

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"If Your Brother Sins Against You, Rebuke Him, But..."*

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse, and we find ourselves at **Luke 17:3**, but you can stay in **Judges 20** because it's where we will be for most of the sermon.

I have four questions for you. The first question is a simple one...

Who is a sinner?

Everyone!

Listen to these verses:

- **2 Chronicles 6:36 There is no one who does not sin**
- **Proverbs 20:9 Who can say, "I am clean from my sin"?**
- **Ecclesiastes 7:20 Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who...never sins.**
- **Romans 3:23 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**
- **1 John 1:8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.**

Now here's the second question...

If everyone is a sinner, who must God use to rebuke people in sin?

Other sinners!

And this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson One: God must use sinners to rebuke sinners.

Here's the third question...

If God uses sinners to rebuke sinners, what is the difference between the rebuker and the person being rebuked?

Unrepentant sin.

They are both sinners, but the person being rebuked is in unrepentant sin and God wants to see repentance.

Think about the Old Testament when God used nations to rebuke other nations...

There were no sinless nations, so He had to use sinful nations to punish other sinful nations. Then He had to punish the sinful nation that punished the other nation because of that nation's sins.

For example:

- God used Assyria to conquer the northern kingdom of Israel.
- Then God used Babylon to conquer Assyria and later Judah.
- Then God used the Medes and Persians to conquer Babylon.
- Then God used the Greek Empire to conquer the Medes and Persians,
- Then God used the Roman empire to conquer the Greek Empire.

If you were with us on Wednesday nights when Jake was teaching through Habakkuk, you know Habakkuk was upset about the wickedness of his people, the Jews. He shares his complaint with God...

Habakkuk 1:3 Why do you make me see iniquity, and WHY DO YOU IDLY LOOK AT WRONG?

That's strong language: Habakkuk said God sees sin but does nothing.

Habakkuk 1:4a So THE LAW IS PARALYZED,

God's law does nothing.

Habakkuk 1:4b and JUSTICE NEVER GOES FORTH.

Sin is never punished.

Habakkuk 1:4c The wicked surround the righteous; so JUSTICE GOES FORTH PERVERTED.

There is so little justice, it's perverted or twisted.

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God answers Habakkuk by telling him He is going to punish the Jews with the Babylonians.

Listen to what Habakkuk says in response...

Habakkuk 1:13 Why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when THE WICKED SWALLOWS UP THE MAN MORE RIGHTEOUS THAN HE?

Did you catch that?

Habakkuk knew the Jews were bad, but the Babylonians were worse. He doesn't understand how could God use the Babylonians to punish the Jews, or as Habakkuk said, how could God have **the wicked** – referring to the Babylonians – swallow up **the man** – referring to the Jews – **more righteous than them**?

But what is the alternative? What righteous nation could God use to punish the Jews?

The Jews were supposed to be the righteous nation God used to punish sinful nations. If the nation that is supposed to be righteous is unrighteous there's nobody left. He must use unrighteous nations to punish unrighteous nations, and some of the unrighteous nations will be even more unrighteous than the nation they punish.

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After Habakkuk's complaint, God responds that He is going to punish the Babylonians. Here's part of what He says, and it is as though He is speaking directly to the Babylonians...

Habakkuk 2:16 You will have your fill of shame instead of glory...The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you (this is the cup of God's wrath), and utter shame will come upon your glory! 17 The violence...will overwhelm you.

So, God used the Babylonians to punish the Jews, but then He punished the Babylonians for their sins.

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Here's the fourth and final question...

When God uses sinful people to rebuke other sinful people, what is the temptation the sinful people doing the rebuking face?

Pride.

And this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Two: If your brother sins against you, rebuke him, but (Part One) be careful of pride.

If God wants us to rebuke people in sin:

- We might look down on those people
- We might think we are better than them
- We might think they are sinners, but we are not
- We might be outraged over their sin without being outraged over our sin
- We might be so focused on their sin, we ignore our sin

Jesus specifically warned against this in the sermon on the Mount...

Matthew 7:3 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Let me say it like this...

When we are supposed to rebuke people, we might start to see a huge chasm between us and them...but God doesn't see this chasm.

So listen to what Jesus and Paul say to discourage us from seeing this chasm, and I asked the sound guys to put these verses up on the screen so you could see them next to each other...

