of Israel turned and slayed the Benjamites. During this time thirty Israelites were killed. (v31).

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## THE THIRD BATTLE CONTINUED

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### JUDGES 20:33

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- **Judges 20:33:** And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place and set themselves in array at Baal-tamar, and the men of Israel who were in ambush rushed out of their place from Maareh-geba (*even* out of the meadows of Gibeah in KJV).

**BAAL-TAMAR:** (meaning Lord of the Palm), is only mentioned here, it most likely derived its name from the famous, and well-known Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel (Judges 4:5), since the highway (Judges 20:31) along which the Israelites enticed the Benjamites to pursue them, leads straight to Ramah, which is only a mile from where the two highways divided. In their pretended fleeing the Israelites got as far as Baal-tamar, then saw the smoke-signal rising up from the city and turned and attacked the Benjamites pursuing them.

**Out of their place from Maareh-geba (the meadows of Gibeah in KJV):** the word Maareh-geba carries the following meanings, caves, plateau, barren hill and clearing it is from one of or all of these places in Gibeah that those who laid in ambush hid in, and at the right time arose and attacked the Benjamites, detailed in (v37-40).

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## THE THIRD BATTLE CONTINUED

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### JUDGES 20:24-36

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- **Judges 20:34-36:** And there came against Gibeah 10,000 chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was hard, but the Benjaminites did not know that disaster was close upon them. <sup>35</sup> And the LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel, and the people of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day. All these were men who drew the sword. <sup>36</sup> So the people of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. The men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin, because they trusted the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah.

This was a third division of Israel's army, different both from the ambush and the army that was fighting at Baal-tamar. The general account stated in (v35) is followed by a detailed narrative of the battle, which is continued to the end of the chapter.

**NOTE:** verse thirty-five states Israel destroyed 25,100 Benjamites, but when the figures of each battle are added up, they only total 25,000, which means there is a 100 missing, which shouldn't surprise us since the battles were so wide spread that it is unlikely, they found everyone who had been killed. Added to this it's unlikely the writer expects these figures to be taken as exact figures, especially since of the thousands that were killed, there would always be a certain number that were not found and not counted.

**A BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE:** prior to this battle the Benjaminites were always victorious, even though they were fewer in number. After such unexpected massive defeats, the armed men of Israel, carefully plan this final battle and set-in place statistical schemes and tactical ambushes that would manoeuvre the Benjaminites to exactly where they wanted them, and by doing so they destroyed 25,100 Benjaminites in one day, and won the battle, because of their clever planning. Yet it is stated "the LORD defeated Benjamin," (v35). The victory is ascribed to the LORD, not to them. It is a principal in Christian life that God works with us as we work with Him, we are to do what is in our power to do and trust He is working with us.

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## THE THIRD BATTLE CONTINUED

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### JUDGES 20:37-40

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- **Judges 20:37-40:** Then the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush moved out and struck all the city with the edge of the sword. <sup>38</sup> Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in the main ambush was that when they made a great cloud of smoke (great flame in KJV) rise up out of the city <sup>39</sup> the men of Israel should turn in battle. Now Benjamin had begun to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel. They said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle." <sup>40</sup> But when the signal began to rise out of the city in a column of smoke, the Benjaminites looked behind them, and behold, the whole of the city went up in smoke to heaven.



This is a detailed description of the battle plan briefly mentioned in previous verses. It's easy to image the horror, terror and confusion of the Benjamites when they looked behind them and saw their city, going up in flames, and the excitement of the Israelites when they clearly saw that their plan had worked.

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## THE THIRD BATTLE CONTINUED

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### JUDGES 20:41-46

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- **Judges 20:41-44:** Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were dismayed, for they saw that disaster was close upon them. <sup>42</sup> Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel in the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them. And those who came out of the cities were destroying them in their midst. <sup>43</sup> Surrounding the Benjamites they pursued them, and trod them down with ease as far as opposite Gibeah toward the sunrising. <sup>44</sup> Eighteen thousand men all of Benjamin fell, all of them men of valour. <sup>45</sup> And they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon. Five thousand men of them were cut down in the highways. And they were pursued hard to Gidom, and 2,000 men of them were struck down. <sup>46</sup> So all who fell that day of Benjamin were 25,000 men who drew the sword, all of them men of valor.

