

# Judges 20 - The Levite Explains the Crime; Call to Arms; Holy War Against Benjamin

III. Depravity in Israel thereby necessitating the need for a King (Judges 17:1—21:25)

(2) Moral disintegration (19:1—21:25)

(B) Civil war: 11 tribes versus Benjamin (20:1-48)

## Judges 20

(B) Civil war: 11 tribes versus Benjamin (20:1-48)

**1** Then all the sons of Israel **from Dan to Beersheba**, including the **land of Gilead**, came out, and the **congregation** assembled **as one person** to the LORD at **Mizpah**.

**1** Then all the sons of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, came out, and the congregation assembled as one man to the Lord at Mizpah.

**1** Then the entire Israeli nation—from Dan to Beer-sheba, including the territory of Gilead—came out for war. The army assembled as one united force to God at Mizpah.

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

- The Levite's gruesome announcement produced the results that he wanted: leaders and soldiers from the entire nation, except Benjamin (v3) and Jabesh-gilead (21:8-9), came together at Mizpah to determine what to do

- "...from Dan to Beersheba" - from the northern to southern boundaries of Israel; a stereotyped expression that represents the entire nation of Israel

- "...the land of Gilead" - refers to all the Trans-jordanian tribes; only the city of Jabesh-Gilead did not join the fight (21:8-9)

- "...congregation" - *kahal*, used in the Torah for the gathering of the people to worship God; here, it implies that the tribes were getting ready for holy war (Cf. Joshua 22:12)

- "...as one person" - emphasizes the unity of the 11 assembled tribes (Cf. v2,8,10,11; 21:5)

— This level of tribal unity was only possible in the early history of the Judges; toward the latter part of this era, the tribes were fighting each other (Cf. Jephthah and the Ephraimites)

- "...Mizpeh" - Tell en-Nasba, eight miles north of Jerusalem and only four miles north of Gibeah (not the Mizpah in Gilead; Cf. 10:17; 11:29)

- Keep in mind that this event probably took place early in the period of the Judges, at a time when the nation wasn't under foreign oppression
- Though they had no central government, the tribes were still united and able to muster troops and wage war together

2 And the leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Israel, took their stand in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand foot soldiers who drew the sword.

2 The chiefs of all the people, *even* of all the tribes of Israel, took their stand in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 foot soldiers who drew the sword.

2 The officials of the entire nation, including every tribe of Israel, took their stand in the assembly of the people of God: 400,000 foot soldiers, all of them expert swordsmen.

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.

- Because of the heinous act perpetrated on the concubine, the Levite was able to do what Barak, Gideon and Jephthah could not accomplish

- 400,000 foot soldiers was not every single Israelite; it included every leader, along with the entire army. This total shows that the population had decreased by one-third since the Exodus and Conquest, when the army was closer to 600,000 strong.

3 (Now the sons of Benjamin heard that the sons of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the sons of Israel said, "Tell *us*, how did this wickedness take place?"

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3 While the descendants of Benjamin were learning that the Israelis had gone up to Mizpah, the Israelis asked, "Somebody tell us how this evil could happen?"

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

- The Benjamites were not officially represented at Mizpah since the men who raped the concubine were from Gibeah in Benjamin

— Such a massive gathering at Mizpah, on the Benjamite border, could not be hidden, and gave the Benjamites time to mobilize their own army

— The fact that they heard that the tribes assembled, but did not attend, shows that they were siding with the perpetrators of the crime

4 So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "I came with my concubine to spend the night at Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin.

4 So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "I came with my concubine to spend the night at Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin.

4 So the descendant of Levi, the husband of the murdered woman, spoke up and replied, "I came to spend the night at Gibeah, which is part of Benjamin, along with my mistress.

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.

- For the first time, it was explicitly stated that the concubine was murdered

5 But the citizens of Gibeah rose up against me and surrounded the house at night, threatening me. They intended to kill me; instead, they raped my concubine so that she died.

5 But the men of Gibeah rose up against me and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me; instead, they ravished my concubine so that she died.

5 But the officials of Gibeah attacked me and surrounded the house because of me. They intended to kill me, but instead they tortured my mistress to death.

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.

