

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #26

Judges 20:1-48

One philosopher said almost all of our problems in life are due to the fact that we are not willing to quietly sit down for thirty minutes and think through all possible consequences for our actions. If God's people would do that, they would make many more right choices and would not end up being so depressed.

If ever you want to see an example of an entire nation who never quietly sat down to think about the direction they were moving, it is the nation Israel. Israel was a nation filled with people who were living life their own way. They did not consult the Word of God and they were not interested in doing the will of God. As a result her existence was a disaster and frankly, still is.

When we come to the end of the book of Judges, it is a dark, dreary and depressing time in the history of Israel. The reason for this depression is because God's people just continued to live life in their own way without seeking to obey God's Word or will and they found themselves hitting rock bottom.

Last time when we looked at chapter 19, we saw that God's people hit a new all-time low. Men from the tribe of Benjamin reached a new level of depravity and perverted evil. The evil men wanted to rape a man but ended up raping his concubine and as a result she died and then the Levite priest cut her into twelve pieces and sent one to each tribe. As we come to chapter 20, it is brutal. Brother is killing brother all because no one considered the Word of God or will of God. What we see here is a lesson we need to see:

WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE DRIFTED AWAY FROM GOD'S WORD AND HAVE LIVED LIFE THEIR OWN WAY, THE END RESULTS WILL BE DISASTROUS, BUT WHEN THEY HONESTLY CONFRONT THEIR OWN SIN THEY WILL HAVE VICTORY.

There are real Christians right now who are in jail because they have done evil. There are real Christians right now who are dying of AIDS because they have been immoral. There are real Christians right now who are totally and completely depressed because of the choices they have made. Some of these believers who are absolutely miserable will not turn to God or His Word and their life will end in a disaster. That is the story of the book of Judges.

The result of the nation Israel doing what was right in their own eyes was immorality, lack of unity, divisions, fighting, war and death. There was no happiness, no God focus and no real peace.

At this point in Israel's history, things among the nation Israel are totally out of control. In the aftermath of each tribe getting part of the body of the concubine eight major events occurred:

EVENT #1 – All the sons of Israel gathered as one to the LORD at Mizpah. **20:1**

Apparently, body parts were sent to key leaders of each tribe and when each leader received their package, they gathered together at Mizpah. Mizpah was located eight miles north of Jerusalem and only about four miles north of Gibeah where the rape had occurred.

Verse 1 tells us that all Israelites from Dan to Beersheba met together. This geographically meant all tribes of the Promised Land from the far north (Dan) to the far south (Beersheba) got together, including the Transjordan tribes from “the land of Gilead.”

Now it is specifically revealed from **verse 18** that the place where God’s presence was really located was at Bethel. In my opinion, this is where they should have met to consult God. But notice they are gathered at Mizpah.

God is Omnipresent so He is everywhere present, and He is also Omniscient which means He knows the reason why they are gathering; however, it would seem that if they truly wanted to know God’s will they would start in Bethel, not Mizpah. What this tells us is the nation is still doing what is right in its own eyes. **They do want to do something, but they are beginning to form their own plan and their plan at this point seems to be to include God, but not necessarily depend on God.**

Many of God’s people to this day still operate this way. They don’t necessarily want to leave out God, but they don’t want to depend on God either. So they make their own decisions and bring God into the equation, but they are not specifically interested in knowing His specific Word or will before they make the decision.

EVENT #2 – Israel’s leaders gather the soldiers to prepare to attack Benjamin. **20:2**

It is interesting that the leaders take their stand “in the assembly,” which in the Greek Septuagint is the word we use for church. So this all has major religious overtones to it. What we have here is a gathering of political and religious leaders for the purpose of mobilizing 400,000 soldiers to draw their swords in order to destroy Benjamin.

This is so sad because one must wonder where these political/religious leaders and chiefs have been all these years. Why didn’t they step up before now and turn the nation back to God and his Word. Where were our political and religious leaders when the Bible was taken out of the schools in the 1960’s? You know it is so odd, but Christian organizations will rise up and try to get a candidate elected, but when the candidate is elected, nothing much changes in the morality or focus of the nation, especially when it comes to God and His Word.

EVENT #3 – The sons of Israel ask the Levite to tell them what happened. **20:3-7**

As **verse 3** begins, the Benjaminites got word that this meeting was taking place. It is possible, although not stated, that they (Benjaminites) were called to appear at this assembly, but didn’t do it. Duane Lindsey in his commentary said that “the tribe of Benjamin received 1 of the 12 parts of the concubine” (*Judges*, p. 412).

When the Israelites gathered, they asked the Levite to tell them what happened. Now let us remember that this Levitical priest is not much of a man of backbone or integrity. As far as I am concerned he is a gutless weasel. So now this man has an opportunity to tell his story to the nation. We may be certain that the way he will spin this story will be in view of his character. He hasn’t repented and given his life to the Lord. He is going to spin this his way.