1. Luke 17:3 **Pay attention to yourselves!** If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,
2. Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. **Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.**

Luke 17:3 is the new verse we've reached in Luke's gospel.

The verse is about rebuking others, but it begins with the words **pay attention to yourselves**.

- The NKJV says **take heed to yourselves**
- The NIV says **watch yourselves**
- The NASB says **be on your guard**

This sounds strange, doesn't it?

Someone sinned, so we would expect to be told to pay attention to them, but Jesus says to pay attention to ourselves.

Paul says something similar...

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. KEEP WATCH ON YOURSELF, LEST YOU TOO BE TEMPTED.

Someone sinned, but Paul tells us to watch ourselves to avoid temptation.

This is not referring to being tempted by the same sin the other person is committing. This is referring to pride.

As I was thinking about this all week an Old Testament account came to mind. This is why we are in **Judges 20**.

Let me give you the context because we are jumping right into the middle.

Some men raped and murdered a woman. The sin was so terrible the whole nation learned about it.

The men who committed the sin were to be executed, and they were from Gibeah, which was within the boundaries of the tribe of Benjamin. So, the other eleven tribes reached out to the tribe of Benjamin to get them to turn over the men.

Look at **verse 12**...

Judges 20:12 And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, “What evil is this that has taken place among you? 13 Now therefore give up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and purge evil from Israel.” But THE BENJAMINITES WOULD NOT LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF THEIR BROTHERS, the people of Israel.

Unbelievably, the tribe of Benjamin would not hand over the wicked men.

How do we explain this?

We are in Judges, and what is the theme verse for this book?

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Israel was one nation, but it was like 12 separate connected states. There were strong tribal loyalties, and even though it was wrong, in the tribe of Benjamin’s eyes they thought the right thing to do was protect their relatives.

One lesson we can learn from this is not to show favoritism or loyalty to people when they sin...even if they’re close friends or family.¹

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The tribe of Benjamin’s behavior gets even worse...

Judges 20:14 Then the people of Benjamin came together out of the cities to Gibeah to go out to battle against the people of Israel.

Not only would the tribe of Benjamin not turn over the wicked men, they actually decided to go to battle against the other eleven tribes!

They remind me of the Corinthian church who protected the man engaging in sexual sin ...

1 Corinthians 5:2 You are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

Paul said the man should have been removed from among the Corinthians, just like the men of Gibeah should have been removed from among the tribe of Benjamin.

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Let’s look at the number of men on each side...

Judges 20:15 And the people of Benjamin mustered out of their cities on that day 26,000 men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who mustered 700 chosen men. 16 Among all these were 700 chosen men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. 17 And the men of Israel, apart from Benjamin, mustered 400,000 men who drew the sword; all these were men of war.

The tribe of Benjamin numbered 26,000 with 700 from Gibeah for a total of 26,700. The 11 tribes of Israel numbered 400,000.

400,000 men against less than 27,000. The 11 tribes are going to slaughter the tribe of Benjamin, right?

Judges 20:18 The people of Israel arose and went up to Bethel and inquired of God, “Who shall go up first for us to fight against the people of Benjamin?” And the Lord said, “Judah shall go up first.”

Three things about this verse...

First, don't take this to mean the Lord audibly spoke; more than likely He communicated through the Urim and Thummim. This is made clearer in **verses 27 and 28**, because of the mention of the High Priest who carried these implements in his breastplate.ⁱⁱ

Second, the eleven tribes asked the wrong question. They said, “Who should go first?” but they should have asked, “Should we go fight?”

It was presumptuous to assume that they should go to battle without first doing what **Luke 17:3** and **Galatians 6:1** says:

- **Pay attention to yourselves!**
- **Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.**

If they did this, God probably would have moved them to be humble...and then He wouldn't have had to humble them Himself.

And this is a good lesson for us...

We should humble ourselves, so God doesn't have to humble us.

I know I've felt humbled by God before, and in hindsight I felt like it could've been avoided if I hadn't been prideful.

Third, God only said Judah should go first. He didn't promise victory. Look at **verse 19**...

Judges 20:19 Then the people of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah. **20** And the men of Israel went out to fight against Benjamin, and the men of Israel drew up the battle line against them at Gibeah. **21** The people of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and DESTROYED ON THAT DAY 22,000 MEN OF THE ISRAELITES.ⁱⁱⁱ

This is not what we would expect, is it?