- Killing the Levite was not the stated purpose of the mob in 19:22 (it was homosexual rape), but it may have been a deduction in light of what they did to the concubine

- The Levite conveniently downplayed (omitted) his role of throwing the concubine out to the mob in place of himself

6 And I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout the land of Israel's inheritance; for they have committed an **outrageous sin** and **vile act** in Israel.

6 And I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout the land of Israel's inheritance; for they have committed a lewd and disgraceful act in Israel.

6 So I grabbed my mistress, cut her in pieces, and sent her remains throughout the territory of Israel's inheritance, because they've committed a vile, stupid outrage in Israel.

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.

- "...outrageous sin" - *zimmah*, a word used for sexual perversion, such as incest (Lev 18:17; 20:14), of giving a daughter over to prostitution (Lev 19:29), and of adultery (Job 31:11)

- "...vile act" - *nevalah*, sexual perversion, such as promiscuity (Deut 22:21), premeditated rape (Gen 34:7; 2 Sam 13:12), adultery (Jer 29:23), and homosexual relations (19:23-24)

— All of these carried the death penalty under the Mosaic Law

7 Behold, all you sons of Israel, give your response and advice here."

7 Behold, all you sons of Israel, give your advice and counsel here."

7 So look, all you Israelis! Speak up and give us your advice!"

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

8 Then all the people rose up as one person, saying, "Not one of us will go to his tent, nor will any of us go home.

8 Then all the people arose as one man, saying, "Not one of us will go to his tent, nor will any of us return to his house.

8 Then the entire army stood up as a single unit and declared, "Nobody's going back to his tent, and nobody's going home!

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.

- The verdict was unanimous: all the people rose as one man against the town of Gibeah to give them what they deserve by launching an attack

9 But now this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah; *we will go up* against it by lot.

9 But now this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah; *we will go up* against it by lot.

9 This is what we'll do to Gibeah: we're going to assemble an army by lottery.

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 out of a hundred throughout the tribes of Israel, and a hundred out of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand to supply provisions for the people, so that when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, they may punish *them* for all the vile sin that they have committed in Israel."

10 And we will take 10 men out of 100 throughout the tribes of Israel, and 100 out of 1,000, and 1,000 out of 10,000 to supply food for the people, that when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, they may punish *them* for all the disgraceful acts that they have committed in Israel."

10 We'll take ten men out of 100 from all of the tribes of Israel. We'll appoint 100 out of 1,000 and 1,000 out of 10,000 to supply provisions for the army. And when we reach Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin, we'll punish them for all of the stupid things that they've done in Israel."

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

- One-tenth of the Israelites' troops collected supplies for those who did the fighting

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

11 Thus all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united as one man.

11 That's how the army of Israel came to be gathered together to attack the city, united as a single unit.

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

- After hearing the Levite's indictment of the men of Gibeah, the people of Israel delivered a verdict and made a vow:

— The verdict was that the men of Gibeah were guilty and should be handed over to the authorities to be slain (Deut 13:12-18)

— The vow was that none of the tribes represented would give their daughters in marriage to the men of Benjamin (21:1-7)

**12** Then the tribes of Israel sent men through the entire tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What is this wickedness that has taken place among you?"

**12** Then the tribes of Israel sent men through the entire tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What is this wickedness that has taken place among you?"

**12** The tribes of Israel sent men throughout the entire tribe of Benjamin to ask them, "What is this evil thing that has occurred among you?"

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

- The tribes attempted to avoid war by requesting that the Benjamites turn over the perpetrators, who would then be executed

— The purpose of the request was justice for the concubine, as well as "put away evil from Israel"

13 Now then, turn over the men, the worthless men who are in Gibeah, so that we may put them to death and remove *this* wickedness from Israel." But the sons of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the sons of Israel.

13 Now then, deliver up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove *this* wickedness from Israel." But the sons of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the sons of Israel.

13 Now then, hand over the men—those ungodly men, and we'll execute them in order to remove this evil from Israel."

But the descendants of Benjamin wouldn't obey the request of their own relatives, the Israelis,

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

- The tribes were concerned to "put away evil out of the land," a phrase that is found at least 9x in Deuteronomy.

