

Judges Chapter 20

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

The Israelites were so enraged by what occurred at Gibeah that they gathered, united in heart and mind ("as one man"), to deliver justice.

This is one of the few encouragements amid story after story of Israel's descent into apostasy.

"All the children of Israel went out":

As a result of this horrible tragedy, a national assembly was convened with people coming from the north (Dan) and the south (Beersheba).

"As one man ... unto the Lord":

This indicated a humble attitude and desire to seek help from God for the nation.

(See the notes on 18:7 and 1 Sam. 3:20).

This "Mizpeh" is in the tribe of Benjamin.

The last lesson ended with the Levite sending a portion of his concubine's body to each of the 12 tribes.

It seems in this; they have called a special meeting to determine what to do about it?

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

The princes of the tribes and heads of families, rulers of thousands, and hundreds, and fifties, and tens; or the "corners".

Who were like the corner stones in a building, which are not only the most valuable and ornamental, but the strength of the building, which cement it, and support it, and hold it together.

Though Abarbanel thinks this intends the division and separation of each tribe, which encamped in a separate corner and side by itself.

But the former sense seems best, and the meaning is, that the principal men of them.

"Even of all the tribes of Israel":

Excepting the tribe of Benjamin.

"Presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God":

Now gathered together: which assembly consisted, besides the heads of them.

"Four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword":

Or were armed men; there were 600,000 or more in Israel able to bear arms.

But as now the wars in Canaan were pretty much at an end.

The militia of the nation was not so regularly kept up, and many were employed in tilling the ground, and dressing the vines, and the like.

And besides, as there were none of the tribe of Benjamin present, it need not be wondered at there should be no more.

But rather that so many should be gathered together on such an occasion.

This is nearly a half million people, who met at Mizpeh to determine this situation.

They were soldiers.

The chief is speaking of the leader that kept the people together.

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

Having no doubt the same notice the rest of the tribes had; but the thing complained of being done in their tribe.

And by some of it, they might be willing to screen the delinquents, or were careless about and indifferent to the case, and secure and easy, as imagining their brethren would never go to war with them about it.

Or were proud and haughty, and would pay no regard to the summons given them.

"Then said the children of Israel, tell us, how was this wickedness?"

Proclamation was made in the assembly.

That if any person there knew anything of this shocking affair, and horrid iniquity, which was the occasion of their meeting together, that they would rise up and declare what was the cause of it.

How it came about, and by whom it was done.

Or they addressed themselves particularly to the Levite, and his host, and his servant, who might all be upon the spot to bear witness in this case, as it is certain the former of them was.

Who upon this stood up, and spoke as follows.

It seems, the Benjamites were not included in the 400,000 who came to Mizpeh.

The Benjamites heard about them gathering.

The large group of Israelites ask the Levite, "How was this wickedness?"

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

The Levite, the husband of the woman that was slain, answered and said":

The injured husband gave a brief and unvarnished recital of the tragic outrage, from which it appears that force was used, which he could not resist.

His testimony was doubtless corroborated by those of his servant and the old Ephraimite.

There was no need of strong or highly colored description to work upon the feelings of the audience.

The facts spoke for themselves and produced one common sentiment of detestation and vengeance.

Now the Levite gives his statement to all of those assembled about exactly what happened to him and his concubine.

He specifically names Gibeah as the place of this terrible crime.

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

Not all of them, but some that dwelt in that city.

He forbears giving them the character they justly deserved, sons of Belial.

These came in a tumultuous and violent manner.

"And beset the house round about upon me by night":

That he might not make his escape, resolving if possible to get him into their hands, and do with him according to their will.

"And thought to have slain me":

Their first intention was to commit the unnatural sin on him, and, if he resisted, to slay him.

But this he modestly conceals, as being a sin not to be named in an assembly of saints.

Besides he might say this, because he himself chose rather to be slain than to submit to their lust, which he knew must be the case upon his refusal and resistance.

And even if he had yielded, being overpowered, this would have been the consequence.

That he should have been abused even unto death, as his wife was.

"And my concubine have they forced, that she is dead":

Or "afflicted", or "humbled" her.

Which is a modest expression for carnal knowledge of her, and which they had to such excess that she died through it.

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

Lest it should be thought that these barbarous creatures, after they had used her in such a manner that occasioned her death, that they had committed this fact also.