It is so sad because a Levite is supposed to be one who communicates the Word of God to people. He was supposed to address the nation as a spokesman for God. Instead, his five minutes of fame are given to tell his pathetic life’s story.

Now when you read this account in **verses 4-7** of what the Levite is telling these men of Israel, the first thing we see is that there are some key distortions and omissions. The general story line is true, but he is not actually revealing what happened. He is shading things to try to make himself look good. The Levite is not quite telling the whole truth here.

We must carefully observe the emphasis that he places on himself: “I,” “my,” “me.” This Levite is a poor excuse of a priest or a man. He makes this out to be a story all about the bad things that happened to him, when in fact he is responsible for turning over his concubine to those worthless men.

He leaves out many key details and then he makes stuff up. He tells them in **verse 5** that the men wanted to kill him, which in fact was not true; they wanted to rape him (19:22). Second, in **verse 5** he makes it sound like they forcibly took his concubine, when in fact he shoved her out the door and gave her to them and went to bed and went to sleep (19:25, 27).

When he got all done with his story, in **verse 7** he appealed to Israel for its advice and counsel. He comes out of this almost looking like a wise hero. But not before God.

There are many people who are living life their own way and shading it to look differently before others. But there will come a day when we all will get before God and no one will shade anything anymore.

EVENT #4 – The people of Israel decided to support a movement to destroy Benjamin.
20:8-11

After hearing the gruesome details of what happened, the nation Israel united with one voice and made a vow that they would not even go to their homes until they make this right. This is the first time in Israel’s history when the nation was completely unified as one man. In fact, the phrase that is repeated three times is that Israel was finally united as “one man” (**v. 1, 8, 11**). Isn’t this sad? For the first time they are united as one man not in a desire to serve God, but in a desire to kill their brother.

Their plan was that 1/10th of the warriors would provide supplies and the others would go up against Benjamin by lot. Four thousand men would provide logistical supplies and 36,000 would attack by lot. No one would shrink away from responsibility. The goal is revenge and destruction.

Now Israel will make some key mistakes here, but there is one thing I do want us to observe. There will come a point in time when God will pour out His vengeance on this God mocking, Christ rejecting world and He will destroy them and the world. That is exactly what He will do in the Tribulation. So this principle is found in both the O.T. and the N.T.

EVENT #5 – The people of Israel surround Gibeah and demand that the Benjaminites turn over the evil men. **20:12-13**

The men of Israel gave the Benjaminites an opportunity to make this right by turning over the evil men who had done this. That phrase “worthless fellows” (v. 13) literally reads “sons of Belial” which, was interpreted by Paul to mean “sons of Satan.” (II Cor. 6:15) Homosexuality is a satanic, unnatural abomination.

According to Mosaic Law (Leviticus 20:13), a homosexual was to be put to death. But we may recall that the Levite willingly gave his concubine to these evil men to gang rape her, and according to Deuteronomy 22:25-26 rape was punishable by death. But the Benjaminites refused. They chose tribal unity over national unity.

We may draw an application from this verse. God calls out to sinners to turn their lives over to Him. But many refuse. They are not about to listen to God. They will face judgment and they will be eternally destroyed.

EVENT #6 – The Benjaminites refuse and gathered 26,700 men to fight 400,000 Israelites.
20:14-17

The Benjaminites had become so corrupt they would not admit there had been any sin and they were not about to turn the evil culprits over to the Israelites. They not only refused to punish the sin, they patronized the sinner. This is the world that we live in. Someone goes out and does horrible evil and people rally around them to defend them.

Instead of dealing with those who had done such horrible things they gathered up their own military force of 26,000 Benjaminites plus 700 choice men from Gibeah who were left handed and very skilled with a sling.

The men of this time were as accurate with a sling and stone as any military man is today with a rifle and scope. Put one of these men within range and they could pick off an enemy just like a sniper with a rifle. It has been calculated that a man trained with a sling can sling a stone at ninety miles per hour.

Now most major league baseball pitchers can throw a baseball at ninety miles per hour and they struggle to throw a strike over a plate. These guys were so well trained that they could sling a stone at ninety miles per hour and not miss a hair target at a much greater distance than 60' 6".

It is interesting that the word "not miss" gives us a clue as to what sin is. Sin is missing the mark. In order to be classified as righteous by God one would have to never have missed the mark of His righteousness even by a hair's miss.

If you have this kind of skill, then there would be many who would die in this kind of conflict. Benjamin was not about to go down without a fight.

When you initially look at these numbers it would appear that they are very lopsided. But the Benjaminites live in hilly country that is easier to defend than to take. Furthermore, the Benjaminites were arrogant and felt as though they could defeat the Israelites even though they were outnumbered.

EVENT #7 – Israel finally turns to God for help. **20:18**

How would you like to be God to figure this out? Everyone in the nation has done what is right in their own eyes and nobody has included His Word or His will in anything. Now in order to kill their brother, they decide to consult God.

I want you to notice what they ask God and what they don't ask God. They ask God "who should go first," not "should we go at all?"