For two reasons...

First, 400,000 men just lost to less than 27,000 men. That alone is one reason we wouldn't expect this outcome.^{iv}

Second, the tribe of Benjamin was in the wrong, so why would they win? They are going to lose in a moment, so that's not really the question.

The question is, why did God want the other eleven tribes to lose?

He was disciplining them.

The days of the judges lasted almost 3.5 centuries, and it was one of the spiritually darkest times in Israel's history...because of all 12 tribes.

The 11 tribes didn't commit the same sins as the tribe of Benjamin, but they were by no means innocent or more righteous. They were plenty sinful themselves.

God wants to see brokenness, humility, and repentance from them too.

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Do you remember when Israel lost to Ai?

Israel defeated Jericho, which seemed like an invincible city. Then they to Ai, which was a little settlement.

Joshua fell on his face and inquired of the Lord. God told him there was sin in the camp.

I am not saying that every loss in life should be attributed to sin, but if you feel like you are regularly getting beat up, ask God if that might be the reason.

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Unfortunately, the eleven tribes were not asking this question. Look how they responded to the loss instead in **verse 22...**

Judges 20:22 But the people, the men of Israel, took courage, and again formed the battle line in the same place where they had formed it on the first day.

This is not how God wanted them responding to the defeat. It says they **took courage**. They encouraged themselves. The word courage is found in the word encourage.

It isn't always good to encourage ourselves or others. Sometimes we should be discouraged if that discouragement leads to humility and brokenness. If people are approaching repentance, we don't want to lift him up before they reach it. Encourage them **AFTER** they repent.

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This defeat did produce **SOME** humility in the eleven tribes. Look at **verse 23...**

Judges 20:23 And the people of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until the evening. And they inquired of the Lord, "Shall we again draw near to fight against our brothers, the people of Benjamin?" And the Lord said, "Go up against them."

What do you see the Israelites doing before this battle that they didn't do before the previous battle?

First, in **verse 18** they said, "Who shall go up first to fight?" But now they say, "Shall we go up to fight?"

They inquired of the Lord in a humbler way. Instead of deciding to go to battle and asking who should go first, they had the humility to ask if they should go to battle at all.

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Second, in **verse 18** they referred to the tribe of Benjamin as **the people of Benjamin**, but now they refer to them as **our brothers**. In other words, previously they saw a chasm between them. They looked down on them. But now they see them as equals.

Third, they **wept**.

This looks good, but here's the problem...

They are experiencing worldly sorrow versus godly sorrow:

- Worldly sorrow is sorrow over the consequences of sin. In this case the eleven tribes are sorry they lost.
- Godly sorrow is sorrow over sin itself.
- Worldly sorrow can involve weeping, fasting, and promises
- Godly sorrow involves repentance.

Think about Esau, Saul, and Judas. All three demonstrated sorrow, but none of them were repentant.

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God told the tribes to go, but again He didn't promise victory...because of the absence of godly sorrow.

Look what happens...

Judges 20:24 So the people of Israel came near against the people of Benjamin the second day. 25 And Benjamin went against them out of Gibeah the second day, and DESTROYED 18,000 MEN OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL. All these were men who drew the sword.

Benjamin defeated Israel again! Israel lost another 18,000 men, bringing the total to 40,000 men.

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Now we finally get to see some godly sorrow. Notice all the evidence in these verses...

Judges 20:26 Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. 27 And the people of Israel inquired of the Lord (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, 28a and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days), saying, "Shall we go out once more to battle against our brothers, the people of Benjamin, or shall we cease?"

Pause here.

They finally reached the level of humility and brokenness God desired. And this brings us to the next part of lesson two...

Lesson Two: If your brother sins against you, rebuke him, but (Part Two) with brokenness over your sin.

How different do the eleven tribes look NOW than they did when they first went up against the tribe of Benjamin?

In a few short verses we see seven wonderful things that we did not see before:

1. There's no temple, so they went up to **Bethel**, which was probably the next best thing
2. Twice it says they were **before the Lord**, which means they sought God
3. They **wept**
4. They **fasted**
5. They sought a priest: **Phineas**. This is the same man I mentioned in last Sunday's sermon who was zealous for God and brought the plague to an end.
6. They **offered burnt offerings and peace offerings**
7. They inquired of the Lord in a humble way asking if they should even go to battle...versus telling Him they're going.