The Levite takes it to himself, and owns that he did that.

"And sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel":

To alarm them, and excite their attention to what had passed, and to raise their indignation against it.

"For they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel":

Being guilty of adultery and murder, and would have committed the unnatural crime, if they could have had an opportunity of doing it.

This is saying they wanted to abuse the Levite, but instead they abused his concubine all night long until they killed her.

He sent the portions of her body to them to get them to take action against this evil city.

He especially wanted the men who did this terrible crime to be punished by death.

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

The descendants of one man that feared the Lord.

Were of one nation, and of one religion.

Men professing godliness, and therefore ought to bear testimony against sin and wickedness of every sort.

And especially such crying abominations as these.

"Give here your advice and counsel":

In this place, being assembled together on this occasion.

Consult what is best to be done, and let every man speak his mind freely what step he thinks should be taken for the glory of God, and honor of religion.

And to bring such persons to justice who had committed so foul a fact.

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

Either the heads of the people assembled in council, all agreed unanimously in one vote or resolution.

Or all the 400,000 men were of the same mind, when the case was reported to them.

"Saying, we will not any of us go to his tent, neither will we any of us turn into his house":

That is, they would not return home, to take one nights rest in their houses, or attend to the business of their callings or to any affair of life, however urgent.

Until satisfaction was made for the evil committed.

The Levite is asking them to judge their own for this terrible thing.

They were all in total agreement that this was a terrible sin.

They also will not go back to their homes until this is avenged.

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

Where the fact was done.

What follows was proposed by some, and unanimously agreed to by all.

"We will go up by lot against it":

Cast lots who shall go up to it and demand satisfaction for the offence committed.

And if denied, to act in a hostile manner against it.

This is saying, that not any of them will shirk their duty to go against Gibeah.

This is such a terrible thing these men have done to the Levite and his concubine, that all of them are eager to avenge this.

The casting of lots is the fairest way of choosing a group out of the whole.

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

Excepting that of Benjamin which was not with them, not any of them.

"And a hundred out of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand":

In all 40,000, out of the 400,000.

"To fetch victual for the people":

Ten men were to provide food for ninety, and one hundred men for nine hundred, and 1000 men for 9000, in all 40,000, for 360,000.

These were either to go to their own tribes and habitations, or to the towns and cities adjacent, to procure food for this large army.

For they came from their homes without any provision, not knowing that the affair would keep them long.

But perceiving that it would require time before it could be determined, they judged it the wisest method for some to be appointed to take care of provision for the army.

That it might not be scattered about on that account, but pursue the war with vigor till satisfaction was obtained.

"That they might do, when they came to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel":

Punish with death the delinquents, and chastise the inhabitants, and especially the magistrates.

For their connivance at such wicked persons among them, and negligence of doing their duty.

We see that 1 out of 10 will be chosen to furnish food for this large group.

There will be 40,000 who will round up the food for the rest of them to eat.

The lot will choose who will have charge of the food.

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

Of Gibeah, even 360,000 men.

"Knit together as one man":

Went heart and hand together, united in their sentiments and resolutions.

Determine to have justice done, or lose their lives in this cause.

According to the Jews, this was on the twenty third of Shebet, which answers to part of January and part of February, on which day a fast was kept on this account.

This would mean that 360,000 men have gone against Gibeah.

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

Meaning the families of Benjamin; for as sometimes a tribe is called a family (Joshua 7:17).

So a family is called a tribe.

And there were ten families in the tribe of Benjamin, according to the number of his sons, the fathers of these families (Gen. 46:21).

Which being numerous and powerful, and consisting of men of courage, and expert in war, thought themselves a match for the ten tribes of Israel now assembled.

Who sent one out of each tribe, very probably ten in all, upon this errand.

For they judged it most advisable, before they went to war with them, to try to get the offenders, delivered up to justice, and so prevent the shedding of blood of either side.

And the rather, as there were none of the tribe of Benjamin at this assembly, and which indeed might give them reason to suspect they meant not to join with them in an amicable manner in this affair.

However, they were willing to try peaceable methods first.

"Saying, what wickedness is this that is done among you?"

Not that they were sent to inquire what the crime was that was committed, that was fully known.

But by putting the question in this manner, their design was to aggravate it, and to put the men of Benjamin on considering how great it was.

And what an enormous sin it was that was committed, and that among them.