Their first prayer should have been, “God what would you have us do?” But they have already decided what they are going to do so they just want God to rubber stamp this and reveal to them who should go first.

Representatives from twelve tribes finally went to Bethel to consult with God. Bethel was the place of the temporal location of the Tabernacle. This consultation would mean God would have to authorize them to go to war against their own brothers.

They finally ask God who should fight and God said Judah should go first. Let us remember that the concubine had been from Bethlehem in Judah (19:1), so it is only logical that they go first. Notice God does not say He is going to give them victory; He says Judah should go first.

God is about to teach them a costly lesson; namely, **if you do what is right in your own eyes you will pay a heavy price.** God can give one victory again when one finally turns to Him, but there can be a heavy price to pay.

God will actually use this conflict for His judicial purposes. God will eventually give Israel victory, but He will providentially destroy 40,000 Israelites in the process until they face their own sin. God would use Benjamin to destroy Israel and then He would use Israel to destroy Benjamin. There were no innocent parties here. God had kept the records and He would settle all scores. God always vindicates His own causes and He works out equitability in any dispensation.

EVENT #8 – God does not give victory for three days. **20:19-26**

There are three main battles carefully described in these verses:

Battle #1 - The first day God allowed the Benjaminites to win and Israel lost 22,000 men. **20:19-24**

We are not told how many Benjaminites were lost, but we are told how many Israelites were lost- 22,000 (**v. 21**). What went wrong? They thought they knew God’s will. The eleven tribes wept and again sought the will of God (**v. 24**) and God again told them to go. I want you to notice that in **verse 18**, when they first inquire about going they use the name “God,” and when they first approach God they refer to their enemies as “sons of Benjamin.” You will see a major change as this story progresses as they come to understand more about God.

Battle #2 - The second day God let Benjamin win again and Israel lost 18,000 men. **20:25-28**

I want you to carefully observe in **verse 23** they now call God “LORD” and they finally admit in **verse 23** that Benjamin is “my brother” and then they ask God if they should go fight. When they first approached God, they did not use His covenant name and it was simply a matter of fighting “the sons of Benjamin” (**verse 18**).

But now because of the loss they use the covenant name, and don’t miss **verse 26**; they now offer burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. And according to **verse 27** they now realize the importance of the Ark of the Covenant, which contains the Word of God. **They had not until this moment faced their own sin and that is why God let them suffer two major defeats. God will not give victory until one is willing to face his own sin. God can use you for great things, but He will never do it until one is willing to deal with his own sin.**

For the first time “the ark of the covenant” is mentioned and so is the priest “Phinehas.” Israel is now beginning to realize the importance of the Word of God and a true priest of God.

At this point Israel had lost a total of 40,000 men because they had not dealt with the Word of God and their own sin. But finally they came to terms with their own sin and according to **verses 26-28** again the sons of Israel sought the Lord and God said I will give you victory on Day three.

It is certainly right to be angry with depraved, evil sin. It is certainly right to want God to punish it. But we must make sure in all of this that we take the beam out of our own eye and deal honestly with things in our own lives.

Battle #3 - The third day God gave Israel victory and Benjamin loses over 25,000 men.
20:29-48

The Benjaminites were not afraid of Israel anymore. They were very self-confident because of the previous victories. They were lured away by what appeared to be a half-hearted Israeli attack. The Israelites took their same battle positions and the Benjaminites went out thinking they would rout them. But they didn't know it was a trap. They pursued the Israelites right out of Gibeah and they were caught in an ambush. As they went out of Gibeah chasing the Israelites, Israel went into Gibeah and set the city on fire and when the Benjaminites turned around and saw the city burning, they realized it is over (**v. 39-40**). Over 25,000 Benjaminites were killed, which means all but 600 Benjaminites were destroyed.

They were killed in stages- 18,000 were first killed (**20:44**); then another 5,000 were killed on the roads (**20:45a**) and then another 2000 were killed as well (**20:45b**). Since the total number killed was 25,100, we know that another 100 were killed from the 700 choice men of Gibeah.

It is interesting that after the Exodus from Egypt there were 35,400 men of war in Benjamin (Num. 1:37) and by the time the second census was taken there were 45,600 (Num. 26:41). During this three day war, Benjamin was destroyed to the point that only 600 survived. Those 600 fled into the desert to the rock of Rimmon, located about four miles east of Bethel, where they stayed for four months. According to **verse 48**, the men of Israel went through Benjamin's land and destroyed Benjamin's military, their cities and their cattle.

How does a nation of God end up with such a disaster? They drifted away from the Word of God and did that which was right in their own eyes. No one knew the Word and no one dared to stand up and communicate the Word and God's people ended up a mess.

There is a statement concerning Benjamin in **verse 34** that is so appropriate in our day; they “did not know that disaster was close to them.” I don't think most people realize how close they are to eternal disaster- we are all one heartbeat away from eternity.

If you are listening to this and you do not know Jesus Christ as your Savior, you need to know disaster is that close to you. Now just take a minute to quietly think about that. Think about potential consequences if you leave here not right with God.