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Sadly, what we are seeing here with the nation of Israel is incredibly rare in Judges. In fact, this is the only place in the entire book that we see some of these things,

- This is the only mention of **fasting** in Judges
- This is the only mention of the **ark** in in Judges
- This is the only mention of a godly **priest** in in Judges. You might remember the priest with Micah in chapters 17 and 18 when he made his own religion, but that's far from a godly priest.

This shows just how far ALL twelve tribes were from God:

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If you are familiar with Judges you know it is largely a record of cycles:

- Israel engages in sin
- God punishes Israel with one of the surrounding nations
- Israel cries out in anguish
- God raises up a judge to deliver them
- Israel sins again and the cycle repeats itself.

My point is that all of Israel's crying out throughout the book was worldly sorrow, but not godly sorrow...which is why they kept being defeated.

And this is why God couldn't have the eleven tribes defeating the tribe of Benjamin without recognizing just how sinful they were too.

And when God wants us rebuking a brother or sister in sin, he wants us keeping in mind that we are sinners too.

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Look at the rest of **verse 28**...

Judges 20:28b And the Lord said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand." 29 So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah.

God finally promised victory.

You can read about the battle on your own if you'd like.

Skip to **verse 35** for the result...

Judges 20:35 And the Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel, and the people of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day. All these were men who drew the sword.^v

The tribe of Benjaminite lost 25,100 of their original 26,700.

Verses 36 through **46** explain how the men of the tribe of Benjamin were killed.

Skip to **verse 47**...^{vi}

Judges 20:47 But 600 men (of Benjamin) turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon and remained at the rock of Rimmon four months.

Picture this: only 600 of the original 26,700 men of Benjamin remained alive, which is barely over 2%. The tribe of Benjamin is almost extinct. The 11 tribes almost wiped out one of their brother tribes.

What would you expect the eleven tribes to say at this point?

"I can't believe we slaughtered almost all our brother Benjamin. Only 600 of them are left. We better stop or we are going to wipe them out completely."

Nope. Look at **verse 48**...

Judges 20:48 And the men of Israel turned back against the people of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, the city, men and beasts and all that they found. And all the towns that they found they set on fire.

This is one of the saddest verses in the Bible describing the indiscriminate and relentless slaughter of all these people who were unarmed and helpless. The eleven tribes didn't just execute the perpetrators, but everyone they could find from Benjamin. They were like wild, ravenous, monsters as they destroyed their brother tribe.

And this brings us to lesson four...

Lesson Two: If your brother sins against you, rebuke him, but (Part Three) with gentleness.

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him IN A SPIRIT OF GENTLENESS. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

The other eleven tribes definitely lacked this **spirit of gentleness**.

It was right to punish Benjamin, but they went overboard.

James 1:20 The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

This account is a good example of this verse. The anger of the eleven tribes did not produce **the righteousness of God**.

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Look one chapter to the right at **Judges 21:2**...

Judges 21:2 And the people (referring to the other 11 tribes) came to Bethel and sat there till evening before God, and they lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. 3 And they said, "O Lord, the God of Israel, why has this happened in Israel, that today there should be one tribe lacking in Israel?"

The eleven tribes cried out to God like it was His fault. They acted like they didn't know why the tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped out...when it was because of their cruelty.

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What we are seeing here is common...

We mess up, cause problems, don't have the humility to see that it is our fault, so we turn around and say:

- *How can this be?*
- *God why did you let this happen?*

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Now let's talk about the application...

This sermon applies to any relationship that involves rebuking sin:

- Rebuking a brother or sister in Christ
- Rebuking a spouse
- Rebuking a child
- Rebuking a sibling

Whenever we rebuke sin, we want to:

- Apply Jesus's words in **Luke 17:3** and **Pay attention to ourselves**
- Apply Paul's words in **Galatians 6:1** and **Keep watch on ourselves, lest we be tempted**

Practically this means we strive to apply the lessons God wanted the eleven tribes to learn in this chapter:

1. We are careful of pride
2. We remember we are sinners and not better than people we rebuke
3. We rebuke in a spirit of gentleness

Romans 2:4 says **God’s kindness is meant to lead us to repentance.**

Just as God’s kindness leads us to repentance, it is probably our kindness that can help lead others to repentance.

