

Episode #547 Judges 20 Part 1 – Israel Versus Benjamin

I. In the book of Judges, we have a brief record of the early history (the first centuries) of the history of the land of Israel. We see the leaders God chose, judges, who ruled under Jehovah, the King. Through the lives and work of these judges, we can learn about God's works and ways.

II. Last time we considered the story of the Levite's concubine. The Lord had solemnly warned the Israelites of the moral decline that would happen to them if they lived among these awful people, Deuteronomy 20:16-18. Now after just a few short generations, while Aaron's grandson was still alive and the high priest, some in the Benjamite city of Gibeah had become so morally corrupt that they acted just like the men of Sodom! Thus Jehovah's commands to destroy the Canaanites for their abominations are justified.

III. The Plan Against Gibeah. Judges 20:1-10.

- A. Judges 20:1. All respond to the grisly message sent by the Levite. A great congregation (Hebrew 'edah) gathers. This is the national government of Israel at the time: on a need-to-meet basis. Dan is the far north (note: already exists), Beersheba the far south, and Gilead the far east. Mizpah = Watchtower, on the southwest of Benjamin. Another in Gilead not meant. Companion Bible: "all this excitement, unanimity, and bloodshed about an injury done to a woman; no sense of the evil of idolatry and sin against God" of chapters 17-18.
- B. Verse 2. All the tribal leaders take their places in the great qahal (same word as "church" ekklesia in the New Testament, these are the representatives) of the people of God. The total army is 400,000 men on foot.
- C. Verse 3. Benjamin hears. Was one of the pieces of the woman sent to them? Why did they not respond? Or were they not called? The sons of Israel want to know the story behind this grisly message.
- D. Verse 4. This is the moment for our scummy "hero" to shine. Notice he leaves out her running away from him and his fetching her.
- E. Verse 5. He makes the story out to make himself look better than he was. He does not reveal that their original plan was to rape him, or that he threw his concubine out in his place. He is being the big leader of this zealous movement.
- F. Verse 6. He wants this wicked behavior stamped out. This hypocrite makes himself out to be a moral compass for Israel! Moralists today can be just as hypocritical.
- G. Verse 7. He leaves it up to them what ought to be done.
- H. Verse 8. They make a stand in complete unanimity. They swear not to return home until having avenged this.
- I. Verse 9. They will order themselves by lot (Urim and Thummim) against Gibeah.
- J. Verse 10. Ten percent of them will support the rest of the army by providing food. Their supply train. They will pay Gibeah back for this disgraceful act.

IV. The Response of Benjamin. Judges 20:11-17.

- A. Judges 20:11. They are all gathered in complete unity against Gibeah.
- B. Verse 12. They send messengers to appeal to Benjamin about this crime.
- C. Verse 13. They ask Benjamin to give them the men of Belial in Gibeah so they can execute them and rid Israel of this calamity. The representatives of Benjamin will not listen to the appeal of their brother tribes, however.

- D. Verse 14. The sons of Benjamin gather to battle against their fellow tribes! They go to war for the wicked men of Gibeah! Some are like this today: they side with their own relatives even when they are clearly wrong or wicked. But is such “loyalty” right?
- E. Verse 15. Benjamin’s numbers. Gibeah was obviously a large and powerful city.
- F. Verse 16. More Benjamite warriors. Again lefthanded = lame or bound on the right hand. A sling was a serious weapon, their artillery. From how far away?
- G. Verse 17. The numbers were against Benjamin, as we already saw.

V. The Failure of Israel. Verse 18. The Israelites go to God’s house at Shiloh, Joshua 18:1, Judges 18:31. Notice their question: who should go to war first? Not asking what their plan should be. This whole portion illustrates to us the theme of the later part of Judges: Judges 17:6, 21:25. Notice: Benjamin was doing the same thing, only what was right in their eyes was different. Yahweh answers. Judah first in victory or in defeat.

VI. Judges 20 shows the response of the Israelite people to the moral outrage done by some men of Gibeah. While we can understand their outrage, we notice what they strictly refuse to deal with: the religious outrages done by Micah and Dan. They do what is right in their own eyes, only asking the LORD about a minor detail. Benjamin does what is right in their eyes, siding with their tribal kin. Jehovah is not pleased by the attitude of either group. Do we too ever go on moral campaigns while leaving the LORD off to the side? Do we do what is right in our own eyes rather than what is right in the eyes of the LORD?