



Benjamin is Held Accountable for the Atrocity Judges 20

Introduction

What can be done about evil? Would it have helped if God had rid the land of the Canaanites by some catastrophe and then brought Israel into a fresh uninhabited land rather than allow them to be surrounded by evil?

No. At the flood He had destroyed the old corrupt world and given Noah and his family a fresh environment in which to begin again. However, even in the perfect environment of the Garden of Eden and again in Noah's day, with everything in their favor, sin entered. A perfect environment does not prevent evil. Nor does education. People do not refuse sin simply by knowing it is bad for them. They need to see the results of sin to know how bad it is. Then they need to be willing to resist it and fight against it. God is a holy God who desires, even demands, a holy people for His Name. Israel needed to learn to resist evil and be able to survive in its presence. So do we.

William R. Newell says, "To maintain their character as an earthly nation involved necessarily the attitude of entire separation from, and consequent hostility to, every nation not owning the authority of Jehovah. Just so, for the individual Christian, a godly walk in Christ involves the enmity and persecution of the world, because of our separation from it (John 15:18-21, 16:33; 1 Peter 2:11-12).

"Inasmuch as sin is here in power, only in the attitude of warring against it can real deliverance from it be maintained" (Old Testament Studies, Vol.I).

Outline of Judges Chapter 20

- I. Israel's Meeting At Mizpah – Judges 20:1-11
- II. Israel's Declaration to Benjamin - Judges 20:12-20
- III. Israel's Battle at Gibeah - Judges 20:21-35
- IV. Israel's God-given Victory - Judges 20:36-48

I. Israel's Meeting At Mizpah – Judges 20:1-11

A. Assembling All Israel – Judges 20:1

The incidents in these last chapters of Judges may have actually occurred earlier in the history of the judges. This view is taken because of the mention of Phinehas, Aaron's grandson in verse 20:28 and possibly Moses' grandson in 18:30. Also, the gathering of all the tribes of Israel fits in better with the early years of Judges, soon after Joshua's death. Joshua had assembled the

tribes frequently during his lifetime, but in the later years they were more isolated.

B. From Dan to Beersheba – Judges 20:2

This is the first use of the term which became popular as a way of referring to the whole of Israel. Dan was the northernmost tribe and Beersheba was the southernmost city.

The nation gathered at Mizpah. All the tribes except Benjamin were represented by their leaders and their soldiers, described as four hundred thousand swordsmen. The tribe of Benjamin knew they were assembling at Mizpah. It was a well-known central meeting place for the tribes.

C. Testimony of the Levite - 20:3-7

The leaders convened the assembly and asked the Levite to tell them just how the atrocity, *this wicked deed*, had happened. The Levite told the story. He and his wife had gone to Gibeah, in Benjamin, to spend the night. The men surrounded the house because he was there and intended to kill him. Instead they ravished his concubine so that she died. Then he explained how he had cut her in pieces to send out to the tribes because such outrageous and lewd wickedness demanded a response.

He closed with an impassioned challenge to the nation, *Look, all of you are children of Israel; give your advice and counsel here and now!*

It is to be noted that the Levite's account differs from the original. The Levite said of the men who surrounded the house, *They intended to kill me*, but Judges 19:22 records them as saying to the old man, *Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally*. Furthermore, the Levite failed to mention that it was he who offered his concubine to the men. Judges 19:25 reads *the man took his concubine and brought her out to them*.

D. Response of the Nation – Judges 20:8-11

The irate people, with one mind, agreed not to depart until they had acted against Gibeah. Meanwhile they would appoint a tenth of the men to provide for the nation's food supply while all the others confronted the people of Gibeah to make them pay for the evil. The assembly moved to the edge of Gibeah.

Are you like the people of Israel when you see atrocities happening around you? Are you unable to rest until you take some action? Will you meet with others who are willing to confront evil and join forces with them?