And therefore, it lay upon them either to punish the perpetrators of it themselves or deliver them up to them to be punished according to the common law of Israel.

This is done to see, if they will deal with this themselves, or will they side in with these evil men of Gibeah.

If the tribe of Benjamin would deal with this problem themselves, the entire family would not be blamed.

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

“But the children of Benjamin would not hearken”:

They hardened their hearts against the justice and decency of turning over the criminals.

Even greatly outnumbered in war, they would not yield to what was right (compare the verses 15-17 below).

So civil war resulted.

This does not say why they did not turn these very evil men over to the other twelve tribes.

They are obviously guilty of a heinous crime.

They will not turn them over, so the other tribes must deal with the tribe of Benjamin, as if they were all guilty.

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

To protect and defend it against the other tribes, being a city of theirs and where the persons charged with the crime lived.

These got together thither out of the several cities of the tribe of Benjamin, as many as could bear arms.

"To go out to battle against the children of Israel":

They neither denied the fact, nor attempted to palliate and excuse it, nor sought for peace but at once betook themselves to arms.

Which showed not only want of prudence but pride, passion and self-confidence, and that they were sadly depraved in their morals to rise up in defense of such wicked men.

And a strange infatuation to expect success against such vastly superior numbers, and in so bad a cause.

The fighting men of all 26 of the cities of the tribe of Benjamin come against these fighting men of the other tribes of Israel.

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

All that they could muster up, and gather together out of their several cities, were no more men than twenty and six thousand that drew the sword.

Able bodied men fit for war, and expert in it.

"Beside the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered seven hundred chosen men":

Young, stout, and strong, and in all but 26,700.

And what are these to an army of 400,000 men, or however 360,000 that came up against Gibeah, while 40,000 were employed in getting provisions for them?

Josephus makes the number of the Benjamites still less, no more than 25,600, led thereunto by a later account.

That 25,000 Benjamites were slain in the third and last battle, and only six hundred escaped to a rock for safety.

Not considering that 1000 men may well be supposed to be lost in the two first battles.

For it would be strange indeed that they should lose none in two engagements with so large an army.

The same error is committed in the Vulgate Latin version, which makes them no more than 25,000.

With which agrees the Alexandrian copy of the Septuagint version.

Though that, according to the Vatican exemplar, has but 23,000.

The numbers in the Hebrew text are no doubt the right.

We see that the total men of Benjamin that were fighting men, including the men from Gibeah.

This little group is ready to fight the 360,000 fighting men of the other tribes.

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

"Lefthanded":

I.e. using their left hand instead of their right.

"Every one could sling stones at a hair breadth, and not miss":

A hyperbolical expression, signifying that they could do this with great exactness.

There are many parallel instances in historians of persons that could throw stones or shoot arrows with great certainty.

So as seldom or never to miss.

And this was very considerable, and one ground of the Benjamites' confidence, because in those times they had no guns.

It is strange that they would have 700 left-handed soldiers, who were skillful with the sling.

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

"Benjamin":

Means son of the right hand.

Who did not join them in this affair, but opposed them.

"Were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword": (See Judges 20:9).

"All these were men of war": Inured to it, skillful and courageous.

After the 40,000 were sent to get food, there were 360,000 fighting men.

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

“Asked counsel of God”:

The Lord gave His counsel from the location of the ark at Shiloh, probably through the Urim and Thummim (verses 27-28).

The tribe of Judah was responsible to lead in battle since God had chosen a leadership role for that tribe (Gen. 49:8-12; 1 Chron. 5:1-2).

See note on Exodus 28:30.

This appears to have happened at Beth-el.

Perhaps, the ark of God was there at this time.

This was about 7 or 8 miles out of Shiloh.

The Israelites did not want to decide this for themselves.

They wanted God to decide who should go up first against these Benjamites.

Because of the terrible crime, they were to be treated as a heathen nation.

Whether this is chosen by lot or not, we do not know.

We do know that Judah was the chosen tribe to represent Israel in the first battle.

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

After they had had counsel at Shiloh, and which perhaps was by a deputation sent thither.

"And encamped against Gibeah":

Formed a camp near Gibeah of 360,000 men, enough to have stormed and taken that city at once, one would think.

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

From the place where they were encamped.

"And the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah":

Not only against the inhabitants of Gibeah, but the children of Benjamin, that came to the defense of them.