- The eleven tribes had agreed “as one man” to attack Gibeah, but first they sent representatives throughout the tribe of Benjamin, calling for the people to confess their wickedness and hand over the guilty men.
- According to Lev 20:13, homosexuals were to be put to death; but that wasn’t the crime the tribes were judging. Since the Levite had willingly given his concubine to the men of Gibeah, their sin can hardly be called adultery (Deut 22:22).
- The penalty for rape was death, and gang rape would be even more serious (Deut 22:25-26)
- The tribes may also have been citing the law concerning wicked men in a city (Deut 13:12-18) and using that as the basis for their action

14 Instead, the sons of Benjamin gathered from the cities to Gibeah, to go out to battle against the sons of Israel.

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14 The sons of Benjamin gathered from the cities to Gibeah, to go out to battle against the sons of Israel. fight the Israelis in battle.

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.

- Some have interpreted the stubbornness of Benjamin as an act of patriotism: they were only trying to protect their own citizens. But their refusal to cooperate was definitely an act of rebellion against the Lord.

- When sin isn’t exposed, confessed, and punished, it pollutes society and defiles the land. The wicked men of Gibeah were like a cancerous tumor in the body that had to be cut out.

- The result? The little tribe of Benjamin declared war on the rest of the tribes of Israel!

15 From the cities on that day the sons of Benjamin were counted, twenty-six thousand men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah who were counted, seven hundred choice men.

15 From the cities on that day the sons of Benjamin were numbered, 26,000 men who draw the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah who were numbered, 700 choice men.

15 The day of the battle, the army from the descendants of Benjamin numbered 26,000 expert swordsmen from their cities, not including the inhabitants of Gibeah, who numbered 700 special forces soldiers.

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.

- The Benjamites mobilized 26,000 swordsmen plus 700 "left-handed" men from Gibeah who were all experts with slings: 26,700 Benjamites versus 400,000 "expert swordsmen"

16 Out of all these people seven hundred choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.

16 Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.

16 Out of all these soldiers, 700 of them were left-handed—and each one could sling a stone at a hair and never miss.

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

17 Then the men of Israel besides Benjamin were counted, four hundred thousand men who drew the sword; all of these were men of war.

17 Then the men of Israel besides Benjamin were numbered, 400,000 men who draw the sword; all these were men of war.

17 But the Israeli army—not counting the tribe of Benjamin—numbered 400,000 expert swordsmen, all of them battle-hardened soldiers.

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

18 Now the sons of Israel set out, went up to Bethel, and inquired of God and said, "Who shall go up first for us to battle against the sons of Benjamin?" Then the LORD said, "Judah shall go up first."

18 Now the sons of Israel arose, went up to Bethel, and inquired of God and said, "Who shall go up first for us to battle against the sons of Benjamin?" Then the LORD said, "Judah shall go up first."

18 The Israelis mounted up, traveled to Bethel, and asked God what to do. They said, "Who is to lead us in our opening attack against the descendants of Benjamin?" The LORD replied, "Judah is to open the attack."

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.

- They went up to Bethel (translated "house of God") to inquire of the Lord (probably through the high priest's Urim and Thummim (Cf. Lev 8:8; Num 27:21; Deut 33:8) concerning which tribe should lead the attack against the Benjamites. The Lord's answer was, Judah shall go first.

- Since the tabernacle was located in Shiloh both before (Cf. Joshua 18:1) and after (Cf. 1 Sam 1:9) this incident, some scholars refer "Bethel" here not to the city but to "the house

of God" which was at Shiloh (Cf. 18:31, "the house of God was in Shiloh").

— However, in 18:31 and elsewhere when the sanctuary is called "the house of God" the Hebrew phrase is *bet-ha'elohim*, not *bet-'el* as in 20:18,26).

— Possibly the central sanctuary was moved back and forth between Shiloh and Bethel, perhaps more than once. So it is preferable to regard Bethel in v18,26 as the city on the central ridge route 10 or 12 miles north of Jerusalem.

- Judah played the same role earlier (1:1-10); this made sense also because the concubine was from Bethlehem-Judah

**19** So the sons of Israel got up in the morning and camped against Gibeah.

**19** So the sons of Israel arose in the morning and camped against Gibeah.

**19** So the Israelis got up in the morning, encamped near Gibeah,

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

20 The men of Israel went to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel lined up for battle against them at Gibeah.

20 The men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel arrayed for battle against them at Gibeah.

20 and the army of Israel went out to fight the tribe of Benjamin, assembling in battle array against them at 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.