When we rebuke people, and they hear humility and love in our voices, it is much louder and easier for them to receive. But if we come in a spirit of pride with cruel words they are more likely to be defensive and proud themselves.

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If you have any questions about the sermon or I can pray for you in any way, I will be up front after the service might consider it a privilege to speak with you.

Let’s pray.

ⁱ Speaking of tribes, you might remember why Levi was chosen out of all the tribes to serve as the priests. It was because of their behavior at the Golden calf. Listen to this...

Exodus 32:25 And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies), 26 then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Come to me.” And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. 27 And he said to them, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.’” 28 And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell. 29 And Moses said, “Today you have been ordained for the service of the Lord, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day.”

Because of their loyalty to God even over their own siblings, He chose them specially out of all the tribes of Israel to serve Him in the tabernacle.

ⁱⁱ Judah was chosen because God already selected this tribe as the leader of the brothers even though he was the fourth-born son:

- Genesis 49:8-12 is when Jacob blesses his sons and he says his brothers will praise him and his relatives will bow before him, and the scepter won’t depart from him, etc.
- 1 Chronicles 5:1-2 Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel—he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father’s bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright; 2 yet Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came a ruler, although the birthright was Joseph’s

ⁱⁱⁱ Even though there’s no mention of Benjamin losing anyone, I suspect they did because the math doesn’t add up exactly at the end. However many Benjamin lost though, it couldn’t have been much or it would be mentioned.

^{iv} Two other contributing factors to Benjamin’s victory are this:

- The Benjaminites were great warriors
- They’re on their ground in Benjamin territory

^v This is going to look like the way Israel defeated Ai in Joshua 7: the army divides and part of it faces the city, pretends to be defeated, draws them out of the city, and when the city is unprotected, Israel enters, destroys it, and both groups of the army attack the Benjaminites while they're outside the city.

Judges 20:30 And the people of Israel went up against the people of Benjamin on the third day and set themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times. 31 And the people of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city. And as at other times they began to strike and kill some of the people in the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, and in the open country, about thirty men of Israel. 32 And the people of Benjamin said, "They are routed before us, as at the first." But the people of Israel said, "Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways." 33 And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place and set themselves in array at Baal-tamar, and the men of Israel who were in ambush rushed out of their place from Maareh-geba. 34 And there came against Gibeah 10,000 chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was hard, but the Benjaminites did not know that disaster was close upon them.

Remember 700 Benjaminites were talented with slingshots? They'd probably be like today's snipers, being able to attack the enemy before they get close enough to attack in return. I think these guys played a large part in Benjamin's first two victories, which is probably why Israel wanted to draw them outside the city where they couldn't attack from the walls.

^{vi} Now the author is going to explain how these thousands of Benjaminites were defeated...in other words, we're about to read the details of how the 25,000 men were killed in the battle...

Judges 20:36 So the people of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. The men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin, because they trusted the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah. 37 Then the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush moved out and struck all the city with the edge of the sword.

They even killed all the women, which is evident in the next chapter (**Judges 21:6-7**).

Judges 20:38 Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in the main ambush was that when they made a great cloud of smoke rise up out of the city 39 the men of Israel should turn in battle. Now Benjamin had begun to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel. They said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle." 40 But when the signal began to rise out of the city in a column of smoke, the Benjaminites looked behind them, and behold, the whole of the city went up in smoke to heaven. 41 Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were dismayed, for they saw that disaster was close upon them. 42 Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel in the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them. And those who came out of the cities were destroying them in their midst. 43 Surrounding the Benjaminites, they pursued them and trod them down from Nohah as far as opposite Gibeah on the east. 44 Eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell, all of them men of valor.

So first Israel killed 18,000 Benjaminites.

Benjamin is defeated. There were only 26,700 of them to start with.

Judges 20:45a And they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon. Five thousand men of them were cut down in the highways.

Then Israel killed 5,000 more Benjaminites for a total of 23,000.

Judges 20:45a And they were pursued hard to Gidom, and 2,000 men of them were struck down.

Then Israel killed 2,000 more Benjaminites for a total of 25,000 of the original 26,700.

Judges 20:46 So all who fell that day of Benjamin were 25,000 men who drew the sword, all of them men of valor.

Verse 35 said 25,100 but verse 46 gives the rounded number of 25,000.