They formed, themselves in a line of battle, and prepared for an action.

Both of the Scriptures above are speaking of the troops of Judah representing all of the troops of Israel.

The battle is ready to begin.

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

Which was their place of rendezvous, and which they came to defend.

And in and about which they had stationed their whole army of 26,000 men.

"And destroyed down to the ground":

Killed dead upon the spot.

"Of the Israelites that day twenty and two thousand men":

Wanting but 4000 of their whole number, excepting the men of Gibeah, which was such a rebuff the Israelites did not expect.

Being engaged in so just a cause, and having such a numerous army.

Several Jewish writers think this was on account of their idolatry, that though they were very zealous to revenge corporeal adultery in the case of the Levite's concubine, and to remove such iniquity from Israel.

Yet were not zealous for revenge and put away spiritual adultery or idolatry in the case of the Danites, who had set up the image of Micah.

And so had spread idolatry not only in their own tribe, but throughout Israel.

And therefore God took this opportunity to avenge his own quarrel, and then to rebuke them for their sin.

And now was Benjamin as a ravenous wolf, according to Jacob's prophecy (Gen. 49:27).

22,000 men of Israel died in the battle against Benjamin.

This seems to be punishment against Israel, rather than against Benjamin.

Gibeah seemed to be on a hill, and they had the advantage with the others in the valley below.

Verses 22-25

The Lord twice allowed great defeat and death to Israel to bring them to their spiritual senses regarding the cost of tolerating apostasy.

Also while they sought counsel, they placed too much reliance on their own prowess and on satisfying their own outrage.

Finally, when desperate enough, they fasted and offered sacrifices (verse 26).

The Lord then gave victory with a strategy similar to that at Ai (Joshua chapter 8).

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

That though they had lost a great number of men, yet still their forces were large and greatly superior to those of Benjamin, and above all their cause was good.

"And set their battle again in array":

Formed a line of battle again facing their enemy, inviting to another battle, and bidding defiance.

"And in the place where they put themselves in array the first day":

By which it seems they kept the field of battle.

Though they lost so many men, they did not flee before the children of Benjamin, but stood their ground.

Nor were they so superstitious as to fancy the place unlucky.

Nor was it a bad situation they were in, to which their want of success was owing, for then they would have changed it.

They were terribly defeated the first day, but they have reasoned why this happened.

Now, they will try another time to defeat the army of Benjamin.

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

The evening of the day in which the battle was fought.

Not that the whole army went up to Shiloh to the house of God there, but a delegation of them, who lamented their defeat, and the loss of so many lives.

But not their sins and transgressions, and particularly the idolatry they had been guilty of.

"And asked counsel of the LORD, saying, shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother":

They seemed to have some doubt, by the loss they sustained, whether they were right in going to war with Benjamin, especially as he was their brother.

And therefore the question now is, not who should go up first, which was already determined, but whether they should go at all.

And still they do not ask any help of God in battle, nor success, but were depending on their numbers.

And the justness of their cause, and therefore neither is promised to them.

Only they have an answer to their question.

"And the LORD said, go up against him":

For Benjamin was certainly in the wrong, and therefore the Israelites are directed to go against him, and they also were not sufficiently chastised, nor thoroughly humbled.

This shows a humbling of themselves.

They have just suffered a terrible loss in battle, and that in itself was humbling to them.

They are aware that God must be with them, if they are to win this battle.

They have done all they know to do by going to the LORD, before they go into battle.

They are now, going into battle with the permission of the LORD.

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

To the city of Gibeah, drew nigh to battle.

"Against the children of Benjamin the second day":

For the two battles were fought two days, one day for each.

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

Flushed with the victory they had obtained the day before.

"And destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again eighteen thousand men, all these drew the sword":

"And were armed men":

This, with the 22,000 slain the day preceding, made 40,000.

The same number singled out from among them by lot to provide food for them, and is thought by some to be the case Deborah refers to (Judges 5:8), and is what is certainly intended in (Hosea 10:9).

We can easily understand why the tribes of Israel were enraged by the things the few men in Gibeah did.

They certainly should have suffered death for their actions of that terrible night.

It is, also, a fact that the entire tribe of Benjamin should have turned the murderers over to the rest of the tribes for punishment.

It is difficult to understand, however, how the eleven tribes could go against the entire tribe of Benjamin, to totally destroy them for this crime of a few.