21 Then the sons of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and struck to the ground on that day twenty-two thousand men of Israel.

21 Then the sons of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and felled to the ground on that day 22,000 men of Israel.

21 The descendants of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, and 22,000 soldiers of Israel fell in battle that day.

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.

- That first day, God allowed the Benjamites to win and kill 22,000 Israelite soldiers

22 But the people, the men of Israel, showed themselves courageous and lined up for battle again in the place where they had lined themselves up on the first day.

22 But the people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and arrayed for battle again in the place where they had arrayed themselves the first day.

22 But the army—the men of Israel—encouraged themselves and arrayed for battle again the next day in the same place where they had gathered the day before.

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 sons of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall we again advance for battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Go up against him."

23 The sons of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall we again draw near for battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Go up against him."

23 From there the Israelites went up and wept in the LORD's presence until evening. Then they asked the LORD, "Should we attack the descendants of Benjamin again?" The LORD replied, "Attack them."

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.)

- The 11 tribes wept before the Lord and again sought His will

- Note that "the children of Benjamin" (v18) becomes "Benjamin my brother" (v23)

— Perhaps this was one reason why God permitted the Israelites to lose that first battle. It gave them an opportunity to reflect on the fact that they were fighting their own flesh and blood.

**24** So the sons of Israel came against the sons of Benjamin on the second day.

**24** Then the sons of Israel came against the sons of Benjamin the second day.

**24** So the Israelites attacked the descendants of Benjamin for a second day,

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

25 And Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah the second day and struck to the ground again eighteen thousand men of the sons of Israel; all of these drew the sword.

25 Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah the second day and felled to the ground again 18,000 men of the sons of Israel; all these drew the sword.

25 and the tribe of Benjamin went to war against them from Gibeah during that second day, and 18,000 soldiers from the Israelites—all of them expert swordsmen—fell to the ground.

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.

- But on the second day of the war, Benjamin won again, this time killing 18,000 men. The situation was very grim.

26 Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel, and they wept and remained there before the LORD, and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

26 Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

26 All the Israelis, including its army, went up from there to Bethel and wept, remaining there in the LORD's presence, fasting throughout the day until dusk, when they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings in the LORD's presence.

**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.

- The third time shows a different approach for preparing for battle: this time, "all the children of Israel," including the leaders and members of the army, went before the Lord at Bethel

— In this instance, they showed signs of mourning (fasted) and worship (offered burnt offerings and peace offerings)

— Perhaps one reason the Lord permitted their initial defeats was to bring them back in a spirit of repentance to the neglected sacrificial worship

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

27 The sons of Israel inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days,

27 The Israelis inquired of the LORD, since the Ark of the Covenant was there at that time

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

- This is the only mention of the Ark of the Covenant in Judges

- The fact that the Ark was present indicates that either the Ark was moved from Shiloh to Bethel, or the "house of God" (v18) referred to Shiloh instead of Bethel

28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, Aaron's son, stood before it to *minister* in those days), saying, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin, or shall I stop?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will hand them over to you."

28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, Aaron's son, stood before it to *minister* in those days), saying, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand."

28 while Eleazar's son Phinehas, a descendant of Aaron, served before it in those days. They asked, "Should we go out to war again against the descendants of our relative Benjamin, or shall we cease?"

And the LORD answered, "Go out, and tomorrow I will deliver them into your control."

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

- This time their inquiry about whether they should continue the battle not only received a positive reply (Go), but also included a promise of victory.

- The mention of Phinehas son of Eleazar (i.e., Aaron's grandson) implies that he was instrumental in procuring the oracle from the Lord. It also indicates that this event occurred not much later than the death of Joshua (Cf. 18:30), and occurred prior to the first appendix (Judges 17-18).

### **General Overview**

God's promise of victory (v28) did not lead to presumption on Israel's part, for they reviewed and improved their battle strategy by setting an ambush around Gibeah.