II. Israel's Declaration to Benjamin - Judges 20:12-20

A. Confronting Benjamin - 20:12-13

Messengers went throughout Benjamin to declare the crime and demand an explanation. *What is this wickedness that has occurred among you?* They also demanded the extradition of the accused men. By their execution their particular evil would be removed.

B. Benjamin's Obstinacy – Judges 20:14-16

Benjamin not only refused to turn over the depraved men, they protected them by preparing for battle against their countrymen. Benjamin was twenty-six thousand strong, and Gibeah had another seven hundred select men, left-handed men who were experts with the sling and able to hurl a stone at a hair and not miss.

C. Israel's Prayer for Guidance – Judges 20:17-20

Benjamin's answer was not what Israel wanted. They had hoped to settle the matter peacefully. The tribes had a much larger force than Benjamin, nevertheless they paused for prayer to God. The leaders gathered at the tabernacle and asked God which tribe should go against Benjamin. The answer was *Judah*, as before (Judges 1:2). In the morning they camped by Gibeah and put the troops in battle array.

III. Israel's Battle at Gibeah - Judges 20:21-35

A. First Day – Judges 20:21-23

The soldiers of Benjamin charged out of Gibeah and cut down twenty-two thousand men. Israel fell back to take stock of their losses. They encouraged each other, probably by reminding one another that their cause was just and God had directed them. Then they went back into battle formation. But before launching into another battle they wept and prayed to God. They wanted fresh assurance that they were in the right before sending more troops into battle. God instructed them to proceed against Benjamin.

B. Second Day – Judges 20:24-29

Israel advanced on the second day and Benjamin cut down eighteen thousand more soldiers. This time all the people gathered at Bethel and wept before God.

They fasted and sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings. Then, with the high priest Phinehas presiding, they asked the Lord, *Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of my brother Benjamin or shall I cease?* This war was not pleasant to them. They would much rather not fight their fellow countrymen. But God sent them back into battle with the promise that the next day victory would be theirs.

C. Third Day – Judges 20:30-35

Israel attacked Gibeah on the third day. Benjamin began to cut them down as before, killing about thirty men and boasting that they were going to defeat Israel again. Israel fled, but only to draw the people of Benjamin out of the city. Ten thousand soldiers stood waiting for the charging Benjamites. When the men of Benjamin rushed out of the city to attack them, other Israelites rose from ambush and cut them off from returning. They then proceeded to destroy Gibeah and set it on fire. The battle was fierce. The Benjamites did not realize that disaster was upon them. They thought they were winning until they saw a cloud of smoke arise from the city behind them. That was the signal to the Israelite army that they were in control of the city. The record says, *The Lord defeated Benjamin*. They lost twenty-five thousand one hundred swordsmen that day.

IV. Israel's God-given Victory - Judges 20:36-48

A. Success of the Strategy – Judges 20:36-44

The strategy of using an ambush was risky but it worked. They depended on Benjamin's confidence from two days of winning to leave the city unprotected and use all their force to chase the Israelites once more. Israel appeared to give ground to them so that the men in ambush could strike the whole city. The Benjamites panicked when they saw the cloud from the city and fled. Israel pursued, decimating them. The ambush force finished off anyone trying to flee from the city. Israelites surrounded them, trampling them. The Benjamites put up a terrific fight but lost the day.

B. Six Hundred Survivors – Judges 20:45-48

The remaining Benjamites fled to the rock of Rimmon. Benjamin had lost almost all their fighting force. All were men of valor. They might have won, had not the Lord fought against them.

Only six hundred men escaped to the rock of Rimmon where they stayed four months. The tribes ended the war by striking all the cities of Benjamin, men and animals, and burning them. The evil was eradicated, but at tremendous cost.

Applications

1. What are you willing to commit to the battle against evil? Will you commit your time, money, prayer, leadership, energy?
2. Who needs your encouragement to stay in the battle until the end? Will you pray for missionaries, your pastor and other believers? What else will you do to give encouragement?
3. Even if you feel defeated, will you stay in the battle for right and good because of God's promises of victory?