Perhaps, that is why God let the Benjamites win these first two battles.

18,000 Israelites were killed in this battle.

Judges 20:26 "Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD."

This looks as if the whole body of the army, with other people from parts adjacent, went up to the tabernacle of God in Shiloh.

"And wept, and sat there before the LORD":

Not only wept, but continued weeping.

And that not merely for their defeat, but for their sins, since it follows.

"And fasted that day until even":

Afflicted their bodies with fasting, which was a token of the humiliation of their souls for their sins.

"And offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD":

To make atonement for their sins, and to implore success on their arms.

The entire congregation of Israel were disturbed by this second large loss of life in going against Benjamin.

They go to their place of worship, and offer burnt offerings and peace offerings, and then they fast until the evening.

They want an answer for what is happening.

Judges 20:27 "And the children of Israel inquired of the LORD, (for the ark of the covenant of God [was] there in those days,"

This is the only reference to the “ark of the covenant” in the Book of Judges.

This reflects how seldom the Israelites consulted God during this time.

The heinous crime recorded in Judges Chapter 19 opened the people’s eyes to their spiritual need, although God’s children should never require such extreme circumstances to seek Him.

Shiloh and Bethel were just 9 miles apart, and the tabernacle was out on the road to Beth-el from Shiloh.

Wherever the ark of the covenant was, symbolized the presence of God as well.

This would be the correct place to go and inquire of the LORD.

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

Before the ark, ministering before the LORD, which shows that this affair was long before the times of Samson, though placed after them.

Or otherwise Phinehas must have been more than three hundred years of age, which is not probable.

Phinehas's standing before the ark was the posture of the priest when he inquired of the LORD for any by Urim and Thummim.

The person that inquired stood before him that was inquired of, as Kimchi observes.

And he that was inquired of stood before the Shekinah, or the presence of the divine Majesty, of which the ark was a symbol.

"Saying, shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease?"

In which the question is put in somewhat different manner than before.

Not only desiring to know whether it was the will of God they should renew the battle or not, since Benjamin was their brother.

But whether they should have success or not; intimating, that if the LORD would bless and help them, they were willing to go up, but if not they chose to desist.

For they were fully convinced now they were wrong in depending on their numbers, or the justness of their cause.

Whereas success depended wholly on the will and pleasure of God, to which they desired to submit.

"And the LORD said, go up, for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand":

Now they are not only directed to go up to the battle, but are promised victory.

Phinehas was the grandson of Aaron.

He also, was the son of Eleazar.

He was the high priest in the tabernacle, when all of this was happening.

The high priest is the only one who could go before the ark, and inquire of the LORD.

He asks if the LORD would be with them, if they went again.

The LORD promises to deliver them into the hands of the Israelites in the next battle.

Verses 29-48

Despite how far Israel had fallen away from their faith, Yahweh still orchestrated their battle and brought justice against “Benjamin”.

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

For though they were assured of success and victory, yet they thought proper to make use of means.

And though their numbers were very great, they had recourse to art and tactic, and set an ambush in different places, much in like manner as Israel did for the men of Ai.

The two cases being pretty much similar.

This ambush was set in the night, as Josephus says.

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

Not the day following the second battle, since it would take more time to go to Shiloh, and fast and offer sacrifices there.

But on the third day from the second battle.

"And put themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times":

As they had done on the first and second days of battle.

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

Sallied out of Gibeah upon them, where they had put themselves in array against them.

"And were drawn away from the city":

The Israelites retreating, and dissembling a flight, which drew the Benjamites to pursue after them.

By which means they were drawn off to a greater distance from the city of Gibeah.

"And they began to smite the people, and kill as at other times":

At the other two battles.

"In the highways":

Where it seems two ways met.

"Of which one goeth up to the house of God":

To Bethel, as the Targum.

Or rather to Shiloh, where the house or tabernacle of God was.

And was two miles from Gibeah, as Bunting says.

"And the other to Gibeah in the field":

So called, to distinguish it from the other Gibeah situated on a hill.

"About thirty men of Israel":

Which were killed in this running fight.

And it seems as if one part of the army of Israel took one road, and the other the other road.

And so divided the army of the Benjamites that pursued after them.

The liers in wait are a new addition to this battle from the others.

They drew the Benjamites away from the city to fight them in the open field.