This was accomplished as follows:

(1) The Israelites took up the same battle positions as before and then deliberately fled as the Benjamites launched their attack, so that the Benjamites were drawn away from the city. Joshua had used a similar ambush strategy against Ai (Joshua 8:1-29)

(2) Then 10,000 of Israel's finest men attacked Gibeah frontally, and the LORD gave them victory in battle. The Benjamites lost 25,100 soldiers—almost their entire force of 26,700 (20:15)

**29** So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah.

**29** So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah.

**29** So Israel set soldiers in ambush around Gibeah.

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

- This was the same strategy employed by Joshua to capture Ai

— It was necessary to draw the defenders away from the city in order to defeat the army and take the city

30 And the sons of Israel went up against the sons of Benjamin on the third day and lined up against Gibeah as at other times.

30 The sons of Israel went up against the sons of Benjamin on the third day and arrayed themselves against Gibeah as at other times.

30 The Israelis went out against the descendants of Benjamin on the third day, arraying themselves against Gibeah as they had done previously.

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.

- The second part of their strategy looked similar to their first two defeats, but in reality it was a trap

31 When the sons of Benjamin went out against the people, they were lured away from the city, and they began to strike and kill some of the people as at other times, on the roads (one of which goes up to Bethel, and the other to Gibeah), *and* in the field, about thirty men of Israel.

31 The sons of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city, and they began to strike and kill some of the people as at other times, on the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, *and* in the field, about thirty men of Israel.

31 They attacked the army and were drawn away from the city as they began to inflict casualties on the soldiers along the roads to Bethel and Gibeah, just as they had done the other times. About 30 soldiers from Israel fell in battle there and in the fields.

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.

- The Benjamites had initial success, striking down Israelites along the roads to Bethel and Gibeah, just as they had done in the previous two battles

32 And the sons of Benjamin said, "They are defeated before us, like the first time." But the sons of Israel said, "Let's flee, so that we may draw them away from the city to the roads."

32 The sons of Benjamin said, "They are struck down before us, as at the first." But the sons of Israel said, "Let us flee that we may draw them away from the city to the highways."

32 Then the descendants of Benjamin told themselves, "They're falling right in front of us, just like before!"

But the army of Israel told themselves, "Let's draw them away by escaping to the highways from the city."

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.

- What seemed like an advantage for the Benjamites was only entrapping them further — As the Benjamites were drawn away from the city, the Israelites who were waiting in ambush dashed into Gibeah, slaying the population and setting the city on fire

33 Then all the men of Israel rose from their place and lined up at Baal-tamar; and the men of Israel in ambush charged from their place, from Maareh-geba.

33 Then all the men of Israel arose from their place and arrayed themselves at Baal-tamar; and the men of Israel in ambush broke out of their place, even out of Maareh-geba.

33 So the entire army of Israel moved from their location and arrayed themselves at Baal-tamar while that part of their army moved from their ambush positions from Maareh-geba.

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

34 When ten thousand choice men from all Israel came against Gibeah, the battle became fierce; but Benjamin did not know that disaster was close to them.

34 When ten thousand choice men from all Israel came against Gibeah, the battle became fierce; but Benjamin did not know that disaster was close to them.

34 As 10,000 of Israel's best soldiers came to fight Gibeah, the battle became fierce, but the army of Benjamin didn't know that disaster was close at hand.

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.

- The element of surprise...the Benjamites did not realize that disaster was imminent  
— In addition to one army taking their stand on the front, a second force was now attacking them from the rear. The Benjamites were cut off from moving forward or fleeing backward.

35 And the LORD struck Benjamin before Israel, so that the sons of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day, all who drew the sword.

35 And the LORD struck Benjamin before Israel, so that the sons of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day, all who draw the sword.

35 The LORD struck Benjamin in the full view of Israel. As a result, the Israelis destroyed 25,100 soldiers of Benjamin that day, all expert swordsmen.

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

- Only soldiers died, no civilians

**36** So the sons of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. When the men of Israel **gave ground** to Benjamin because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah,

**36** So the sons of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. When the men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against

Gibeah,

**36** Then the descendants of Benjamin realized that they had been defeated. The army of Israel pretended to retreat from the army of Benjamin, knowing that they had set some soldiers in ambush near Gibeah.

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

- Verses 36-48 give a summary of the third battle that defeated the Benjamites, providing more details than the overview given in v29-35

- The Benjamite army realized that the tide had turned and they had lost the war. The following verses show how they came to that realization.

- "...gave ground" - pretended to retreat; the Israelites' flight was a ruse to lure the Benjamite soldiers away from Gibeah, allowing the hiding soldiers to ambush a defenseless city

37 the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush also deployed and struck all the city with the edge of the sword.