The men of Benjamin were dismayed at this unexpected danger surrounding them on every side, their great disappointment and sudden change of events at the sight of flames rising up from their city behind them, and at the Israelites fiercely turning to fight them, when they thought they were sure of victory, as they previously had at other times. As they fled up and down the highways the Israelites pursued after them killing five thousand for, they were determined to leave no survivors.

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## THE THIRD BATTLE CONTINUED

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### Judges 20:47-48

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- **Judges 20:47-48:** But 600 men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon and remained at the rock of Rimmon four months. <sup>48</sup> And the men of Israel turned back against the people of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, the city, men and beasts and all that they found. And all the towns that they found they set on fire.

In verse thirty-five the number given is 25,100. Then, verse forty-four to forty-six give the details of the loss on that day firstly 18,000, secondly 5,000, and thirdly 2,000, giving a total of 25,000. But in verse fifteen we are told the Benjamites numbered 26,700 and 600 escaped to the rock of Rimmon, which means that 1,100 are unaccounted for. Following are some possible reasons for this:

- Those who fell in the first two battles are not counted.
- The numbers given here and in verse thirty-five are restricted to those who fell on the third day only.
- The loss is stated here in round numbers and is confined only to that of the third day.
- A thousand had fallen during the two previous battles. (Judges 20:15).

**Rimmon:** The Rimmon in focus here is a steep hill not far from Gibeah, and fifteen miles north of Jerusalem, six miles east of Bethel (towards the sun-rising). Here the six hundred men hid themselves for four months. They were able to gather in provisions which they could do now that the heat of the battle was over, and the Israelites were not pursuing after them. The following verse shows that Saul had the same number of men in a cave at Enged.,

- Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah in the pomegranate cave at Migron. The people who were with him were about six hundred men, (1 Samuel 14:2).

Saul is said to be under a pomegranate tree or in a pomegranate cave, very likely it was a cave surrounded by pomegranate trees, which were common in Palestine. It is very possible the rock Saul remained in was the same rock these 600 survivors hid themselves at for both are said to be near Gibeah.

**They pursued hard to Gidom:** (v45) Gidom is mentioned nowhere else, but was obviously located somewhere close to Rimmon. Here Israel slew two thousand Benjaminites, which was 2000 more besides the 5000 previously mentioned.

**Israel struck with the sword all they found:** (v48) the dreadful horror contained in this verse is the absolute extermination of a whole tribe of Benjamin, men, women, children, cities and cattle, with the exception of 600 fugitives. The thought of the horror and terror of thousands of poor women and innocent children ruthlessly being butchered in cold blood in this devastating war between brother Israelites is extremely appalling to our minds, as it should be. The whole tribe was treated without mercy as though they had been worshippers of other gods, for in (Deut. 13:12) the LORD said to Israel:

- You shall surely put the inhabitants of that city to the sword, devoting it to destruction, all who are in it and its cattle, with the edge of the sword. <sup>16</sup> You shall gather all its spoil into the midst of its open square and burn the city and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God. It shall be a heap forever. It shall not be built again. (Deuteronomy 13:15-16).

And just as the inhabitants of Jericho were mercilessly exterminated:

- And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent. (Joshua 6:17).
- Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword. (Joshua 6:21).

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And as the inhabitants of Ai were devoted to destruction:

- And all who fell that day, both men and women, were 12,000, all the people of Ai. <sup>26</sup> But Joshua did not draw back his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had devoted all the inhabitants of Ai to destruction. (Joshua 8:25-26).

They had devoted to destruction all who did not go up to Mizpeh, when they were summoned (Judges 21:5) which none of the Benjamites did, it was for this reason they also slew the men, women, and children of Jabesh-gilead (Judges 21:10). But, no one would deny this was a most inhuman barbarity, contrary to the laws of God, which had forbidden the innocent to be punished with the guilty as the following verse shows:

- Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin. (Deut. 24:16-22).

The final verse of this book states:

- In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25).

The fact everyone did right in their own eyes, shows that much of this brutal, horrific and unnecessary slaughter, (especially of the innocent) was not of the will of God, but of man.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*

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