The loss to the Israelites was 30 men.

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

Here was a battle strategy that lured the Benjamite army into a disastrous ambush (compare verses 36-46).

When the Israelites began to retreat, the Benjamites followed them further and further away from the city.

The Benjamites did not realize they were being drawn away from the city.

They thought they were winning the battle, as they had the two times before.

Judges 20:33 "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."

The main body of the army, which fled before Benjamin, when they were come to a proper place, stopped, and rose up out of it, and stood in their own defense.

"And put themselves in array at Baal-tamar":

Drew up in a line of battle at that place, facing their enemies, in order to engage with them.

This place the Targum calls the plains of Jericho that being the city of palm trees.

Which Tamar signifies; and so Jarchi interprets it.

But these are too far off; it must be some place near Gibeah.

Jerom speaks of a little village in his time in those parts, called Beth Amari, and may be thought to be this same place.

Perhaps in the times of the old Canaanites here was a grove of palm trees, in which Baal was worshipped, from whence it had its name.

"And the liers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, even out of the meadows of Gibeah":

Or plain of Gibeah, as the Targum.

For as the city was built on a hill, at the bottom of it were a plain and fine meadows of grass, and here an ambush was placed at some little distance from the city.

And when the army of the Benjamites were drawn off from it, in pursuit of Israel, these came forth and placed themselves between them and the city.

Notice also, that all of the tribes came against the Benjamites this time, not just the men of one tribe as in the beginning.

When the Benjamites were far enough from the city, the liers in wait got up behind them.

Now there were Israelites on both sides of the Benjamites.

One group was near the city.

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

Which, according to Ben Gersom, were the liers in wait.

And came from the south, as the Targum says.

"And the battle was sore":

Not between those liars in wait, and the Benjamites.

But between those at Baal-tamar, and them who set themselves in battle array against them, and they fought stoutly on both sides.

"But they knew not that evil was near them":

That there was an ambush laid, by which they were in great danger.

They knew nothing of the 10,000 men that were now come out against Gibeah, and were between them and that.

These are the men who had been liars in wait.

They were a select group out of the larger army.

They attacked Gibeah, while the Benjamites were fighting the other Israelites.

This is speaking of the people of Gibeah being caught unaware.

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

Gave Israel the victory over them at Baal-tamar.

For notwithstanding all the art and stratagem they used, their numbers and their valor, victory was of the LORD, and to him it is ascribed.

For until now Benjamin, though fewer in number, had been always victorious.

And the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day 25,100.

Which is the total sum of all that were slain of them that day, the particulars of which are afterwards given.

"All these drew the sword":

Were armed men.

It appears, that 25,100 of the fighters for the tribe of Benjamin died this day in their battle against Israel.

They started with 26,700 fighting men so this leaves just a remnant.

Only 1,600 men remain.

Some of them could have died the first two days of battle.

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

Their forces broken and worsted, many being killed.

"For the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites":

At first, and made as if they were afraid of them, and so fled before them.

Which was only to decoy them to a greater distance from the city of Gibeah.

"Because they trusted unto the liers in wait":

Which they had set beside Gibeah.

That these would not only enter the city, and burn it, but meet the Benjamites fleeing back to it.

When they should turn upon them and smite them, and so cut off all that remained of them.

It seemed that, the great army of the Israelites allowed this remnant to move away from the battle.

They knew they could not safely return to Gibeah, because of the liers in wait.

Verses 37-42

The men of "Gibeah" were taken in a ruse reminiscent of Joshua's victory at Ai (Joshua 8:4-29).

The slaughter was enormous, with but a scant six hundred "Benjamite" men having escaped (verse 47).

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

When the time was come agreed upon for them to rise out of their ambush.

"And rushed upon Gibeah":

At unawares, with great force and violence entered the city, and took possession of it.

Or "extended", or spread themselves unto it.

Before they lay close in a narrow compass, but now they put themselves in a regular order, and marched rank and file, and reached from the meadows in which they were (Judges 20:33), to the city.

"And the liers in wait drew themselves along":

Along the city, in every part of it, spread themselves all over it, and made themselves masters of every corner of it.

Or "made a long sound" with a trumpet, protracted that to a great length, which was done to terrify the inhabitants, or to let the Israelites know they were possessed of the city.