37 the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush also deployed and struck all the city with the edge of the sword.

37 The soldiers in ambush rushed out to attack Gibeah, deploying in force and executing the entire city with swords.

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

- The details of the slaughter of Gibeah by the hiding Israelite soldiers...

38 Now the agreed sign between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they would make a great cloud of smoke rise from the city.

38 Now the appointed sign between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they would make a great cloud of smoke rise from the city.

38 Meanwhile, the army of Israel had arranged to signal their soldiers who had been hiding in ambush by sending up a cloud of smoke from the city.

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

- The hiding Israelite soldiers who had invaded Gibeah began to set fire to the city. The smoke from the city going up in flames was a prearranged signal for the retreating Israelites to turn on the terrified Benjamites, who fled toward the desert (eastward; Cf. v43)

39 Then the men of Israel turned in the battle, and Benjamin began to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel, for they said, "Undoubtedly they are defeated before us, as in the first battle."

39 Then the men of Israel turned in the battle, and Benjamin began to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel, for they said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle."

39 The army of Israel turned around in the battle, and the army of Benjamin began to attack and kill about 30 soldiers, thinking, "Now we're really defeating them, just like before."

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.

- A description of the entrapment...

— The Israelites pretended to flee; the Benjamites chased them along the road, away from the city, killing about 30 Israelite soldiers

— Because this battle seemed to play out like the first battle, the Benjamites drew a false assumption of victory once again

40 But when the cloud began to rise from the city *in* a column of smoke, Benjamin looked behind them; and behold, the entire city was going up *in smoke* to heaven.

40 But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, Benjamin looked behind them; and behold, the whole city was going up *in smoke* to heaven.

40 But then the smoke began to rise from the city in a column. The army of Benjamin observed behind them that the whole city was going up in flames straight into the sky!

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 Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were terrified; for they saw that disaster was close to them.

41 Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were terrified; for they saw that disaster was close to them.

41 At that point, as the army of Israel turned back to face the army of Benjamin, the army of Benjamin was filled with terror, because they realized that disaster was about to overtake them.

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

- When the Benjamites saw the smoke from the burning city, they realized their defeat (Cf. v36)

42 Therefore, they turned their backs before the men of Israel *to flee* in the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them while those who *attacked* from the cities were annihilating them in the midst of them.

42 Therefore, they turned their backs before the men of Israel toward the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them while those who came out of the cities destroyed them in the midst of them.

42 So they turned tail and ran away from the army of Israel toward the wilderness, but they were overtaken in battle when soldiers came out from the cities to destroy 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.

- They fled down a steep descent in the Hill Country east of Gibeah, which extends down to the Jordan Valley

— They only fled to the edge of the wilderness, not all the way down to the valley

- The hiding Israelite army, who invaded the city and burned it, then went out of the city to pursue the retreating Benjamites

43 They surrounded Benjamin, pursued them without rest, *and* trampled them down opposite Gibeah toward the east.

43 They surrounded Benjamin, pursued them without rest *and* trod them down opposite Gibeah toward the east.

43 They surrounded the army of Benjamin, pursuing them ceaselessly until they defeated them near the east-facing border of Gibeah.

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

- Now smaller groups of Benjamites were surrounded and slaughtered

44 So eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell; all of these *were* valiant men.

44 Thus 18,000 men of Benjamin fell; all these were valiant warriors.

44 That's how 18,000 men from the tribe of Benjamin fell in battle, all of whom were valiant soldiers.

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

- A total of 18,000 soldiers died in these skirmishes

45 The rest turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, but they caught five thousand of them on the roads and overtook them at Gidom, and killed two thousand of them.

45 The rest turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, but they caught 5,000 of them on the highways and overtook them at Gidom and killed 2,000 of them.

45 The rest of them turned and ran into the wilderness in the direction of the rock of Rimmon, but 5,000 of them were killed on the highways while 2,000 of them were overtaken and killed near Gidom.

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.

- The mop up operation...

- As the Benjamites fled in small groups toward the wilderness, Israelite soldiers hunted them down and killed a total of 7,000 soldiers

46 So all those of Benjamin who fell that day were twenty-five thousand men who drew the sword; all of these were valiant men.

