

all but 400 virgins! These people are involved in Israel history later (1 Sam. 11:9-11; 31:11-13).

c. Ridiculous arrangements vv. 16-24.

In addition to the slaying of Jabesh-gilead to get wives for Benjamin, Israel arranged for "dances" to get women taken "forcedly" for Benjamin. Both arrangements in getting women for Benjamin were hidden behind a subtle interpretation of the verb "give" (vv. 18, 22). It was trickery and unwise.

Conclusion It is obvious that there was great confusion both politically and spiritually in Israel at this time. They had no order (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). While they had no earthly ruler, even more critical was the fact they had denied the theocracy: the rulership of the Lord. The defense of the guilty, the murder of innocents (low view of human life), and the violation of personal rights (women) tell the sad account of these days. How could this be in the light of the Lord's activity (2:16-19)? Only one answer: the rebelliousness of the human heart (Jer. 17:9). God give us a different view of things for our hearts! Amen.

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

"War Against Benjamin"

Judges 20, 21

Introduction

1. The experience of a Levite in having his concubine ravished serves as the background for this chapter (chap. 19). Gibeonites, within the territory of Benjamin, had done the dastardly deed.
2. The event is timed early in the period of the Judges. This is done in view of the activity of Phineas (20:28; cf. Num. 25:7; Josh. 22:13). Hence, the chronology of the passage is linked with the entire dreadful era of the failure of Israel under the Judges.
3. The Levite had summoned Israel to correct the problem of the death of his concubine (20:27-30). He did this by a cruel method of dissecting his wife's body and sending the pieces to the 12 tribes of Israel. The result of this action is the thrust of the final two chapters of this book. Here are the events of correction:

1. ASSEMBLY FOR WAR vv. 1-11.

a. Where? Place vv. 1, 2.

They gathered at Mizpeh. This was near Shiloh in the confines of Judah and Benjamin (Josh. 15:38; 18:26; 1 Sam. 7:5-12). It was not the Mizpeh mentioned elsewhere (Judges 10:17; 11:11, 29, 34). Those called were the "chiefs". This word literally means "cornerstone" and has reference to those who held that position in the tribes (1 Sam. 14:38; Zech. 10:4). Fortunately, they gathered "unto the Lord" and are called the "people of God" because of the moral issue involved.

b. Why? Problem vv. 3-7.

Benjamin boycotted the assembly. Evidence was required, however, to gain the full import of the crime. The Levite related it all. He inferred that he too was a target for death (v. 5). What was done is labeled as lewdness or wantonness (Lev. 18:17) which is punishable by death (Lev. 20:12, 14).

c. What? Proposal vv. 8-11.

The tribes gathered as one man. They decided on immediate action. They were knit together as friends and comrades (v. 11). Lots of ten would prepare for battle (v. 10). This was the response to the Levite's call for advice and counsel (v. 7, literally "a word and counsel", meaning: say right now what sentence is to be passed. He called for them to deal with the matter while it was fresh on their minds.).

2. PRACTICALITY BEFORE WAR vv. 12-16.

a. A question v. 12.

The Tribes had unexpectedness and bewilderment over the matter. They asked in essence: "What has come over you? How could you get involved in such a heinous crime?"

b. A proposition v. 13.

What was suggested was the summary dealing with the wicked men. They were "sons of Belial" (cf. 19:22). What was demanded was simple, understandable, and justified (cf. Deut. 13:5; 17:12; 19:19; 22:21, 22, 24; 1 Cor. 5:13). But, amazingly, Benjamin refused and dared to support the sinfulness of the men who committed the crime (cf. 1 Sam. 15:15).

c. A decision vv. 14-16.

The Benjamites decided for war. They marshaled 26,700 (700 from Gibeon). Among these were 700 crack troops who were ambidextrous. Literally, they could not miss to a hair (same root for word "sin", hence the concept of "miss the mark" for sin). Such troops are mentioned again (1 Chron. 12:2).

3. ACTIVITY OF WAR vv. 17-48.

a. Round 1

There was no inquiry from the Lord about the rightness of the action of war, but just how it was to be done (v. 18). Even with 400,000 troops, Israel suffered

a stunning defeat (vv. 17, 21). This number was not large in view of the eligibles listed (Num. 26:51).

b. Round 2 vv. 22-25.

With the defeat, Israel now took courage (v. 22). They also added to this some prayer and counsel. They were told to get to battle. Again they suffered defeat. There is no mention of casualties for Benjamin in the first two rounds.

c. Round 3 vv. 26-48.

Israel was really in trouble now. At least eight items are mentioned to show what they decided to do. Included in this are the following: all the children of Israel gathered, they came to the house of God, they wept, they sat there, they fasted, and they offered offerings. Mind you, they also had the ark. The burnt offering showed dedication and the peace offering showed expected victory. The strategy here was an ambush as at Ai (Josh. 8:3, 4). The attack came and the Lord gave the victory as promised (v. 35). The harmony of the figure of Benjamites killed is made by understanding that 1000 must have been slain during the first two rounds of battle. The summary of the battle is given (vv. 33-35). The day's activities are provided (vv. 36-48). It was a total victory for Israel and defeat for Benjamin. They were left with only 600 men!

4. DIFFICULTY AFTER WAR 21:1-24.

a. Senseless oath vv. 1-7.

Benjamin was not "given" wives. Furthermore, anyone who had not come up for the muster (20:1, 2) was to be killed. Both decisions were made without God (20:8, 9, 18, 28). Israel cried: "Why did God allow this?" He had a purpose and fulfilled it.

b. Ruthless destruction vv. 8-15.

Had Israel heeded the wise counsel of God, they would not have landed in this situation (Ecc. 5:2; Acts 19:36). So now they were intemperate and indiscriminate in murder. They charged against Jabesh-gilead and killed