"And smote all the city with the edge of the sword":

Old men, women, and children, who were not able to bear arms.

This tells of that 10,000 going through the city destroying those who opposed them.

It is not apparent whether this meant women and children, or not.

The word "all" would indicate that it did.

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

Or an appointed time as the Targum; and so Kimchi and Abarbanel.

There was a time fixed, at which the men of Israel proposed to be at Baal-tamar, exactly when the Benjamites would be drawn at a proper distance from the city.

And then the liers in wait were to break forth, and rush upon it, and enter it.

"And that they should make a great flame with smoke to rise up out of the city":

Set it on fire, and cause the fire to burn fiercely.

That there might be a large ascent of flame and smoke to be seen afar off.

Which, when the men of Israel saw, they would know the city was taken.

When the Israelites saw this smoke coming from the city, they would know that the liers in wait had taken the city.

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

Which is before expressed by their fleeing, and giving place to the Benjamites.

And was only a deceit of theirs, to draw them off from the city.

"Benjamin began to smite and kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons":

Which was done in the highways leading to Shiloh and Gibeah in the field (Judges 20:31).

"For they said, surely they are smitten down before us as in the first battle":

When the greater number of the Israelites were slain by them.

It appears, when the Israelites started to back up from the Benjamites that remained, they thought they were winning and killed 30 Israelites.

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

Fire being set to it by the liars in wait, who had entered it, and who made a large fire.

Which caused a vast pillar of flame and smoke to arise, which might be seen a great way off.

"The Benjamites looked behind them":

Perhaps at hearing the blowing of the trumpet, and the long sound of that.

"And, behold, the flame of the city ascended up to heaven":

Went upwards, and reached to a great height.

This handful of Benjamites suddenly realized they had lost the battle, when they looked behind them and saw the city burning.

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

Turned their faces to the Benjamites, on whom they had turned their backs.

And which they did on hearing the sound of the trumpet, or seeing the flame of the city, or both.

And that in order to fight the Benjamites, and smite them, as now was their opportunity.

"The men of Benjamin were amazed":

At this strange and sudden change of things, at the sight of the flame of their city behind them, and at the Israelites turning back to fight them.

When they thought themselves sure of victory, as at other times.

"For they saw that evil was come upon them":

That they were in the utmost danger, between two fires.

As we usually say, liers in wait behind them, which had seized their city and burnt it, and the army of Israel turning upon them with great spirit and resolution.

Judges 20:42 "Therefore they turned [their backs] before the men of Israel unto the way of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them; and them which [came] out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them."

And fled from them.

"Unto the way of the wilderness":

What wilderness is not certain, perhaps the wilderness of Judah.

They did not turn directly back towards Gibeah, perceiving that was taken, and in the hands of a body of men that would meet them.

And therefore, they turned on one side towards the wilderness, if happily they could make their escape thither, and shelter themselves.

"But the battle overtook them":

That is, they that made war, as the Targum.

The Israelites that were engaged in battle with them pursued them, and overtook them.

"And them which came out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them":

Either the Israelites that came out of their cities to assist their brethren destroyed the Benjamites as they fled.

Or the Benjamites who came out of other cities to Gibeah, these were destroyed in the midst of it with the inhabitants, by the liers in wait, when they entered it.

After the Benjamites killed the 30 Israelites, the Israelites turned on them in attack.

The Benjamites, knowing all was lost, turned and ran to the woods.

The Israelites followed them into the woods and killed them.

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

Surrounded them on all sides, the army of Israel being posted in different places, and people coming out of all the cities to their assistance.

Josephus says, they were forced into, and cooped up, in a hollow place in a valley, so that they could not escape.

"And chased them":

Or "caused to pursue"; calling after them a pursuit, crying to one another as they went along, saying, pursue them, pursue them.

So Jarchi and Kimchi; which cry, as it inspired the pursuers with zeal, so they pursued with terror.

"And trod them down with ease":

They making no resistance, being quite dispirited.

The Targum is, "from the house of their rest," where they took up their rest.

And designed to rest that night, but could not, being so closely pursued, and diligently sought after.

"Over against Gibeah, towards the sunrising":

That is, as Jarchi interprets it, to the east of Gibeah, there was this overthrow and slaughter made.

Judges 20:44 "And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these [were] men of valor."

Just the number they had slain of Israel in the second battle.