46 So all of Benjamin who fell that day were 25,000 men who draw the sword; all these were valiant warriors.

46 To sum up, the soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin who died that day totaled 25,000 men, all of them expert swordsmen and valiant soldiers.

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

- Before 600 Benjamites finally escaped to the rock of Rimmon, they suffered a total loss of approximately 25,000 Benjamites swordsmen (the more exact figure of 25,100 is given in v35)

— The narrative groups their deaths in stages of the battle—18,000 (v44), 5,000...along the roads, and 2,000 at Gidom (v45). These were soldier casualties...the actual slaughter of people was far greater.

47 But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon; and they remained at the rock of Rimmon for four months.

47 But 600 men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they remained at the rock of Rimmon four months.

47 However, 600 soldiers ran into the wilderness in the direction of the rock of Rimmon, where they remained as fugitives for four months.

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

- Only 600 Benjamite warriors were able to reach the defensible stronghold of the rock of Rimmon (modern Rammun, four miles east of Bethel), where they stayed four months (until they received terms of peace from the Israelites; Cf. 21:13-14)
- They were the only survivors from the entire tribe of Benjamin, since the Israelite soldiers destroyed and burned all the towns of the Benjamites

Benjamin started with 26,700 soldiers at the beginning of the conflict (v15). Verses 46-47 state that 25,000 Benjamites were killed (18,000 + 5,000 + 2,000) and 600 were left during the third battle. That would account for 25,600 Benjamite soldiers. The other 1,100 soldiers must have been killed during the first two battles.

48 The men of Israel then turned back against the sons of Benjamin and struck them with the edge **of the sword**, both the entire city with the cattle and all that they found; they also set on fire all the cities which they found.

48 The men of Israel then turned back against the sons of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, both the entire city with the cattle and all that they found; they also set on fire all the cities which they found.

48 Meanwhile, the army of Israel went back to fight the surviving descendants of Benjamin. They attacked the entire city with swords, including its cattle and everyone they could find. Then they set fire to all of the cities that they could find.

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.

- After unsuccessfully pursuing the 600 fleeing Benjamites, the Israelites went to the other Benjamite cities to finish the slaughter of the remaining residents, including animals, and set fire to the cities

- "...of the sword" - *cherem*, translated "totally destroyed" in 10:28,35,37,39-40; 11:11-12,21; "destroy them totally" in 11:20 (Cf. 1 Sam 15:3,8-9,15,18,20)

- The noun *cherem* is translated "devoted" or "devoted things" in Joshua 6:17-18; 7:1,11-12,15; 1 Sam 15:21; "devoted to destruction" in Lev 27:29; "set apart for destruction" in Deut 7:26

- Since the destruction included the animals and everything else they found, apparently they had placed the Benjamite towns "under the ban" as in holy war

- The city of Jericho and everything in it was "to be devoted to the Lord" (Joshua 6:17) as the firstfruits of the Land

- Just as the firstfruits of a crop, given to the Lord, pointed to more crops to come, so the conquest of Jericho signified that Israel would receive all of Canaan from Him

- No loot from Jericho was to be taken by the people

— In carrying out the *cherem*, people and animals were to be killed (Joshua 6:17,21), and other things were either to be destroyed or set apart, as in this case, for the purposes of the sanctuary. These items included “silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron” (v19). All was “devoted” either to destruction or to the Lord’s “treasury”; all was to be forfeited by the people.

— The original intent of the *cherem* curse was for it to be applied to Canaanites, but here it was applied to the Tribe of Benjamin

— Joshua 6:21 includes a verb form of that noun *he-rem*: They devoted (*wayyah-a-rimu*, from *ha-ram*) the city to the LORD. The idea is that the city’s contents were to be given over to the Lord by totally destroying them.

God’s purpose was to bless the nation of Israel in the Land and to use her as a channel of blessing to the world. But this would be greatly hindered if they were infected by the degenerate religion of the Canaanites. Sin is desperately contagious. To compromise with evil is dangerous and invites spiritual disaster. Gleason Archer declares, “In view of the corrupting influence of the Canaanite religion, especially with its religious prostitution...and infant sacrifice, it was impossible for pure faith and worship to be maintained in Israel except by the complete elimination of the Canaanites themselves.”