

Day 258 - FRIDAY: September 15th

Judges 20

Judges 20:1-48 NKJV

So all the children of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, as well as from the land of Gilead, and the congregation gathered together as one man before the LORD at Mizpah. And the leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand foot soldiers who drew the sword. (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) Then the children of Israel said, "Tell us, how did this wicked deed happen?" So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "My concubine and I went into Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, to spend the night. And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me, but instead they ravished my concubine so that she died. So I took hold of my concubine, cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of the inheritance of Israel, because they committed lewdness and outrage in Israel. Look! All of you are children of Israel; give your advice and counsel here and now!" So all the people arose as one man, saying, "None of us will go to his tent, nor will any turn back to his house; but now this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah: We will go up against it by lot. We will take ten men out of every hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, a hundred out of every thousand, and a thousand out of every ten thousand, to make provisions for the people, that when they come to Gibeah in Benjamin, they may repay all the vileness that they have done in Israel." So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united together as one man. Then the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What is this wickedness that has occurred among you? Now therefore, deliver up the men, the perverted men who are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove the evil from Israel!" But the children of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brethren, the children of

Israel. Instead, the children of Benjamin gathered together from their cities to Gibeah, to go to battle against the children of Israel. And from their cities at that time the children of Benjamin numbered twenty-six thousand men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who numbered seven hundred select men. Among all this people were seven hundred select men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss. Now besides Benjamin, the men of Israel numbered four hundred thousand men who drew the sword; all of these were men of war. Then the children of Israel arose and went up to the house of God to inquire of God. They said, "Which of us shall go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin?" The LORD said, "Judah first!" So the children of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah. And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel put themselves in battle array to fight against them at Gibeah. Then the children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, and on that day cut down to the ground twenty-two thousand men of the Israelites. And the people, that is, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and again formed the battle line at the place where they had put themselves in array on the first day. Then the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, "Shall I again draw near for battle against the children of my brother Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Go up against him." So the children of Israel approached the children of Benjamin on the second day. And Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah on the second day, and cut down to the ground eighteen thousand more of the children of Israel; all these drew the sword. Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. So the children of Israel inquired of the LORD (the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, 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 my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand." Then Israel set men in ambush all

around Gibeah. And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in battle array against Gibeah as at the other times. So the children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city. They began to strike down and kill some of the people, as at the other times, in the highways (one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah) and in the field, about thirty men of Israel. And the children of Benjamin said, "They are defeated before us, as at first." But the children of Israel said, "Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways." So all the men of Israel rose from their place and put themselves in battle array at Baal Tamar. Then Israel's men in ambush burst forth from their position in the plain of Geba. And ten thousand select men from all Israel came against Gibeah, and the battle was fierce. But the Benjamites did not know that disaster was upon them. The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel. And the children of Israel destroyed that day twenty-five thousand one hundred Benjamites; all these drew the sword. So the children of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. The men of Israel had given ground to the Benjamites, because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah. And the men in ambush quickly rushed upon Gibeah; the men in ambush spread out and struck the whole city with the edge of the sword. Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they would make a great cloud of smoke rise up from the city, whereupon the men of Israel would turn in battle. Now Benjamin had begun to strike and kill about thirty of the men of Israel. For they said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle." But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and there was the whole city going up in smoke to heaven. And when the men of Israel turned back, the men of Benjamin panicked, for they saw that disaster had come upon them. Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel in the direction of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them, and whoever came out of the cities they destroyed in their midst. They surrounded the Benjamites, chased them, and easily trampled them down as far as the front of Gibeah toward the east. And eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell; all these were men of valor.

Then they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon; and they cut down five thousand of them on the highways. Then they pursued them relentlessly up to Gidom, and killed two thousand of them. So all who fell of Benjamin that day were twenty-five thousand men who drew the sword; all these were men of valor. But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they stayed at the rock of Rimmon for four months. And the men of Israel turned back against the children of Benjamin, and struck them down with the edge of the sword—from every city, men and beasts, all who were found. They also set fire to all the cities they came to.

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: “The grisly evidence of the crime of the Gibeahites produced shock in the nation of Israel. A council was held at Mizpah, the Levite giving his testimony as to what had happened. All Israel resolved to take action against the Gibeahites.

A delegation was sent to the Gibeahites demanding the surrender of the "sons of Belial" (a term denoting wicked, worthless, perverse individuals). But when the Gibeahite elders showed themselves to be implacable, the situation became ominous. Indeed, all Benjamin rallied to the aid of Gibeah. The Benjamites fielded an army of 26,000 men against 400,000 soldiers out of the remaining tribes.

That the men of Benjamin would determine to fight the other 11 tribes appears remarkably senseless, even though they were known for their courage and military prowess. Genesis 49:27 hints at this and 1 Chronicles 8:40 and 12:2 provide examples. Judges 20:16 states that their army included 700 men who possessed devastating power by use of the sling (the same weapon with which David later slew Goliath). It was an effective weapon: "The sling, which was employed with a left-handed motion, must not be confused with a modern schoolboy's catapult; it was a formidable weapon of war used in the Assyrian, Egyptian and Babylonian armies as well as in Israel.... It has been estimated that

stones weighing up to one pound could be projected with uncanny accuracy at speeds up to 90 m.p.h.!" (*Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, note on verses 15-16).

With the clash between the two armies looming, the Israelites obtained counsel from God on the matter and, after initial reverses, completely routed the Benjamites.

We do not really know the reason that God initially allowed the Israelites to suffer 40,000 casualties with virtually no Benjamite casualties before giving the Israelites any help. There may have been tactical reasons for the lopsided nature of the first engagement.

The *Tyndale* commentary on Judges offers this observation: "The hilly terrain in the vicinity of Gibeah favored a defensive force rather than an attacking force, especially if the former was in a strong position, as was likely in this case, since the Benjamites were familiar with their tribal portion. In such a situation superior numbers were of limited value, since they could not be effectively deployed, and a determined group of men armed with slings could inflict heavy casualties on an attacking force.... [And] in the battle which ensued the psychological advantage lay with the Benjamites. They would fight desperately because they were fighting for their lives, whereas the opposing force, while convinced of the rightness of their cause, may have had little heart to engage in a civil war" (note on verses 19-25). If this analysis is correct, it is an interesting parallel to the American Civil War, in cases where southern armies overwhelmed numerically superior armies of the north.

Perhaps more importantly, God may not have been especially happy with the other tribes (that their hearts were not really right is evident in what happened in the aftermath of the war). We do see that they were driven to fasting and sacrificing before God, something quite rare in this period. Perhaps God wanted them to see the need for this. In any case, the Israelites finally succeeded using a tactic similar to that used at Ai.

All but 600 Benjamite men were slaughtered in the fighting. The 600 men fled to a stronghold and maintained themselves there for four months.

But during that four months, the Israelites did something just as unthinkable as the crime that sparked the war in the first place—they went through Benjamin's territory and slaughtered the entire tribe, women and children, young and old. This was an unjustified atrocity, though the Israelites may have considered it just retribution because the Benjamite cities they butchered had sent forces to aid the wicked men of Gibeah. In any case, it was an instance of anger and revenge taking precedence over self-control. When the slaughter was complete, only the 600 men in the stronghold survived.” [END]

Verse 47 – Rimmon means “pomegranate” (BDB)