This is the number of them that were slain when Israel turned upon them, and by that time they got to the east of Gibeah.

Afterwards 5000 more were slain on the highways, and 2000 near Gidom, as after related.

"All these were men of valor; as appears by three times facing and engaging with the army of Israel, so vastly superior to them, and twice beating them.

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

Which signifies pomegranate.

Perhaps it was in the form of one, and may be the same as in (1 Sam. 14:2).

Where Saul is said to be under a pomegranate tree, or under Rimmon, the rock Rimmon.

For that is said to be near Gibeah, as this was.

There was a village in the times of Jerom called Remmon, fifteen miles from Jerusalem to the north, but could not be near this rock to have its name from thence.

Here the rest of the army fled for shelter.

"And they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men":

Who were scattered one from another, and as they were found in the highways, and picked up.

They were slain one after another, just as ears of corn are gleaned one by one, after the harvest is got in, or as grapes in single berries, after the vintage is over.

"And pursued hard after them unto Gidom":

Which perhaps had its name from the cutting off of the Benjamites there.

"And slew two thousand men of them":

That is, 2000 more besides the 5000 before mentioned.

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

"Twenty and five thousand":

A rounded number for the more exact, 25,100 (compare verse 35).

This is a description of where the different groups were killed making up the 25,000 total that were killed.

This is a slight discrepancy from the 25,100 spoken of in verse 35.

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

The number of Benjamites adds up to the 26,700 (verse 15) in a reasonable way:

18,000 killed (verse 44); 5,000 (verse 45); 2,000 (verse 45); 600 survived (verse 47); leaving an estimated 1,100 lost the first two days (verse 48).

This 600 added to the 25,100 would be 25,700.

There were originally 26,700.

We do not know for sure what happened to this other 1,000.

They could have been killed in the first two days of fighting, or they could have been killed in Gibeah, or some of the other cities.

This could have been a hiding place for them.

The 4 months passed to give time for all of the soldiers to go home.

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

After they had destroyed their army, the city of Gibeah, and the inhabitants of it.

Not content with this, in their wrath and fury, turned and went.

"And smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of every city.

Even men, women, and children, in every city of Benjamin, at least all that lay in their way.

And which they might do to be avenged on them, for sending out their militia against them, which had made such a slaughter among them to the loss of 40,000 men.

Or to fulfil their oath, that such who came not to Mizpeh should be put to death.

For which reason, also the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead, as well as of the cities of Benjamin, were put to death; men, women, and children, dealing in the same severity with them as with the Canaanitish nations, or as with a city given to idolatry.

This is speaking of an almost annihilation of the tribe of Benjamin.

This is a ruthless act upon the part of the Israelites.

The Benjamites were there relatives.

They burned their cities, and killed their people.

Judges Chapter 20 Questions

1. Where was "Mizpeh" located?
2. All of the congregation called a special _____.
3. How many footmen, that drew sword, came for Israel?
4. Who relates what happened to the Israelite leaders?
5. What does the counsel try to get Benjamin to do, before they go to war?
6. How many men were chosen to furnish food for the men of Israel?
7. Would the tribe of Benjamin turn over the killers to Israel?
8. What would have been the punishment for these men that did this terrible thing?
9. How many cities did Benjamin have?
10. How would the Israelites deal with the Benjamites?
11. How many men came to help Gibeah?
12. How many men did Gibeah have themselves?
13. How many lefthanded men, who could sling stones at a hair's breadth, were there?
14. What does "Benjamin" mean?
15. How many men to fight did Israel have, after they sent part of their men to furnish food for the rest?
16. Who was chosen to represent all Israel in this first battle?
17. How many men of Israel died in the first battle?
18. What did the children of Israel do, after they lost the battle the first day?
19. What advice did the LORD give them?
20. What happened in the second battle?
21. Who went to the tabernacle, and fasted, and sacrificed, after the second battle?
22. Who was the high priest at this time?
23. What answer did the LORD give them?

24. What did they do differently in this third battle?
25. How many Israelites were killed?
26. How many men lay in wait?
27. How many of Benjamin died that day?
28. How many had originally come to fight?
29. Who smote Gibeah?
30. What was the sign the Israelites had agreed upon?
31. When did the Benjamites realize they had lost the battle?
32. How many men fled to the rock Rimmon for safety?
33. This is speaking of an almost _____ of the tribe of Benjamin.